



**Speech by Erik Akerboom, Commissioner of the Netherlands Police, at IDEC 2018.**

*April 2018 –The spoken word prevails*

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*[the intro is a clip from Pulp Fiction in which the main characters (two contract killers) talk about their experiences in Amsterdam]*

Ladies and gentlemen,



'How many of you use drugs every now and then?'

'How many of you have used cocaine?'

Two weeks ago I was invited to speak at ProDemos. You can see a photo of this event behind me.

ProDemos is the 'House for Democracy and the Rule of Law', directly opposite our Houses of Parliament in The Hague.

In the run-up to the local elections, they invited me to give a lecture about how crime undermines society.

And about how this invisible form of crime eats away at the foundations of our democracy.

Especially the foundations of local government.

I showed photos and quoted figures and statistics to inform the audience that evening about what we, as police, are doing to combat these undermining effects.

With the help of spreadsheets and photos showing a liquidation, I talked about activities that unfold in the grey areas of the law.

Activities that may at first glance seem not to have impact all that much on the lives of ordinary citizens, but that do in fact seriously damage mutual trust.

And in this way have a negative impact on the functioning of democracy.

I had a really great evening, I can tell you. And it was above all an extremely harmonious evening: everyone was unanimous that this was a huge problem that warranted close attention, and we should make every effort to stamp it out.

And it was precisely this unanimity that irritated me...

So that's what prompted me to ask the audience:

'How many of you use drugs from time to time?'

Uneasy shuffling in their chairs...

'How many of you have used cocaine?'

Deathly silence.

[...]

Ok, so I didn't expect that when the police commissioner asks this question the whole audience will rush to put up their hands.

Or that everyone would then react with stories about their most recent drug-taking experiences.

But those questions – and especially the discomfort in the room – did really help to bring home my point:

Which is that there is an intrinsic and strong link between drug use and the undermining effects of drug crime.

Because if we tolerate drug use, as I pointed out to my audience, we also tolerate the disastrous effects that crime has in undermining our society.

And I have noticed a worrying development here: romantic stories about drug use.

The phenomenon known as the ‘wellness paradox’, or ‘cocaine yogis’.

In the big cities highly educated young people in their twenties and thirties have an ultra healthy lifestyle during the week.

Yoga, smoothies, and daily workouts at the gym...

A weird paradox if you take into account that the number of drugs related deaths doubled in recent years. From 123 in 2014 to 235 in 2016.

But then at the weekend they get hopelessly drunk, and take cocaine and various pills.

In this way drug use is becoming normalized.

Romanticized.

And we have to get rid of this image.

Apart from the fact that it’s bad for your health, there is a hard and brutal world lurking behind that ‘innocent-seeming’ little line or pill.

So my appeal to that audience two weeks ago and to all of you today is: try to raise people’s awareness of the system they are continuing, the system they are sustaining.

A system in which abuse and extreme violence are the norm.



So I ask you all:

How do we go about this? How can we combat this system, this world? My answer is as simple as it is complex: by working together.

Behind me you can see a photo of a border crossing between Kosovo and Serbia.

A month ago I visited the EULEX mission there.

This is a European mission, whose goal is to support Kosovo's public administration, police, judicial authorities, and customs service.

Our fellow police officers in Kosovo are making enormous efforts to curb crime, but they are very glad of assistance.

So ever since the start of the mission, dozens of police officers from the Netherlands have lent a helping hand.

With idealistic motives. Of course. As police officers we want to help our colleagues.

But we are also motivated by deliberate self-interest.

Because what you can't see in this photo are the many little winding paths that bypass the official border crossing.

Paths that give smugglers free access to the rest of Europe.

Drugs, human beings, weapons... all sorts of things are brought to our streets by way of those little paths.

So taking part in these sorts of missions is a vital necessity:

- To strengthen institutions that combat corruption, security risks, and organized crime.
- To contribute to safety and security in individual countries and stability in whole regions.
- To build up intensive police cooperation and an international police network.

And we do this from the conviction that crime doesn't neatly stop at borders, but is becoming ever more international.

We help in countries like Kosovo because we want to help our colleagues there, but also to prevent problems arising elsewhere in Europe.

Because security problems like terrorism, illegal migration, cybercrime, and undermining drug crime often have an international component, and often also have their origins abroad.

And it is vital for us to tackle these problems together.

There is simply no other option, because we're all in the same position: we can't do it alone.

Since I took on the role of Commissioner of the Netherlands Police two years ago I've been organizing informal meetings with other European police chiefs.

I felt – and still feel – that it is our responsibility to create networks.

Certainly since we in the Netherlands feel a great responsibility in this area.

All too often we feature in the news as a production or transit country for drugs.

At these meetings of European police chiefs we talk about the challenges we face.

We look where we can help each other and what we can learn from one another.

It works well.

So well, that I want to take it further.

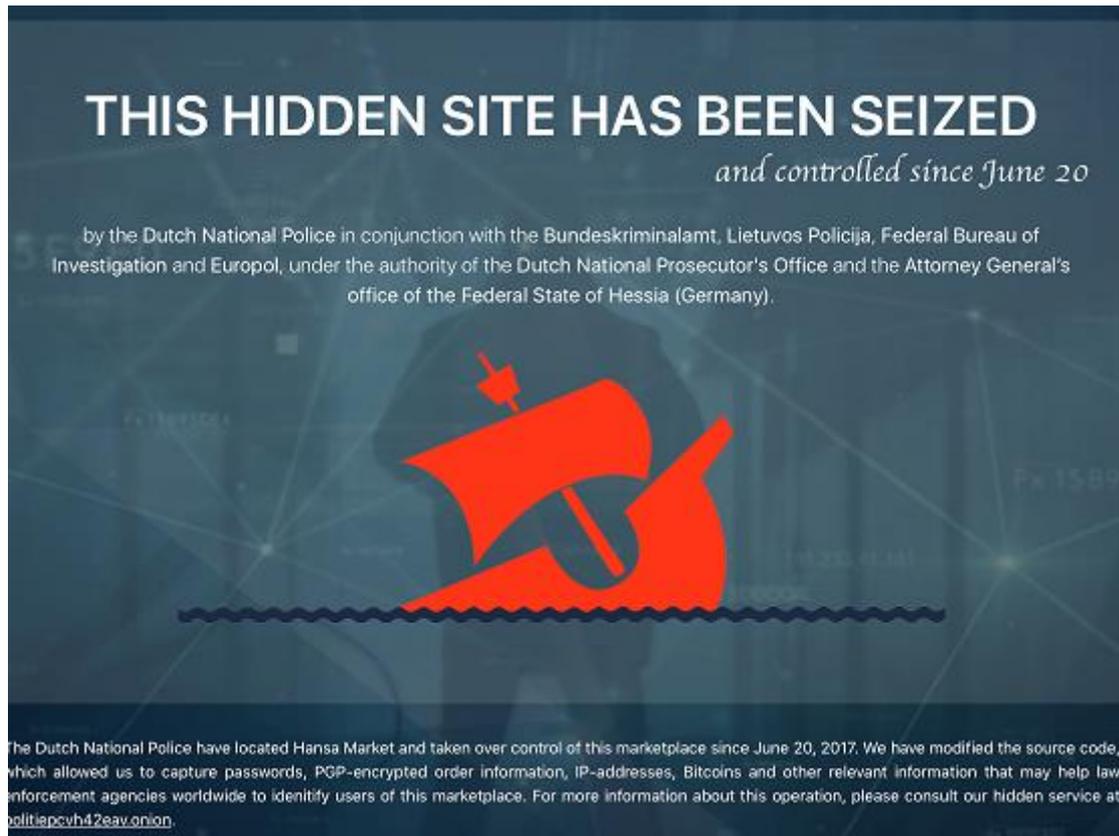
For the next meeting I'd like to get the heads of all the European criminal investigation divisions to join us.

I'd like to look with them at all the possible ways we could curb crime in our society. Curb crime and combat crime.

A European 'Law enforcement community.'

Because that's indeed what it comes down to: we need to reflect together on new ways to combat drug crime.

And then we need to put them into practice together. Action!



Ladies and gentlemen,

I have one last photo for you today, and this leads me to my conclusion.

This is the screen that met visitors to Hansa Market when they accessed the website last June.

'This hidden site has been seized...'

Hansa Market was a site on the dark web where you could buy whatever you wanted – drugs, weapons, prostitutes.... you name it. A murky market where criminals felt invisible and immune.

A thorn in the flesh of legitimate society.

Last year, together with our partners at the national and international level, we succeeded in taking over this site, dismantling it, and putting it offline.

We did this in close cooperation with Europol, and the police and judicial authorities in Germany, Lithuania, and the United States.

An achievement that really appealed to the imagination – and continues to do so. And an achievement that makes us proud.

I want to share this example with you because it can serve as an inspiration to us all to work together even more closely.

As police and judicial authorities, in the first instance, but we really shouldn't let it stop there.

We should look to our societal partners, for instance.

I am firmly convinced that we can achieve a great deal more if we seek collaboration with these partners.

These possible partners are sometimes completely unaware that they are contributing to societal problems.

That they may be a facilitator and may be helping to sustain something they don't at all want, or certainly shouldn't want.

If we help to make them aware of this ...

If we point out their responsibilities...

And if we actively involve them in finding solutions...

... they will help us. And this can pave the way for interesting new developments.

Take the parcel post companies in the Netherlands, for instance.

Even if Hansa Market was hidden away in the deepest reaches of the dark web...

...the MDMA or ecstasy people bought there was often simply sent to them using the normal post.

So we're now seeking to collaborate with the postal companies.

Ladies and gentlemen,

To conclude, let me recall the two main points I hope you will take home with you today:

- We have to make drug users more aware of the system that they are helping to sustain;
- And we must work together more – and more effectively – at the international level.

But of course there is so much more we can do together. And that's what you're going to discuss together over the coming days.

As I see it, you share the fundamental conviction that the world around us is changing...

And that our work as police is changing with it.

Or to put it differently:

Crime is constantly on the move, so we must move with it.

From the classic tracking down perpetrators and catching baddies our work is developing towards something more complex: stopping a phenomenon.

We have a lot of ground to make up if we are to protect society more effectively against new dangers and developments.

What do we need? More men and women in blue, plenty of courage and daring... and above all – each other.

Thank you all.