



INTRODUCTION

by the Chair of the European Forum



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The title of the conference was *Restorative Justice in Europe: Where are we heading?* The reason to raise this question was to make people in the restorative justice field watch out now as restorative justice is increasingly to be found on the political agendas in many countries. We wanted to contribute to “preserving and developing the restorative justice spirit”, and not let it be co-opted and submerged by the established criminal justice systems. On the other hand, both the keynote speakers and the participants at the conference seemed to agree that cooperation between the criminal justice system and the field of restorative justice (should it be a separate field??) is absolutely necessary to make restorative justice a viable and effective tool in the handling of conflicts and its consequences due to crime.

Also the situation in the Central and Eastern European countries regarding restorative justice was given much attention. The conference included an AGIS II seminar, i.e. a seminar for the participants in AGIS II, a project on implementing restorative justice in Central and Eastern Europe financed by the European Commission. We had the impression that the encounter between east and west was very much welcomed by the participants, as much by the Western Europeans as by the ‘Easterners’.

The main objective of the conferences of the European Forum for Victim-Offender Mediation and Restorative Justice is to create meeting points for practitioners, policy makers and researchers in the field of restorative justice. The conferences have developed along the principles of active participation and involvement to promote sharing and exchange of information, knowledge, discussions and dialogue. The idea is to stimulate further bi- (or tri-) lateral networking and exchange between participants for future benefit. According to the evaluations of the two former conferences, the participants asked for even more workshops and café conferences to meet this need. This explains why there were only a few plenary speeches but a multitude of workshop presentations.

We regret that we have not been able to collect all the presentations at the conference in writing, as they were all valuable contributions to the committed discussions that took place in Budapest in October 2004. Where the full papers are missing, the abstracts are presented. This should at least give an idea of the direction of thinking in the different workshops.

In the end it turned out that it was too demanding to make sensible reports from the workshop and café conference discussions. We have therefore chosen to let the texts speak for themselves.