



CITY OF HELSINKI

Jussi Pajunen
Mayor

Esteemed Minister Thors,
Mr Police Commander Riikonen,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the Mayor of Helsinki, I have the great pleasure to warmly welcome you to Helsinki and to this seminar.

The purpose of this seminar is to discuss the side effects of European integration. Those invited to participate represent the broadest possible spectrum of authorities and organisations. Therefore, I hope that the discussion can be comprehensive in scope, representing different perspectives and highlighting a variety of solutions.

My warmest thanks to you for accepting our invitation to discuss extremely challenging issues with us!

The European Union has undeniably had a very positive effect on the development of the whole of Europe, but we still face challenges with which we have to deal on the local level.

Thanks in part to Helsinki's northern location, a phenomenon that is familiar in southern and central Europe, street begging, did not reach us on any noticeable level until a couple of years ago. Our society was baffled in the face of this new phenomenon. Until then, our system of basic services had guaranteed that there was no need to resort to begging.

City residents contacted the authorities in numerous different ways to express their concern about the new phenomenon. It felt odd that with snow falling in Helsinki, there were under-age children on their knees, begging in the streets of the city.

Under existing legislation, a municipality in Finland can not itself do anything about street begging. Therefore Helsinki asked the Government for guidance. We hoped that the guidelines would clarify the division of powers between different authorities, especially with regard to exchange of information.

It was discovered quite soon that the City's own powers were restricted to intervening in a minor's situation on the ground of child welfare. Our Minister of Migration and European Affairs Astrid Thors will outline the conclusions that a civil service working group reached in the matter.

We still encounter street begging, because under Finnish law it is not illegal except when it is considered to be too intrusive. This means stopping free movement in the streets, for instance. In practice, it has been found that intervention in the situation is legislatively high. However, through our street work project we have noticed that the phenomenon has been changing from a passive to an increasingly aggressive one.

Begging is not confined to the EU countries alone and therefore is not a result of free mobility alone. We shall be hearing here about the experience of Norway, where the phenomenon has prompted discussion from many angles.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The President of Finland has expressed as her view that begging can not be an occupation. At the same time, she said that the matter should be resolved on the EU level. The message that also urban actors can send to politicians is that our common objective must be to spread wellbeing in a balanced way throughout the Member States.

Preventive and broadly based security starts with the basic things of everyday life. The foundation is laid by matters such as essential subsistence, health care, housing and educational opportunities. By preventing social exclusion we also prevent the side effects that we are discussing at this seminar.

Another central theme of the seminar is human trafficking, which can be regarded as one of the most serious forms of cross-border crime. It is especially important for us to recognise the victims of human trafficking and develop common measures to help them.

Several different authorities are responsible for the safety and pleasantness of everyday life in cities. We cooperate especially closely with the Helsinki police department in several different ways. It is gratifying to see representatives of the police from several countries among the participants. For example, we shall be hearing about the Birmingham model of good practices

in everyday cooperation. I should also mention that Birmingham is especially important for Helsinki, as the model for several of the current safety projects in our city has been adopted from there.

And precisely that is what also this seminar is intended to achieve: networking and presentation of good practices.

Discussion at this seminar will not be confined to the side effects of free mobility within the EU countries alone. Southern Europe has long had to deal with the problems of illegal immigration from Africa among other areas.

The enlargement of the Schengen Area in the beginning of 2008 brought us in the North new kinds of development focuses in cooperation between border and customs authorities. As an example of improving the safety of the city, we increased camera surveillance in the harbours when passport controls were abolished.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With these words I wish you a most rewarding and interesting seminar. As a final reminder, I would like to use the opportunity to invite you to a reception hosted by the City of Helsinki in the Old Court House tonight.

Thank you!