

Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to represent the Council of Europe at this International Conference on Urban Violence.

On behalf of the Organisation, I would first and foremost like to thank the Portuguese Ministry of Justice for having helped us to organise this Conference. I would also like to extend our sincerest gratitude to the *Policia Judiciara* for making this magnificent room in which we find ourselves available to us.

It is no coincidence that we are today meeting in the central building of the Portuguese Police Department to talk about urban violence. Law enforcement agencies play an important role by taking action on the ground to channel such outbursts of violence, then arresting those responsible and finally by placing themselves at the centre of criminal proceedings.

Allow me to quote some figures.

Over 200 million euros of damage. 130 people injured. 300 buildings and 10,000 vehicles set on fire. Four deaths. These figures, which relate to the riots that took place in the suburbs of French cities in 2005, send a chill down one's spine.

Now let us cross the channel and the riots in London in 2011: five people killed and several injured, at least a hundred houses destroyed in fires and looting, over 3,000 people arrested and damage estimated at over 300 million euros.

In 2012 it was Spain's turn to erupt. The videos of these events give the impression of indescribable chaos.

Greece came up against the problem in 2008. There were violent clashes between the law enforcement agencies and the protestors during which fourteen police officers and six protestors were injured.

Sweden has also experienced urban violence and in 2013, there were several nights of riots, which spread at the speed of light.

Not far from here, Amadora is testament to the reality of urban violence in Portugal. This town, which is situated between the motorway leading to the airport and the outskirts of Lisbon, not far from the *la Luz* stadium, is one of the towns with the highest rates of urban crime and violence in Europe.

I could give you any number of examples of such events. The current serious economic and social crisis faced by Europe is giving rise to frustration among its populations and tensions are still growing. It is therefore quite likely that such outbursts of violence will be repeated; they may even turn into something worse with increasingly serious consequences.

Although such events do not necessarily have endings as tragic as those I have just described, the material damage, the psychological trauma and the feeling of insecurity have an impact on our societies and can undermine democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

In view of this alarming situation and the human and material damage caused by urban violence, the Ministers of Justice of Council of Europe member states decided to make urban violence the focus of their 31st Conference in Vienna in September 2012.

On this occasion, the ministers of justice pinpointed a key factor: the role played by new information and communication technologies in such tidal

waves of urban violence. Indeed, there are numerous examples among recent events which bear witness to this.

For example, in the London riots, BlackBerry Messenger played a crucial role in spreading violence as, unlike Facebook and Twitter, it provided the possibility to communicate anonymously.

Last March the role of social networks was challenged in Turkey: the Prime Minister decided to block Twitter and threatened to ban YouTube and Facebook.

And at this very moment, communication technologies are being used by protestors in Hong Kong. To get round the problem of a possible disconnection from cellular networks and WiFi, the protestors of Occupy Central in Hong Kong are using FireChat, an instant messaging service which only requires a Bluetooth connection.

Given the speed at which these new technologies are developing and the way in which our societies adjust to them, it is obvious that they will continue to play a key role in urban violence, especially given that, in addition to being used by the instigators or leaders of urban violence, they are also used by the law-enforcement agencies, sometimes to prevent such outbursts and sometimes to provide proof of the responsibility of the persons involved.

These digital tools pose a crucial question as to how to strike a balance between the protection of public order and the fundamental freedoms enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights, in particular freedom of assembly and association, freedom of information and freedom of expression.

This question will be one of the salient points of this Conference.

It is obvious that all democratic societies must accept the principle of freedom to use these new technologies. However, it is also necessary to find an effective way of preventing individuals from exploiting them as a way of generating violence.

This problem is the underlying theme of the entire conference. Indeed, if the criminal investigation services are to have appropriate legal and legislative tools to gather evidence on such acts and penalise them, we must make a clear distinction between the proper use of such tools and the ways in which they may be misused.

From now on it is therefore a matter of developing tools that allow the prosecuting authorities to prevent, through the use of this technology, such outbursts of violence, and also to punish them.

Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The subjects we will be discussing during this conference directly reflect the concerns of the ministries of justice, which have asked the Committee of Ministers to instruct the European Committee for Crime Problems (CDPC) to consider ways of fostering dialogue and co-operation between law enforcement authorities, telecommunication providers and Internet service providers to make it easier to prevent urban violence, gather evidence, and ensure that the instigators of violence are held responsible for their acts, while guaranteeing full compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights.

I would point out that this is the first time that experts in this field are meeting in a pan-European context to exchange views on this subject. Given its long experience in upholding human rights and in striking a

balance between these rights, the Council of Europe is particularly well placed to address this threat. Also, the fact that it has 47 member states, means that it is, by its very nature, the Common European Home.

I therefore trust that we will manage to agree on a common definition of urban violence at a pan-European level. Indeed it appears that this is a multi-faceted concept and that there are many different understandings of urban violence. While some countries use the term when vehicles or rubbish bins are set on fire, others only use it to describe more serious cases when whole towns or cities descend into violence and major criminal offences, if not crimes, are committed. There is at present no clear definition, and the two terms “violence” and “urban” are by no means sufficient in themselves. Indeed the word “violence”, as legal experts from all countries agree, is an extremely general term. And it is by no means certain that “urban” fully reflects the situation.

It is important to fill this legal void and to come up with a common definition of what we mean by the two words “urban violence”. I am confident that our expert speakers will be able to suggest a shared approach to this subject.

I also hope that this conference will provide a real platform for discussion and exchange so that the good practices and know-how of each participant can be shared across borders.

Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen, for the first time you have the opportunity to compare the different measures and laws in your countries aimed at preventing such violent behaviour. You will have the opportunity to discuss not only what you do to prevent violence, but also how you respond to this phenomenon, how you identify and penalise the

instigators and leaders, and above all, how you protect both law and order and fundamental freedoms, mainly by means of electronic evidence. I trust that at the end of these two days of discussions, we will have identified tools to help the judicial authorities fulfil the tasks assigned to them. I therefore invite all of you to take the floor over the next two days.

Tomorrow we will present the conclusions of the Conference to you. They will be drawn up on the basis of your presentations and will take account of the discussions following the various sessions.

Finally, we will consider the practical steps that should be taken. These will also take account of the various angles from which the problem might be approached. It is obvious that legislative and punitive measures will be at the centre of our discussions. Nevertheless, as I already pointed out earlier, punitive measures are in themselves insufficient. The emphasis should be on preventing such events. We must therefore take social and educational measures. There is a popular saying “better safe than sorry” and this applies particularly to urban violence.

Together we are going to try to identify the steps which the Council of Europe could consider taking to help its member states address this problem and prepare measures that are appropriate, proportional and harmonised.

I look forward to hearing what all these very competent speakers have to say on this subject. I sincerely hope that the combination of your expert knowledge and your wide-ranging fields of competence will contribute to

our discussions, enable us to have lively and passionate debates, and that at the end of these two days we will come up with some answers.

Thank you for attending this conference. I wish you all two excellent days of fruitful work and lively discussions.