

Workshop on

"Psycho-Social Acute Care in the Event of a Crisis"

Vienna, 22/5/2000 to 24/5/2000

Vienna City Hall (Rathaus), Lichtenfelsgasse 2, A - 1010 Vienna

Report

History and Preparation

In 1995 the Chief Executive Office for Rapid Relief and Aid Programmes started developing the project "Psycho-social Emergency Care". After a selection procedure to recruit qualified staff and a one-year intensive training course, the "Acute Care Team for Vienna" has been available for operations since July 1999. The pilot project will be put on a regular basis no later than the end of 2000.

In 1998 Ministerialrat Dr. Peter Kis, head of the department for civil defence at the Ministry of Internal Affairs proposed that the Viennese project be put on a European footing. The chosen platform was the Core Group Disaster Medicine, where Mr. Christoph from the Chief Executive Office for Rapid Relief and Aid Programmes in Vienna was nominated to represent Austria.

"Psycho-social care" was a very important area of work for the core group. The group soon suggested that a workshop (conference) should be organised in Vienna with the support of the European Union to utilise the experience gained in the Viennese project. After consultations with the responsible bodies at the European Union, a decision was taken to focus on the theme "Psycho-Social Acute Care".

The project was presented in Brussels in February 1999. In April 1999 the necessary documentation was submitted with an application for funding and the EU approved the application in June 1999. The European Conference in Vienna was scheduled for 22nd to 24th May 2000.

Questionnaire

In view of the complexity of the subject and to facilitate international comparisons the development and evaluation of an appropriate questionnaire constituted an important element of the project. The questionnaire was drawn up in co-operation with members of the Institute of Psychology at the University of Vienna and was sent to approximately 250 individuals and institutions in the member states of the EU in autumn 1999.

Mr. Christof Zedrosser, a student at the Institute of Psychology at the University of Vienna evaluated the results of the survey and used them as the basis for his MA thesis.

Organisational Preparations

Vienna City Hall was chosen as the venue for the conference. Preparations for the conference were started in September 1999 as soon as the contract presented to the EU had been signed and become valid. Using the customary channels, the national correspondents in the EU member states were asked to nominate participants for the conference.

Places were reserved at the conference for members of the Acute Care Team Vienna, as well as for members of a working group in Austria working in the field of psycho-social care, and representatives of various other institutions and organisations in Austria and abroad.

During the course of the preparations it became apparent that interest in the conference was far greater than had been anticipated. Due to the size of the conference facilities and to ensure the efficiency of the discussions it was necessary to be fairly restrictive when selecting participants for the conference.

Participants

The original assumption was that 75 participants would attend the conference. In fact, attendance fluctuated up to 150. (see official list of participants).

A number of individuals and institutions that were unable to attend the conference expressed their interest in the results of the conference and have said that they would be interested in participating in the project in future.

Conference Schedule

With one exception, those delegates from the EU member states who were guests of the organiser arrived in Vienna on Saturday 20 May 2000. After checking in to the hotel they had the rest of the weekend at their disposal.

The conference was opened on Monday 22 May 2000 at 9.00 a.m. Music at the opening ceremony was provided by a string quartet from a Viennese military band.

Chief Executive Officer Dr. Theimer officially opened the conference on behalf of the City of Vienna. The head of the Core Group "Disaster Medicine", Dick Fundter, from the Netherlands gave a welcoming address in his capacity as official representative of the department for civil defence at the Directorate General Environment.

Two presentations were planned for the morning. In his presentation "Between disaster and special broadcasts – operations managers, victims and journalists" Mr. Geier, a reporter with the Austrian Radio Company described his experiences at the rescue operation in Galtür (avalanche disaster in 1999).

Professor Kleber from the University Tilburg, Utrecht (Netherlands) gave the key note address "Psycho-social acute care: The current status of research into coping with trauma and other acute crisis interventions".

The afternoon was devoted to presentations from the participating countries and the presentation of the results of the questionnaire "Survey on the Status of Psycho-Social Acute Care in Emergency Situations".

The day ended with a guided city tour and an evening at a wine tavern at the invitation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

On Tuesday 23rd May 2000 delegates split up into four working groups to discuss the concept that had been submitted for a "Vienna Manifesto". The titles of the working groups and the names of the group leaders are contained in the programme.

The 3rd section of the "Vienna Manifesto" "Further Recommendations and Comments from the Working Groups" was drawn up in lively discussions in the working groups. Discussions in Groups 1 and 2 were particularly intense.

The day's programme concluded with a "Viennese Evening", an operetta concert performed by the teachers and students of the City of Vienna Conservatory. The performance was followed by a cocktail reception given by the City of Vienna that provided an opportunity for informal contacts.

The 3rd section of the Vienna Manifesto that had been drawn up by the Working Groups was translated into English and French overnight and was available to the delegates as a printed text the next day.

On Wednesday 24 May 2000 the results of the discussions in the Working Groups were presented in the form of brief summaries.

In a discussion during a plenary session, the participants at the conference unanimously repeated their opinion that the "Vienna Manifesto" in its current form (Version 1, status 25.5.2000) should be regarded as the basis for a discussion process within the framework of the European Union. As a result of various conflicting views it was not possible to produce a version of the Manifesto that could be put to a vote and whose contents could be accepted as standards and guidelines.

The conference decided that the discussion process should be continued in the individual EU member states and institutions. The Chief Executive Office for Rapid Relief and Aid Programmes, as the conference organiser, has offered to collect all contributions and pass them on to all those who are interested in the form of a network.

The first results of this discussion process should be available in autumn 2000. Further steps will be agreed depending on the progress of this discussion process and will be co-ordinated with the department for civil defence at the Directorate General Environment and with the leader and members of the core group "Disaster Medicine."

Follow-up

At the start of the conference the delegates received a documentation folder. As abstracts of all presentations were not available in all three conference languages,

work is currently in progress on a second volume that will be passed on to delegates once it has been completed.

The latest version of the "Vienna Manifesto" has been sent to all those who attended the conference. The relevant officials from the Commission (Mr. Barisich, Mr. Alevantis) have also been informed of the results of the conference.

We expect to receive the first delegate's contributions to the discussion by autumn 2000. These summaries will also be sent to the aforementioned groups.

Outlook

The European conference "Psycho-social Acute Care in Emergency Situations" was considered a success by all those involved. With the Vienna Manifesto we have succeeded in initiating a discussion process. It is now up to the Chief Executive Office for Rapid Relief and Aid Programmes to maintain and expand this discussion process in the form of a network.

Continuing the project with the aim of reaching an agreement on joint standards and guidelines for psycho-social acute care, and if necessary, their implementation in a pan-European project "Psycho-social Acute Care" appears sensible and necessary. Particular attention should be paid to the evaluation of training courses and specific psycho-social acute care services in the individual countries as well as defining possible indicators.

Finally, we would like to thank the officials at the relevant offices and departments of the European Commission in Brussels for the tremendous help and co-operation that they have given us.