

COM 4-015

Brussels, 8 December 1999

OPINION

of the Committee of the Regions

of 18 November 1999

on

Crime and Safety in Cities

The Committee of the Regions

HAVING REGARD TO the Bureau decision of 11 June 1997, under Article 198c(4) of the Treaty establishing the European Community, to instruct Commission 4 "Spatial Planning, Urban Issues, Energy and Environment" to draw up an opinion on "Crime and safety in Cities";

HAVING REGARD TO the draft opinion (CdR 294/99 rev. 1) adopted unanimously by Commission 4 (meeting of 7 October 1999) (rapporteur: **Ms Tarras-Wahlberg**, SE, PSE);

adopted the following opinion unanimously at its 31st plenary session on 17-18 November 1999 (meeting of 18 November):

1. Introduction

1. In Europe there is widespread interest in crime and public safety and security issues. Two working groups have been set up, including representatives from several cities. The Council of Europe has had a "Crime and Urban Insecurity" group for some years now, and the group has produced a number of reports. Eurocities recently set up a working group on "urban safety", but it has not yet produced a report.
2. Article 2 (ex-Article B) of the Amsterdam Treaty states that the EU must aim to strengthen the protection of citizens' rights and interests through the introduction of a citizenship of the Union.

3. Under Article 29 (ex-Article K.1) of the Amsterdam Treaty, the EU must aim to provide citizens with a high level of safety within an area of freedom, security and justice by developing common action among the Member States in the fields of police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters and by preventing and combating racism and xenophobia. This is to be achieved by preventing and combating crime, organised or otherwise, and in particular terrorism, trafficking in persons and offences against children, illicit drug trafficking and illicit arms trafficking, corruption and fraud.
4. A large proportion of EU measures currently focus on organised and cross-border crime.
5. While it is extremely important to combat organised and cross-border crime, EU citizens feel the fight against everyday crime - in respect of the subsidiarity principle - is of at least equal importance. This type of crime makes them feel insecure and unsafe; it also provides a springboard and breeding ground for organised and cross-border crime. It is thus vitally important to make a determined effort to tackle everyday crime. This must of course be achieved through measures at local, regional and EU level.
6. The interpretation of "everyday crime" can vary from country to country, or even within the same country. However, some types of crime do seem to occur across the board. These include crime against persons (e.g. violence, sexual abuse and racist crime) and material crime (e.g. graffiti and other forms of vandalism).

2. Causes of crime¹

1. Crime is an integral part of our society and most criminals generally behave just like any other citizen. It thus follows that it is the pattern of everyday life, i.e. the society in which we all live - criminals and law-abiding citizens alike - which has the greatest influence on criminal trends and patterns. Preventive action to combat the causes and circumstances of crime and socially undesirable behaviour is a task for all groups within society.
2. The scope and spread of crime in a given area largely depends on its inhabitants or on the people who, for one reason or another, are staying in the area. The word "users" is a useful umbrella term here. In the countryside, "users" and "inhabitants" are often interchangeable, but in the cities the former outnumber the latter by a wide margin. By "users" here, we mean - in addition to the city's inhabitants - people who work in the city but do not live there. In addition to these, tourists from home and abroad, and people who travel in from the suburbs in search of recreation must also be counted as "users".
3. Some types of city have more "users" than others, e.g. capital cities, industrial cities, those which attract tourists, and regional leisure and entertainment centres. To understand the crime and safety problems of different cities or regions, it is necessary to have a good grasp of who the users are, rather than just how many people live there. This is of vital importance when assessing the impact of different measures.
4. Explanations for the causes of crime look to theories which either focus on the individual, or circumstances beyond the individual, or a mixture of both. Cultural differences are not such that one might expect the "individual" causes to vary to any great extent.
5. When studying crime in the city, urban planning must be taken into consideration.

Socio-economic structures could even explain differences between cities or regions. It is also important to consider the role of the city in the region, e.g. as a workplace, seat of learning, leisure centre, etc.

6. Metropolitan areas provide a marketplace for crime in the sense that convertible goods are readily available, as is the opportunity to sell them on. Large cities have many households, cars, visitors and companies. There is a constant flow of people and events. Life is more anonymous than in more provincial areas.
7. Cities also provide what in market terms might be called a good "recruitment pool" for crime. There are many social deviants who, for one reason or another, converge on the city; illegal immigrants can remain largely anonymous; those who engage in criminal activity or who are illegal immigrants are much more likely to be discovered in a provincial town than in a large city.
8. There are several criminological theories. According to the theory known as "routine activity theory", three factors are present when a crime occurs:

- the criminally-inclined individual
- objects which invite crime
- absence of adequate protection².

Crime occurs when a criminally-inclined individual is exposed to an object worth stealing which lacks adequate protection.

9. Preventing crime involves trying to influence some of the above factors. Good crime prevention does not necessarily mean that one either can or must eliminate all of the factors.
10. The scale and patterns of crime are related to population structure. Groups in certain areas may be more criminally-inclined, while those in other areas may be more likely report crime, or to be more exposed to crime.

3. **Individuals who are likely to commit crime**

1. The road to crime often begins in the early teens, with crimes such as petty theft and vandalism. Much of this is opportunistic crime, i.e. it is seldom planned, and is carried out to provide the peer group with excitement. For most young people it stops there, but others go on to commit more serious crimes. From this comparatively large number of occasional offenders, a small number of people will go on to become repeat offenders. These people have often been members of a gang, and have learned a criminal way of life through peer pressure.
2. A very small number of criminals is responsible for a large amount of crime. This is particularly true for crimes such as violent crime and burglary, where it is possible to identify a group of repeat offenders which is disproportionately active. This type of criminal has generally been well-known to social workers and the legal authorities from an early age. The most effective way of preventing the huge volume of crime committed by these people is to stop them from boarding the criminal bandwagon.

3. The longer the criminal bandwagon has been allowed to roll, the more difficult it is for social or situational crime prevention measures to stop it. It is therefore vital to intervene at the earliest possible stage to prevent children and young people from being drawn into serious crime. If gangs are to be prevented from replacing normal societal patterns, it is important to split them up as soon as possible. Society must act on wrong behaviour at an early stage.

4. **Urban planning**

1. As far as urban planning is concerned, the most important crime prevention strategy is the provision of adequate protection. Discussions of adequate protection often focus on technical solutions, such as alarms and surveillance systems.
2. The concept of what constitutes "adequate protection" needs to be expanded to take in other solutions. A house which is never left empty is less likely to be burgled than one which is periodically unoccupied. This reasoning ought to hold true for all geographical areas. A city is under indirect surveillance from its "users" (residents, workers, visitors, "leisure commuters", etc.), who provide adequate protection against most types of crime. There is strong evidence that the make-up of the "user-group" is a major factor in providing protection.
3. Urban planning plays an important role in obtaining an even flow of users from the different categories throughout the day. A city area populated entirely by workers during the day and only by those in search of entertainment in the evening is not protected as effectively as an area with a mix of different categories (residents, workers, visitors, "leisure commuters"). Social meeting points where people can meet up provide better social control, thus enhancing people's enjoyment and feeling of safety.
4. Urban planners need to deal with structural situations which breed insecurity, e.g. urban decay. Run-down, decaying areas of a city are often inhabited by people with various problems. Unemployment, poverty, drug abuse and crime are common, and there is often a high percentage of immigrant residents.
5. Crime prevention must be considered in the planning stage for both new construction and urban renewal projects. This could be achieved through close cooperation between urban planning authorities, property owners and the authorities responsible for public safety.
6. The EU Member States are currently experimenting with various projects where crime-prevention is mainstreamed into urban planning.

5. **Safety and security**

1. When discussing security at EU, national, regional and local level within Europe, it is important to remember that there can be a discrepancy between actual and perceived levels of safety, not forgetting how this is portrayed in the media.
2. Safety cannot be measured objectively. It is affected by our own personal experience, lifestyle, and the way we choose to interact with our surroundings. It is extremely important that residents should be able to identify with their city.
3. Many cities are endeavouring to work with figures on insecurity rather than just crime. There is a remarkable discrepancy between the two in terms of when people

perceive certain situations as unsafe and vice-versa. National surveys have revealed that the people who worry most about crime are those who are least exposed to it, while those who tend to be on the receiving end of crime - i.e. young men - give little thought to the matter.

4. Preventing the feeling that public safety is at risk is completely different from preventing crime. The question of public trust and confidence in the authorities responsible for safety and security also has to be addressed. When an individual has a bad experience with the authorities, there are serious repercussions in terms of trust and confidence. The police run courses for their officers in this area.
5. In structural terms, it is visible crime and disorder which impact most on perceived safety levels. People's sense of safety is affected most by the crime and disorder they can see in our cities; crime where they are chance-victims, e.g. sexual assault, mugging etc. Noise, shouting, aggressive and threatening behaviour and vandalism all have a negative impact on perceptions of safety.
6. "Covert" crime (violence in the home), and situations in which people can influence their vulnerability to crime (violence between people who know each other) are rarely perceived as threatening. There is something of a paradox here, as it is precisely this type of crime (particularly violence in the home) which - despite the large number of unrecorded cases and a lack of public awareness - represents a major problem for society.
7. One reason why safety is perceived in this way could be that the media, for example, see senseless, chance street crime as being more newsworthy than the everyday tragedies played out in the home. When the media continually report certain types of crime, there is a tendency to overestimate the risk of falling victim to it. Media reporting can cause perceived safety levels to differ markedly from real safety levels. The media do not just paint a picture of reality; they also try to describe the social climate surrounding the events. In doing so, they affect the very climate they are trying to portray. In other words, media reporting not only contributes to the way events are described but also influences the social climate.
8. Feelings of safety and anxiety can also be affected by circumstances other than crime. It goes without saying that society's institutions influence an individual's basic sense of safety. The knowledge that, after the sense of violation which always accompanies a crime has subsided, the victim can get some form of help whether it be financial or emotional, influences perceived safety. The fact that the criminal is convicted can have a therapeutic effect on the victim, reducing further anxiety. Financial compensation makes it easier for the victim to move on without being overwhelmed by anxiety. Quick, sure access to adequate professional help and care after a crime is also extremely important for basic feelings of safety. Similarly, after a building has been defaced or vandalised, it is important to bolster the public's feeling of safety by ensuring the walls are cleaned of graffiti and all broken windowpanes are replaced.
9. It can be said that organised and cross-border crime impacts less on perceived safety than does everyday crime in the local environment.
10. In some cases, perceived safety levels are mistaken, in as much as they do not correspond to any actual risk of becoming a victim of crime. Negative perceptions of public safety are detrimental to society, so this factor should not be ignored. Efforts to enhance public safety should therefore take the perceived safety factor into account.

6. **Victim Support**

1. It is important that the victims of crime get help and support. A victim's perception that he is not safe increases when support is lacking, and he feels abandoned. This anxiety can soon spread to those around him.
2. Mediation can provide useful victim support. Criminal and victim meet, together with an impartial mediator to talk about the crime. Victims can speak about their experience and can get answers to their questions about the crime. Criminals are better able to grasp the consequences of their action, and are given the opportunity to express regret. Mediation works best when the criminal is young.
3. There are also instances where voluntary organisations help in replacing stolen documents, having keys cut, etc., to prevent any escalation in the subjective feeling of insecurity.

7. **Measures by the police and society as a whole**

1. The police have an important role to play in the drive to foster safety and security. It is, however, important that the problem should not be seen merely as something which concerns the police, but also as a problem for society.
2. In order to provide a safe community, the police must work closely with the public and be visible on the streets. It also helps if the composition of the police force reflects the diversity of the population.
3. The police can work on both prevention and enforcement, but success rates can be improved if society's other authorities and institutions are also involved in the fight against crime. The social services, schools, corporate organisations, local residents, voluntary organisations, etc. are all useful cooperation partners for the police. Cooperation and coordination between all these make strong, effective crime prevention possible.
4. In some countries, local security contracts are drawn up between the police, the courts, school authorities, organisations and local politicians, in order to improve crime prevention and increase public safety.
5. There are also examples of advisory groups comprising the local police and representatives from the local community. These have been very successful, not least in providing the police with information to allow them to investigate a crime it would have otherwise been difficult to solve.

8. **The public's obligations**

1. It is not only criminal behaviour that creates a feeling of insecurity; bad behaviour can also contribute considerably. When society's authority is undermined, such behaviour becomes more common.
2. Whilst members of the public have a right to safety and security, their obligation to help achieve this should not be forgotten. People need to be informed about their duties as citizens in promoting solidarity and safety in their community. If the city is to become a human place, steps must be taken to help prevent youth exclusion, combat discrimination in society and in the workplace, and prevent drug abuse and violence in

schools and society. People themselves should no longer turn a blind eye to crime and public order violations, but do their utmost to be part of the solution.

3. Apart from educating students, schools also have an important role to play in passing on social values and explaining how society operates. Children's experience at school lays the foundations for the way they will behave as adults, and determines whether they will feel part of society or stay out on the margins. Schools must strengthen both the feeling of local identity which comes with national citizenship, and the European identity which follows on from European citizenship. However, this must not detract from an understanding of people from other countries or from other ethnic groups who are now part of European society.

9. Exchanges within the European Union

1. The above-mentioned problems are being addressed at local or regional level. Future efforts should continue to focus on this level.
2. Cooperation within the European Union tends to take place at national level. Exchanges do not occur so frequently at regional or local authority level.
3. There is, however, good reason to believe that the various local and regional authorities who are working to prevent, hinder or take measures against crime have much to learn from each other when dealing with everyday crime issues. This is currently possible - albeit on a small scale - through town twinning arrangements ("twin cities").
4. It is important that the measures adopted should be of a long-term nature, thus having a lasting impact on crime reduction and increased security. This does not, of course, mean that it is not important to adopt measures which will have an immediate effect on crime and security. This could be achieved by actively coordinating regional and local authority measures rather than through mere cooperation.

10. Dissemination of best practice

1. The European Council secretariat is compiling a handbook containing Europe-wide examples of best practice in crime prevention for dissemination to European States. The aim is to spread the examples rapidly, and there is no requirement to provide an assessment of their effect. This initiative comes from Germany, which defines crime prevention as follows:

" Crime prevention includes all programmes, initiatives and measures which normally prevent or limit crime both quantitatively and qualitatively as a political or social phenomenon in terms of cooperation measures between States and private institutions or at an individual level or which at least keep the negative repercussions of crime to a minimum and increase the public's feeling of safety." (5227/99 DG H II)

2. There are good examples in several different European cities and regions of measures which have lowered the crime rate and enhanced security. It should be possible to use these examples as a source of inspiration for other cities which have similar problems. It is important that these examples of crime prevention and safety-enhancing measures can spread throughout the EU, particularly between regions and municipalities.

3. In order to provide access to these examples, the EU should aim to set up an information centre where they can be collated. The information centre should collate and disseminate examples which have proven beneficial. It could also collate and disseminate crime statistics and information.
4. There must, however, be an assessment of these examples of best practice before they are disseminated. For instance, external factors which might affect the impact of various measures must be carefully identified. In this connection, it is important to include both practitioners and researchers in the assessment, by means of an EU network.
5. The EU could usefully contribute to expanding and enhancing cooperation between its various regions by arranging exchange schemes for officials, and interregional conferences. Such exchanges would make it possible to air thoughts and ideas on ways of dealing with everyday crime, thus reducing both public concern about safety levels and recruitment to the world of crime. This could also provide a good basis for combating organised crime in the long term.

11. **Harnessing EU funds**

1. There are currently several different EU funds and programmes which regional and local authorities can apply to for resources³. With reference to Article 29, there could be a case for reviewing how current and possible future funds, can foster crime prevention via cooperation at local and regional level.
2. There are, however, numerous other funds and programmes which are not primarily intended for what might directly be regarded as the forces of law and order. Where appropriate, crime and security issues should be seen as a deciding factor. Practical experience of general crime prevention and security funds shows, moreover, that these issues are not just police-specific issues, but a problem for society.

12. **Conclusions**

1. The Committee of the Regions feels it is extremely important that European Union should pay attention to public security and safety issues, particularly at local and regional level. A social policy approach can be adopted at local level in particular. Local authorities should, as far as possible, help in the drive to eradicate the causes of crime by means of youth, social and family policy.
2. The Committee of the Regions believes that people have a right to feel safe in their everyday lives, and that public perceptions of safety play an important part in the quality of life.
3. The Committee of the Regions feels it is important to frame examples for dissemination in regional and local authority areas which can be implemented using existing resources rather than requiring outside funding.

These could include:

- training programmes for the police, among others, stressing the importance of the trust factor;
- introducing and discussing the subjective aspect of safety at all levels in school; this could be done with the help of experts in various sectors, e.g. the police and the social services;
- mainstreaming security and safety issues in urban renewal projects;

- taking on board *ab initio* police and other security authority expertise in urban planning and renewal projects;
 - promoting discussion of these issues at regional and local level.
4. Better cooperation and exchanges on crime prevention at local and regional level can, in the long-term, help to shrink the "recruitment pool" for cross-border and organised crime. The Committee of the Regions therefore calls on the Commission to continue to promote crime prevention at local and regional level.
 5. The Committee of the Regions also considers it important for the Commission to see to it that security matters remain on the agenda. When it comes to disbursing money from various funds and in Community initiatives, projects which include safety and security aspects should always be given priority.
 6. The Committee of the Regions considers that the question of establishing an EU crime prevention information centre for collating and disseminating best practice is of such importance that it warrants thorough investigation. In this connection, the Committee of the Regions calls on the Commission to harness local and regional authorities' experience.
 7. The Committee of the Regions believes that good examples must be assessed before they are disseminated. For instance, external factors which might affect the impact of various measures must be carefully identified. The Committee of the Regions calls on the Commission to endeavour to include both practitioners and researchers in a Europe-wide network.
 8. The Committee of the Regions believes that funding must be more readily available to encourage exchanges between Member State regional and local authorities. Similarly, the funding arrangements for an information centre and a European network must be finalised. The Committee of the Regions calls on the Council and the European Parliament to ensure the budget provides for this.

Brussels, 18 November 1999.

The President

The Acting Secretary-General

of the

of the

Committee of the Regions

Committee of the Regions

Manfred Dammeyer

Vincenzo Falcone

¹ Projects under the Falcone Programme are investigating links between serious crime and everyday crime

² Also known as "effective surveillance". This includes people such as the police, guards and especially ordinary people (local residents, employers, employees, etc.) The extent to which criminals are attracted to an object depends on the degree of external protection and other technical measures. A high degree of external protection removes the attraction.

3 For the legal world, the OISIN, FALCONE and GROTIUS programmes

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