INTRODUCTION

Peter IJzerman

It was encouraging to see participants from most European countries – and even some non-European countries – gathered together to attend the first European Conference on Hostage Negotiations.

An important conference, I think. During my career in the Dutch police I have been involved in the handling of hostage situations as well and have had the opportunity to experience the positive impact of negotiation and communication in potentially explosive situations such as hostage incidents. It is good to see that European law enforcement professionals increasingly rely on negotiation as a peaceful alternative to tactical assault for hostage taking in a broad range of situations including terrorists attacks, domestic crises, suicide attempts, criminal kidnaps, and prison revolts.

Most countries independently founded their own negotiation strategy. This first large-scale international gathering of experts opened ways to exchange information and to learn from one another. This alone would justify a conference like this. But there is more.

Recent developments urge the need for interstate co-operation and for establishing more formal collaborative relations. What are these developments?

Firstly, countries encounter an increasing number of cross-border incidents, partly because it is more and more easy to freely move throughout the European Community. To handle these incidents efficiently, law enforcement professionals need to know which practices are employed in neighbouring countries and how to co-ordinate joint actions.

Secondly, Europe is rapidly growing more culturally diverse and we have to increase our understanding how to negotiate effectively with individuals from culturally different backgrounds. Law enforcement professionals from countries with different cultural heritages and composed of different cultural or ethnic groups may provide crucial information to one another.

These developments urge the need for international co-operation and for establishing more formal collaborative relations, which may benefit all those involved.

The conference had four main objectives:

1. to map and understand similarities and differences concerning hostage incidents and their management in different countries, especially with regard to legislation and operational procedures;
2. to identify joint training needs for law enforcement personnel involved in hostage incidents;
3. to improve law-enforcement co-operation between Member States of the European Union, especially in cross-border incidents;
4. to discuss innovating approaches to the management of hostage incidents

To achieve these objectives would mean a huge step forward.
The fact that so many professionals gathered to attend the conference was already the first success. I am especially proud that this conference is the result of the co-operation between:
- a police force: the Metropolitan Police, who have so much expertise in this area;
- a training institute, the Police Institute Public order and Safety, which is part of the LSOP; and
- a research group from the university of Groningen, with a lot of expertise in negotiation and communication research.

The fact that research is incorporated is in line with developments within the LSOP, the Dutch Police Education and Knowledge Centre. We have come to realise more and more that in order to be able to professionalise law enforcement, we need to make more and better use of research based insights. The conference has brought together a unique blend of practitioners and scientists and I am pleased that areas where additional research might be needed have been identified. I will gladly support initiatives to start promising research projects.

I would like to thank everyone who made this important event possible, not in the least the European Union. I thank all for their presence and active involvement in the conference. I trust that the contacts made during the conference will result in improved international co-operation. And I will be curious to know when and where the second European Conference on Hostage Negotiations will be held.