

Introduction by the Executive Director

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Executive Director



Dear Readers,



In the last months, the Covid-19-pandemic has changed the world as we knew it.

All over Europe – and beyond – people were forced by circumstances to operate in a new reality, characterised by sudden disruption, uncertainty and volatility. In order to curb the fast spreading of an hitherto unknown virus, governments decided to re-erect borders, forbid or restricted private travel and imposed strict home curfews. Most personal and institutional routines of life have been affected, or made impossible. Kindergartens and schools were shut together with restaurants and many other businesses in the third sector – public life, for a time, came to

a standstill. This unprecedented health crisis has put enormous strain on our societies and, for the first time in decades, we have had to call on our capacity of resilience.

Governments across Europe resorted to impose a general curfew as an exigent first response, restricting the freedom of movement of citizens as well as shutting down many businesses. A state of emergency was declared and police officers had to enforce observation of the new rule of “social distancing”, meaning that strangers had to keep a minimum physical distance when in public.

Worthy of note is the exceptional courage and selflessness demonstrated by medical, emergency and law enforcement servants in ensuring public safety and supporting governments’ wide efforts to prevent the pandemic from reaching even higher tragic proportions than those already registered. Thinking of all those professionals fills me with admiration, appreciation and deep gratitude for their solvent work and unwavering commitment.

We, European citizens, have together found ways to persevere through these difficult times. We have all witnessed signs of hope and solidarity and a broader sense of community has erupted.

This pandemic has unveiled once more, how interconnected we all are. Digital technologies have never been more important in our lives and organisations. I can but attest how critical they have been to ensure business continuity. As a matter of fact, this crisis forced CEPOL's operations to shift to digital-only channels and agency-wide remote work. Following the first announcement in March on the temporary suspension of all our training activities and meetings requiring physical presence, the agency ramped up remote working capabilities to keep connected to its stakeholders and maintain its online learning activities running smoothly and without disruptions.

The reality is that having access to safe digital tools for facilitating virtual workshops and online meetings has become a clear prime commodity, a public utility, for organisations.

The pandemic outbreak has made apparent other emerging needs with regard to law enforcement training in some Member States: the lack of solid and adequate online infrastructure to ensure continuity in the delivery of mass training activities. Those needs were immediately detected by CEPOL through our COVID-19 Task Force set up in March.

Following an initial mapping of needs, we articulated a quick response by putting all our available eLearning infrastructure, resources and expertise to the service of those training institutions requiring support. Thanks to this response, more than 2,000 law enforcement officers from x different countries have been able to receive training through their corresponding academic institutions.

The current crisis has shown us all how important up-to-date online learning solutions are for enabling us to continue with our vital further qualification. The current challenging circumstances have not hindered the release of our new Law Enforcement Education platform, LEEd - launched in the midst of this crisis after 18 months of intensive software development work. We have been at the forefront of law enforcement online education for over a decade and LEEd epitomises CEPOL's commitment for online learning as an integral part of our training programme.

Being already into the orbit of advanced technological education solutions for law enforcement training in Europe, our aspiration is to become a true law enforcement eLearning hub. As part of the natural progression, incremental changes will have to be made in the platform. Innovation does not stop on the day of the release. However, it is not just all about technology. CEPOL has a critical role to play in unlocking the existing knowledge on new forms of crime and make it available to entire law enforcement community in Europe.

The contemporary pandemic has not just affected and changed the rules of everyday life for all EU-citizens and the authorities in the Member States, it also has altered the landscape of opportunities for criminals and criminal organisations. Their “business models” have felt the impact of restricted traffic and physical encounters as everyone else, but criminals being smart entrepreneurs, they seized the chances for adapting to the new environment in regard to counterfeiting, cybercrime and fraud. In a recent ad-hoc report¹, Europol has outlined three phases of the developing serious crime field, differentiating between the current situation, the mid-term outlook and the long-term impact. As key factors shaping criminal behaviour towards new or extended vulnerabilities, the push towards more online activities, demand for certain scarce health care products, and a potential severe economic downturn with rising levels of unemployment are highlighted. The Corona-crisis has started out as a global crisis of public health, but it has quickly rendered its potential as an economic threat of historic dimension. As history is teaching us, economic problems always are followed by social tensions, and the institutions of law enforcement shall be better prepared and trained for this possible future very soon.

Faced with such global crisis, it is more important than ever for the European Union, its institutions and agencies, to work together and exchange best practices and knowledge in the face of this unprecedented challenge.

Sincerely,

Dr. h.c. Detlef Schröder

¹ [“Beyond the pandemic - how COVID-19 will shape the serious and organised crime landscape in the EU”](#), Europol, The Hague 2020.