



Republic of Austria

Tenth
United Nations Congress
on the Prevention
of Crime and the Treatment
of Offenders

STATEMENT

by
Dr. Ernst Strasser
Federal Minister of the Interior

15 April 2000

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The globalization of crime presents an extremely dangerous threat to our societies at the beginning of the new millennium.

Trans-border organized crime undermines and destabilizes the political, economic and social system. These new crime syndicates take advantage of the opportunities arising from increasing globalization. Effective steps have to be taken to ward off this danger. As no country in the world is able to cope with this problem on its own, cooperation is necessary at all working levels.

The community of nations has responded to these negative developments. The successful conclusion of the negotiations regarding the proposal of a UN-Convention against transnational organized crime is of particular significance. This convention will provide the framework needed to efficiently combat the worldwide threat posed by organized crime.

Austria wants to emphasize the importance of the negotiations of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the three Protocols on Trafficking in Human Beings, especially women and children, firearms and migration, which we consider an integral part of the Convention.

Mr. Chairman, as to the Protocols, which, I repeat, should be viewed as integral part of the instruments against organized crime, I am pleased to state with satisfaction that the Austro-Italian initiative to elaborate an International legal instrument against the smuggling of migrants - which Austria presented to the General Assembly three years ago - has gathered so much support among UN member states.

Bearing in mind the human tragedies caused by the smuggling of migrants and the substantial profits criminal organizations derive from committing this crime, an urgent and effective response by the international community is very important. In order to fill the still existing legal lacuna in this field, the international community should focus its efforts on providing for an early adoption of the protocol on migrants.

I also want to emphasize that Austria highly appreciates the work of the CICIP -Center for International Crime Prevention - located at the United Nations A Vienna, in particular in the field of juvenile justice.

Organised crime is mainly driven by greed for financial profits, which entails attraction of numerous additional sectors providing opportunities to commit crimes on the one hand, and creates the necessity to launder the criminal proceeds on the other hand.

Organised crime is becoming more refined and able to respond swiftly to political and economic changes and legislative measures. Excellent experts, providing advice and relentlessly exploiting every loophole in the laws, work for organised crime. If the community of nations is to further develop in an area of freedom, security and justice, better organisational measures have to be taken, and we must be ready to meet this challenge by taking strategic and tactical action.

Organised crime must be fought with all possible means, without compromise, but at all times with legitimate methods, observing the principles of a state of law, of democracy and human rights. The community of nations must fully exhaust its potential by creating the prerequisites for a maximum of mutual commitment of those who prepare new legislative provisions at international level, and those who have to enforce these provisions at police, customs and justice level.

There must be close cooperation between the individual law enforcement and prosecution authorities, as well as those responsible for crime prevention.

It is of utmost importance to keep on eliminating all obstacles to international cooperation and to further enhance all existing instruments. There must not be a standstill. We can only be successful through close cooperation between European police forces and law enforcement authorities of other continents.

Organised crime has proven very skilful in taking advantage of the speed and anonymity of modern means of communication for their own purposes. This fast changing sector requires permanent attention on the part of the legislator as well as law enforcement and prosecution. Austria has already responded to many of these new types of threats.

Numerous special units to combat organised crime have been installed within the Ministry of the Interior. We have introduced a witness protection programme and installed a specialised agency for this purpose.

Advanced modern technical equipment has been added to the instruments for more efficient combating of organised crime, especially telecommunication techniques and modern electronic data processing have been adapted to the needs. Furthermore, the legal framework conditions for efficient forfeiture of criminal proceeds have been introduced. When the Austrian Banking Act came into force, a money laundering unit that processes 'Dubious Transaction Reports' received from the banks was established at the Austrian Organised Crime Combating Squad. The international cooperation with regard to combating the different varieties of organised crime has been further strengthened. Austria has joined the relevant EUROPOL-projects, and is part of numerous bilateral, trilateral and quadrilateral initiatives and exchange programmes.

Crime prevention is not to be neglected either in the fight against organised crime. Trans-border organised crime is both a social and a legal problem, and its root causes serving as // breeding ground must be eliminated.

In the future, the community of nations must possess the instruments and mechanisms to counteract organised crime at all levels, ranging from prevention and repression to prosecution. International experience in combating organised crime has shown clearly and distinctly that in the future further enhancement of prevention, taking into account technical organisational, social, and legal elements, will play a major role. Success can only be achieved through internationally harmonized efforts.

In view of the progressing removal of national frontiers, individual nations are no longer capable of taking adequately efficient countermeasures against certain types of organised crime, such as Internet-, white collar and drug-related crimes.

Being aware of this fact and in order to evaluate the results of this congress, the Portuguese Council Presidency has organised a high-ranking conference on crime prevention, to be held on the 4th and 5th of May 2000, aiming at a better harmonization of Europe-wide prevention measures and at taking greater efforts in the field of crime prevention.

The Joint Measure of the European Union, initiated by Austria, to prevent illegal dissemination of child pornography via the Internet has resulted in the establishment of units in all EU-member countries to process reports on this loathsome crime. These units form an efficient instrument to fight child pornography, on the one hand, and serve as a platform for regular exchange of information, in order to prevent such crimes in the future, on the other hand.

The endeavours of the community of nations in the field of combating money laundering are also characterized by the enhancement of prevention mechanisms. Awareness training of professions specialised in economics, law, and tax legislation will in the future very much contribute to reducing their being abused by organised crime to a minimum.

Successful strategies in the fight against narcotic drugs are increasingly characterized by a balanced approach comprising repression, prevention and therapy. Prevention of addiction has become an indispensable component of efficient narcotics policy. Such a **p o l i c y** ensures that prevention and help in case of drug or addiction problems focus on the human being.

Organised crime cannot be fought without combating corruption with all possible means. A long-term objective of corruption prevention is a change of attitude in this respect of the society as a whole, which might eventually result in a new form of global ethics. Developing anticorruption action plans in which all layers of society should participate, could lead to a rethinking process of society in the medium run and result in minimising corruption in the long run.

Mr. Chairman,

We will succeed in developing new efficient combating and prevention models based on the most recent intelligence of the community of nations and, if implemented adequately, eventually will present an important step towards minimising the threat potential emanating from organised crime. Consequently, Austria supports the international cooperation outlined in the Vienna Declaration. Together we will be in the future able to cope successfully with this challenge.

Thank you for your attention.