European Institute for
Crime Prevention and Control,
affiliated with the United Nations
(HEUNI)
P.O.Box 157
FIN-00121 Helsinki
Finland

Publication Series No. 44

Crime and Crime Control in an Integrating Europe

Plenary presentations held at the Third Annual Conference of
the European Society of Criminology, Helsinki 2003

Edited by
Kauko Aromaa and Sami Nevala

Helsinki 2004

Copies can be purchased from:

Academic Bookstore
P.O.Box 128
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Finland
Website: http://www.akateeminen.fi

Criminal Justice Press
P.O.Box 249
Monsey, NY 10952
USA
Website: http://www.criminaljusticepress.com

ISBN 952-5333-20-5
ISSN 1237-4741

Page layout: DTPage Oy, Helsinki, Finland
Printed by Hakapaino Oy, Helsinki, Finland

Contents

Crime Trends in Europe from 1990 to 2000[1]

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Introduction

In this presentation I will examine the evolution of crime rates according to police statistics from 1990 to 2000 in twenty-nine European countries[2]. The offences considered are intentional homicide, assault, rape, robbery, theft, vehicle theft, burglary, domestic burglary, and drug offences. Data are taken from the first and the second edition of the *European Sourcebook of Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics* (Council of Europe, 1999; Killias et al., 2003).

Methodology

It is a well-known fact that reporting and recording practices affect the validity and reliability of police statistics as measures of the social reaction to crime, and that these practices vary across offences, countries, and time. For example, according to the International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS) conducted in 2000, in the so-called industrialized countries, only 40% of the attempted burglaries were reported to the police, but the percentage rises to 78% when completed burglaries are considered. Nevertheless, the latter percentage varies from 92% in Belgium to 59% in Portugal. Moreover, in Poland the percentage rose from 49% in 1992 to 54% in 1996, and to 62% in 2000 (van Kesteren, Mayhew & Nieuwbeerta, 2001: 194–5). It is for these reasons that, for some offences, the correlations between victimization rates and police recorded crime can be improved if data are weighted according to the percentage of offences reported to the police (Aebi, Killias & Tavares, 2002).

As far as recording practices are concerned, crime rates vary according to the moment when data are collected for police statistics, the counting unit used in the statistics, and the way in which multiple offences and offences committed by more than one person are counted (*European Sourcebook 2003*: 74–5). Thus, it has been shown that the high rates of rape in Swedish police statistics are due to a combination of all these factors (von Hofer, 2000) and that the group of Euro-

1 This paper was written during a stay at the *Max-Planck-Institut für ausländisches und internationales Strafrecht* (Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany) made possible through the support of the Swiss National Science Foundation.

2 Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, England & Wales, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Norway, Poland, Romania, Russia, Scotland, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey.

pean countries that records data for statistical purposes when the offence is reported to the police systematically presents higher crime rates than the group of countries that records data when the police have completed the investigation (Aebi, submitted). In fact, statistical counting rules seem to be the main explanation of cross-national differences in recorded crime.

As a consequence, the validity of cross-national comparisons of crime rates according to police statistics is extremely doubtful. On the contrary, police statistics provide a reasonably valid basis to study time series, as long as the statistical counting rules and the legal definitions used have not experienced substantial changes during the period studied or have changed in ways it is possible to run controls for (von Hofer, 2000). That is why in this presentation I will not talk about crime *levels* but about crime *trends*.

Besides, in order to reduce the impact of sudden changes in the data recording methods of a particular country, I will not analyze trends in each country but in two groups of them. The first group includes sixteen Western European countries and the second one thirteen Central and Eastern European countries (see Annex). Furthermore, I will use the rates of offences known to the police per 100,000 population in each country to compute *median rates* instead of mean rates for both groups of countries because, from a statistical point of view, the mean is extremely sensitive to extreme values (*outliers*), while the median is not. In addition, as small numbers contribute to the lack of statistical reliability, my analysis does not include countries with less than one million inhabitants. As a matter of fact, such countries may experience substantial changes in crime rates from one year to another that are only due to the addition or the subtraction of a few offences.

All in all, the analyses cover twenty-nine countries and ten offences over eleven years, but, as some countries did not provide data for every offence and every year, they include less than the 3,190 theoretically possible figures. In that context, when only one year was missing in the time series of a country for a specific offence, I interpolated it using the figures given by the country for the previous and the subsequent year. If the missing value was the figure for 1990—i.e. the first year of the time series—I used the figure for 1991; if it was the figure for 2000—i.e. the last year of the time series—I used the figure for 1999. When data for more than one year was missing, the country was excluded from the analysis. Whenever there were differences in the figures provided for 1995 and/or 1996 between the first and the second edition of the European Sourcebook, I used the figures of the second edition, which is an update of the first one (European Sourcebook 2003: 5). Finally, my calculations of median rates and percentage changes between 1990 and 2000 are based upon unrounded scores (i.e. they include all decimals that could not be shown in the printed versions of both editions of the European Sourcebook). The list of countries included in each analysis can be found in the Annex and their number is specified in the headings of the respective Figures.

Property offences: Theft, vehicle theft, burglary, and domestic burglary

Property offences are presented in Figures 1 to 4. They include an overall measure of theft (Figure 1) and a number of subcategories such as vehicle theft (Figure 2), burglary (Figure 3), and its subcategory domestic burglary (Figure 4). According to the classification of offences of the *European Sourcebook*, theft does not include robbery. Thus, in countries where the concept of robbery is expressed as theft with violence against persons (e.g. Spain), robberies were subtracted from the total number of thefts by the national correspondents that provided the data for the *European Sourcebook*.

In Western Europe, theft increased from 1990 to 1993 and started decreasing afterwards. Thus, the median theft rate for 2000 was 16% lower than the one for 1990. Domestic burglary followed the same pattern, registering an increase between 1990 and 1993 and a decrease subsequently. Overall, a comparison of the rate for 2000 with the rate for 1990 shows a 10% decrease in domestic burglary. In the case of burglary, there was an increase between 1990 and 1991 followed by a decrease in 1992 and 1993, a rather stable trend from then up to 1999—with rates comparable to the rate for 1990—and a substantial decrease in 2000. Hence, the median burglary rate for 2000 was 12% lower than the one for 1990. Vehicle theft followed an analogous trend until 1997, that is an increase from 1990 to 1991/1992 followed by a decrease in 1993 that led the rates to be stable

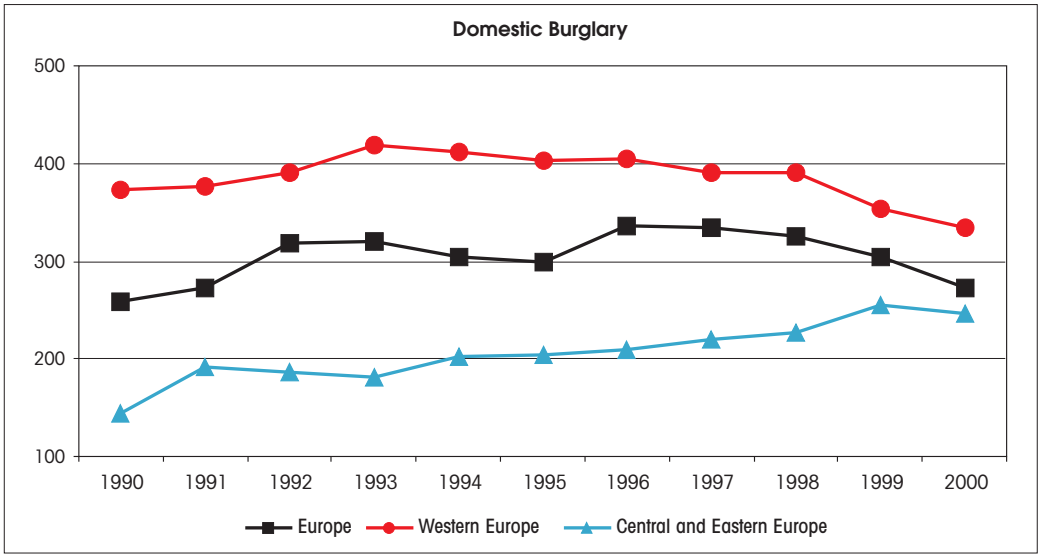

Figure 1. Median rates of theft per 100,000 population from 1990 to 2000 in 19 European countries according to police statistics

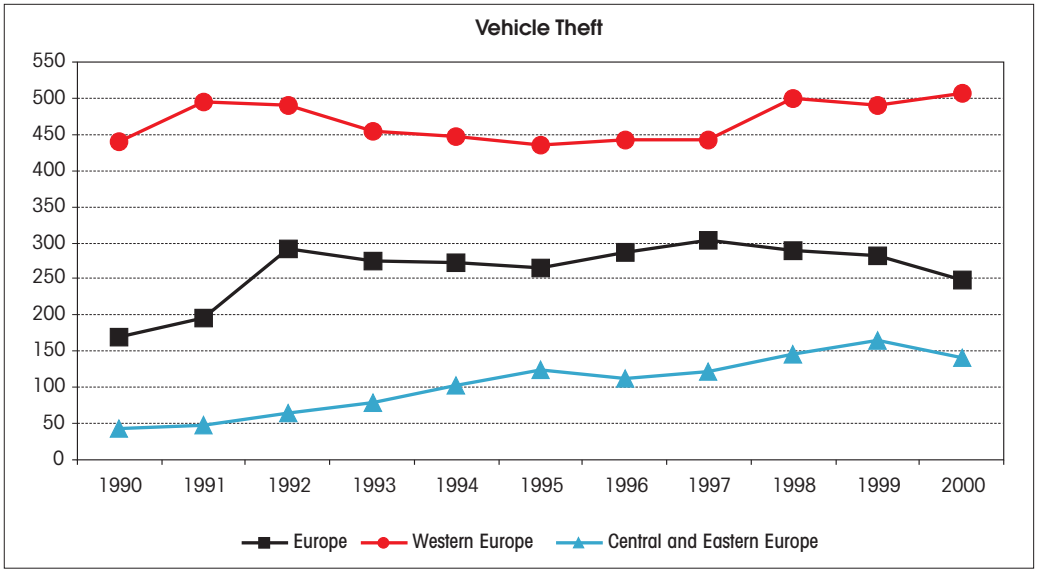

Figure 2. Median rates of vehicle theft per 100,000 population from 1990 to 2000 in 23 European countries according to police statistics

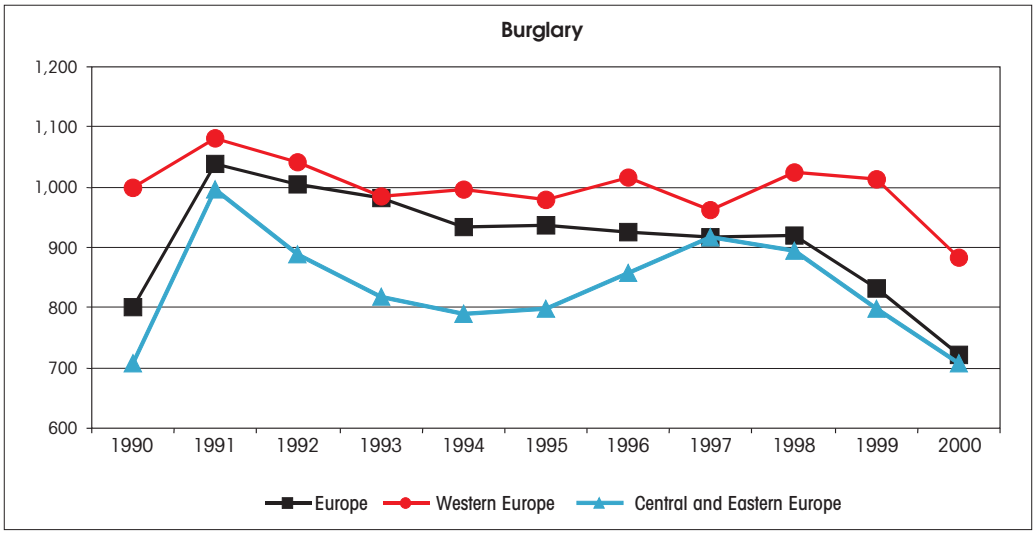

Figure 3. Median rates of burglary per 100,000 population from 1990 to 2000 in 17 European countries according to police statistics

and comparable to the rate for 1990; but in 1998 the rates rose again and they remained at that level until 2000. All in all, the median rate for vehicle theft in 2000 was 15% higher than the median rate for 1990.

In a few words, in Western European countries property offences increased at the beginning of the 1990s, registering peaks from 1991 to 1993, and then decreased in such a way that, by 2000, their median rates were lower than in 1990.

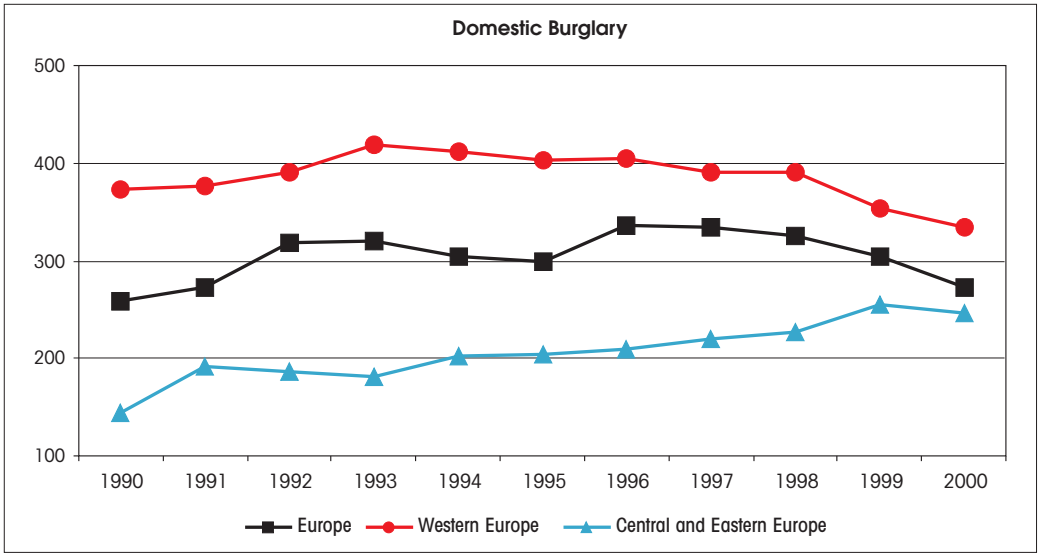

Figure 4. Median rates of domestic burglary per 100,000 population from 1990 to 2000 in 16 European countries according to police statistics

The only exception is motor vehicle theft, which followed the same pattern until 1997, but registered an increase in the last three years of the time series.

In Central and Eastern Europe, domestic burglary increased by successive stages during the whole period studied. Thus the median rate for 2000 was 72% higher than the rate for 1990. Motor vehicle theft increased almost constantly leading to a median rate 236% higher in 2000 than in 1990. Theft and burglary followed a curvilinear trend characterized by a sharp increase at the beginning of the decade, followed by a decrease until 1994, a new increase until 1997 and 1998 and a decrease during the last years covered. On the whole, theft increased by 47% during the period studied, while the median rate for burglary was the same in 1990 than in 2000.

In sum, in Central and Eastern Europe, rates of property offences were pretty low in 1990 and followed an upward trend throughout the decade. With the exception of burglary—an offence for which the sample is probably not representative of the region studied because only five countries provided data—all property offences presented higher rates in 2000 than in 1990.

Violent offences: Homicide, assault, rape, and robbery

Violent offences are presented in Figures 5 to 9. They include homicide (Figures 5 and 6), assault (Figure 7), rape (Figure 8) and robbery (Figure 9).

In Western Europe, assault and rape increased in an almost linear way during the 1990s. In fact, when the first edition of the *European Sourcebook* (Council of Europe, 1999) was published, an analysis of the available trends for both offences led Killias & Aebi (2000a) to warn that "the increase might not have reached its upper level by the end of the time series" (Killias & Aebi, 2000a: 52) which, at that moment, was 1996. In fact, the increase was even sharper since

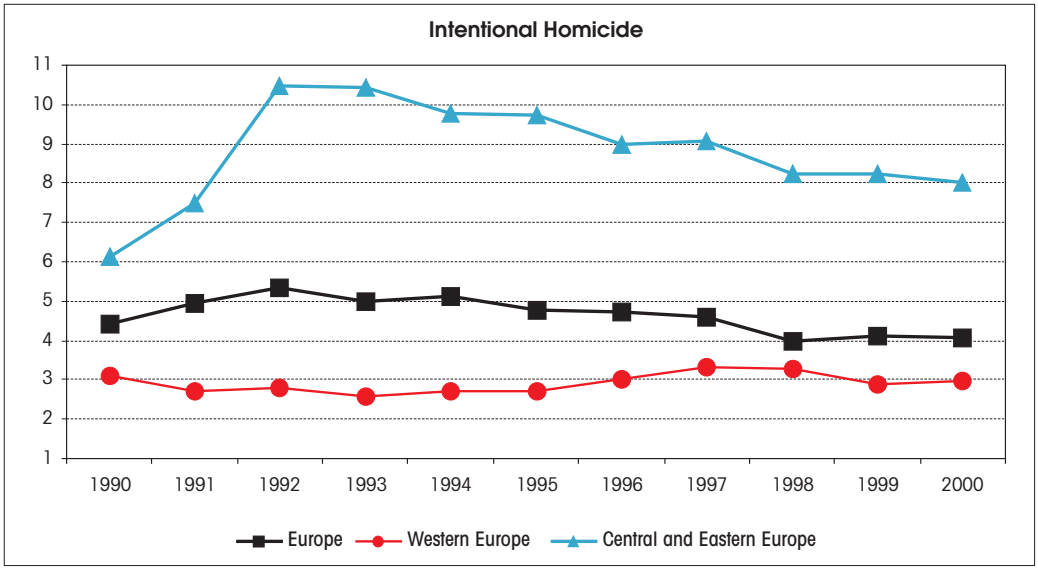

Figure 5. Median rates of intentional homicide including attempts per 100,000 population from 1990 to 2000 in 23 European countries according to police statistics

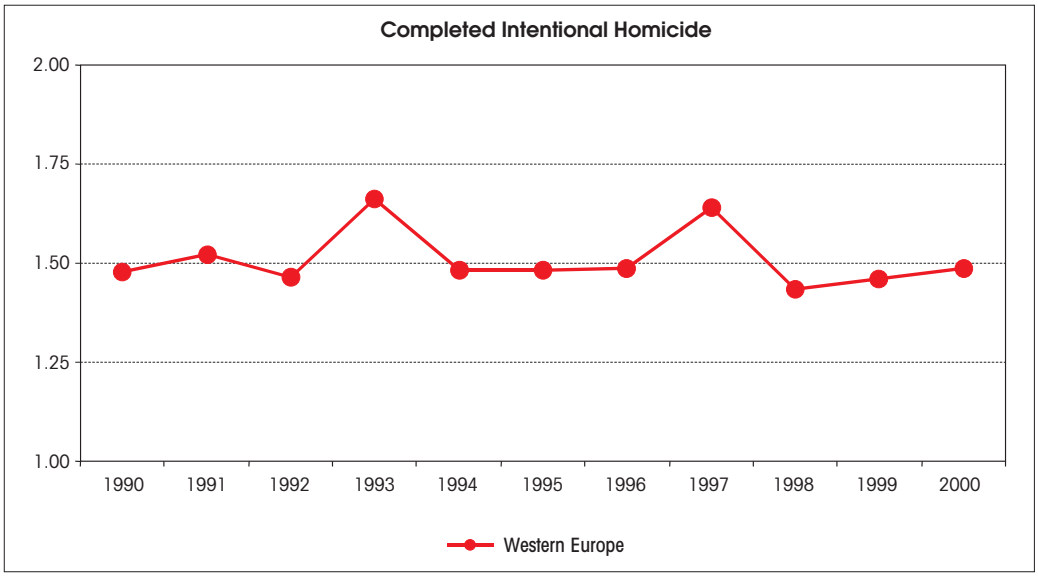

Figure 6. Median rates of completed intentional homicide per 100,000 population from 1990 to 2000 in 14 Western European countries according to police statistics

1997. On the whole, the 2000 assault rate is 85% above that of 1990, and the 2000 rape rate is 36% above that of 1990. Robbery increased substantially at the beginning of the time series (1990–1993), then decreased provisionally in the middle (1994–1995) and started rising again to finish the series with a median rate

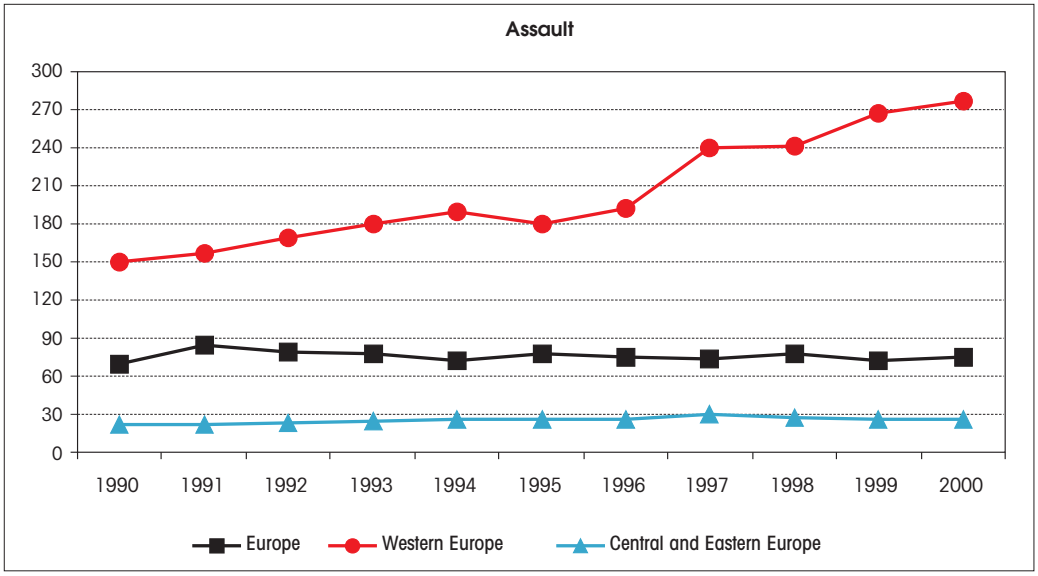

Figure 7. Median rates of assault per 100,000 population from 1990 to 2000 in 23 European countries according to police statistics

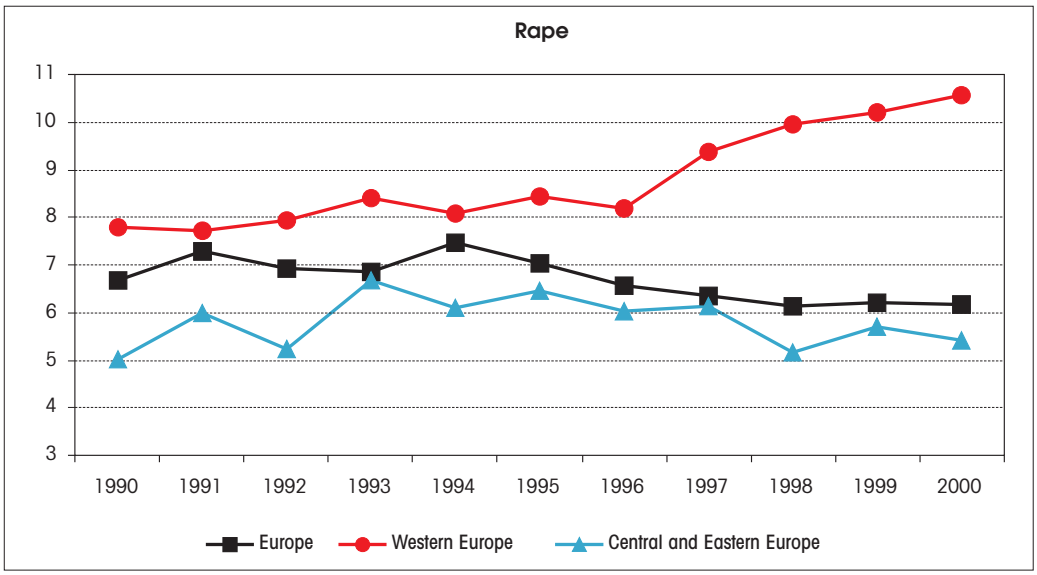

Figure 8. Median rates of rape per 100,000 population from 1990 to 2000 in 25 European countries according to police statistics

for 2000 that was 22% higher than the one for 1990. Only homicide remained stable during the whole period.

In Central and Eastern Europe, rape reached a peak in 1993 and decreased after that. Nevertheless, by the end of the series, the rate was still 8% higher than in 1990. Assault reached its peak in 1997 and was also followed by a slight de-

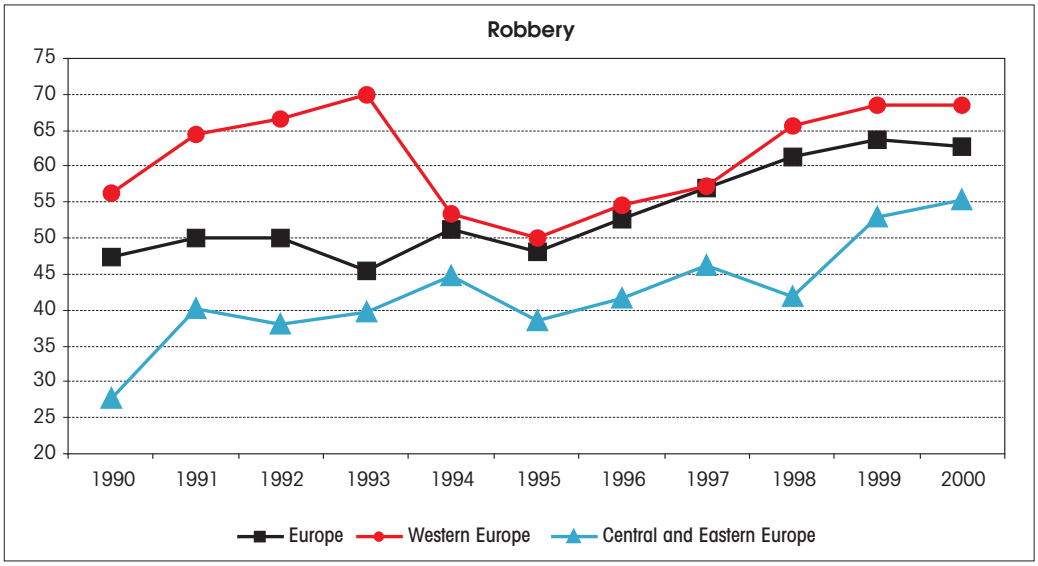

Figure 9. Median rates of robbery per 100,000 population from 1990 to 2000 in 24 European countries according to police statistics

crease, but once more the median rate for 2000 was higher—in this case by 16%—than the rate for 1990. Robbery followed a curvilinear upward trend in such a way that, by 2000, the median rate was 100% higher than in 1990. Finally, homicide increased sharply at the beginning of the time series, reaching peaks in 1993 and 1994 and decreasing constantly after that, although in 2000 the median rate was still 30% higher than in 1990. Incidentally, homicide was the only offence that showed higher median rates in Central and Eastern Europe than in Western Europe.

In sum, according to police statistics, European societies would have been more violent by the end of the millennium than ten years before. Nevertheless, both sides of the continent followed a different trend throughout the 1990s. In Central and Eastern Europe the peaks were reached sometime during the beginning or the middle of the decade (i.e. between 1992 and 1997) and, with the only exception of robbery that continued to increase, the trend was a decreasing one by the end of it. In Western Europe, on the contrary, violent offences followed an upward trend, with homicide as a noteworthy exception.

Drug offences

As can be seen in Figure 10, both in Western and in Central and Eastern Europe, there has been a steady increase of drug offences during the whole period studied. In fact, every European country experienced an increase in police recorded drug offences between 1990 and 2000. Thus, in 2000, the median rate of drug offences was sixteen times higher than in 1990 in Central and Eastern European countries, and two point six times higher in Western European countries.

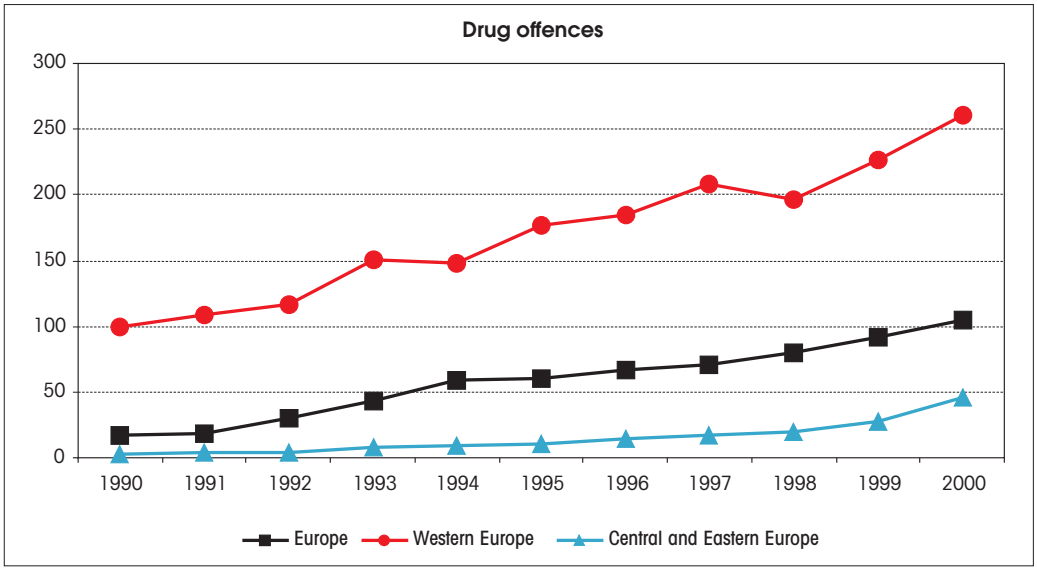

Figure 10. Median rates of drug offences per 100,000 population from 1990 to 2000 in 20 European countries according to police statistics

Discussion

In order to understand the crime trends that I have just exposed, one must take into consideration the political, economic and social situation of Europe during the period covered by the analyses. In November 1989, the fall of the Berlin wall produced a substantial modification of crime opportunities by putting in contact two parts of the continent that differed dramatically in wealth; thus, within a few months, a substantial market for stolen products, including stolen cars, jewelry, electronic devices and even clothes emerged in Central and Eastern Europe (Killias & Aebi, 2000a). This led to a more organized kind of crime with the development of gangs that took advantage of the new lines for the transportation of drugs, illegal goods and commodities, and even human beings, between both sides of the continent.

In that context, the increase in all kinds of property offences registered on the wealthy side of Europe at the beginning of the 1990s seems quite logical, and adjusts itself to the predictions of an opportunity-based theory such as the routine activities approach (Cohen & Felson, 1979, Felson 2001). The decrease that followed could be explained by the combination of at least three factors. Firstly, a saturation of the Eastern market; secondly, a reinforcement of police measures against transborder crime, especially in countries seeking to become members of the European Union; and, thirdly, as suggested by Lamon (2002) on the basis of ICVS data, an improvement in security measures in Western European households.

Robbery is an interesting case because it is a combination of a property offence and a violent offence. Like property offences—and probably for the same

reasons that I have just explained—it increased in Western Europe at the beginning of the 1990s and started decreasing shortly afterwards; but this was followed by a new upward trend since the middle of the nineties. The latter may be somehow related to the increase in drug use in Europe (see below) and its consequences on the number of muggings committed[3], but its main cause seems to be the increase in small electronic devices—and, in particular, mobile phones—ownership and theft. Thus, research conducted in England and Wales on the basis of the 2000 British Crime Survey, school surveys and recorded police robbery figures, shows that mobile phone theft increased by 190% between 1995 and 2000—while the number of phone subscribers increased by 600%—and represented 28% of all robberies in 2000/2001 compared to 8% in 1998/1999 (Harrington, & Mayhew, 2002). This evolution reminds one of the explanation given by the routine activities approach (Cohen & Felson, 1979, Felson 2001: 32) suggesting that one of the main causes of the mushrooming crime rates in the United States after 1963 was the proliferation of lightweight goods that were easy to steal. In the same line of reasoning, mobile phones belong undoubtedly to the category of *hot products*, defined by Clarke (1999) as products that are stolen much more than others because they are concealable, removable, available, valuable, enjoyable and disposable. Moreover, we seem to be far away from a saturation of the black market for these products as new models—including new functions and gadgets such as built-in digital cameras—are being released constantly[4].

Finally, the increase in vehicle theft in Western Europe at the end of the time series is due to increases in eight out of fourteen countries, while England and Wales, France, Germany, Italy, Scotland and Switzerland showed a downward trend during that period. These trends are not easy to explain with the available information because of some methodological problems. First of all, the number of vehicle thefts per 100,000 population is not a good measure for such a crime. A better indicator would be the number of vehicle thefts per 100,000 cars available in each country. Unfortunately, there is no reliable data on that issue as figures from the ACEA (*European Automobile Manufacturers Association*) do not include motorcycles, which represent a substantial part of vehicle theft—e.g. 25% in France—in some countries (EUCPN, 2003). Second, in countries such as France, Italy or Spain that receive tens of millions of tourists each year, the theft of cars and motorcycles rented by them can be quite important (Aebi & Mapelli, 2003) and adds more distortions to the crime rate per 100,000 population. Third, vehicle theft includes theft for profit and theft for joyriding, but the proportion of

3 For example, in Switzerland, the relatively high rates of robbery at the beginning of the 1990s were partly due to muggings committed by drug addicts near open drug-using sites, and the decrease of such offence in the mid-1990s seems largely due to the success of the Swiss heroin prescription programs (Killias & Aebi, 2000b). Incidentally, Switzerland is one of the just three countries—the other two are Finland and Scotland—that registered slightly lower rates of robbery in 2000 than in 1990.

4 The idea that hot products go through a life cycle of vulnerability was first put forward by Gould (1969) and developed lately by Mansfield, Gould & Namenwirth (1974), Felson (1997), and Guerette & Clarke (2003). According to the latter: "At first, these products attract little theft because they are unfamiliar and relatively unavailable. As their popularity among consumers grows, thieves become attracted to them for personal use or for resale. Subsequently, they become widely available and relatively inexpensive, and their attractiveness for theft declines" (Guerette & Clarke, 2003: 7).

each of these categories varies across countries and over time. For example, taking into account the number and the type of cars stolen and recovered—and assuming that the cars recovered are mainly those that were used for joyriding—from the 1970s to 2000 in Italy, Barbagli, Colombo & Savona (2003: 148, with references) found that by the end of the century joyriding had decreased while theft of cars had increased, and that the number of cars recovered was quite different according to their cubic capacity. The latter finding suggests that there is a careful selection of the type of cars stolen that could be explained by the existence of a (mainly Eastern European) black market for some specific models.

In Central and Eastern Europe, crime trends followed a different pattern. In fact, with the exception of homicide, most offences presented pretty low rates in 1990. Such rates were probably a reflection of the life style under the authoritarian regimes that were falling apart at that moment[5]. However, the reliability of police statistics during such a period of transition is doubtful. Furthermore, such statistics were still under the influence of the recording practices applied during the communist regimes, which were most likely oriented to show low crime rates.

In that context, the fall of the communist regimes was followed by an explosion of violence in Central and Eastern Europe that was particularly palpable in the sharp increase of homicide at the beginning of the 1990s. Shelley (2002) has suggested that in Russia the increase in violence was due to the transition and the rise of organized crime, and the same explanation seems to hold true for the rest of Central and Eastern Europe, with the already mentioned exception of Turkey (see note 4). Then, as countries started to reorganize themselves, violence became less common. At the same time, the development of a market economy multiplied the number of consumer goods—suitable targets for theft—and was accompanied by a social fracture between those with power or influence and the rest of the population—that started suffering of mass unemployment—creating thus the setting for an increase in property offences.

This process went together with an increase in the number of drug users. In fact, according to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), drug use increased during the 1990s both in acceding and candidate countries to the European Union (EMCDDA, 2003a) and in the European Union and Norway (EMCDDA, 2003b). The ESPAD school survey project also showed that the lifetime prevalence of use of illicit drugs among 15–16-year-old students increased in Europe between 1995 and 1999 (Hibell, Anderson & Bjarnason, 1997; Hibell, Anderson & Ahlstrom, 2000) Thus, the upward trend in police recorded drug offences mirrors a real increase in drug use in the whole Europe. The latter could be related to an increased availability of drugs in the markets provoked by the opening ot the European borders that facilitated the distribution of drugs produced principally in the Middle East (Killias & Aebi, 2000a)

At the same time, the struggles between different groups and organizations that tried to take control over these new lines of transportation of drugs, goods and commodities, and human beings—mainly illegal aliens and prostitutes—as

5 Turkey—included only in the analyses of robbery and vehicle theft trends—is of course an exception to that situation.

well as over the markets associated to them, may explain a part of the increase in violent offences in Western Europe. That would also explain partially the increase in the number of foreing prisoners in Western European prisons[6]. In fact, that increase has often been evoked by the mass media as well as by right wing parties to support the idea that there is a link between immigration and the rise of violence in Western Europe. However, this idea is extremely simplistic for a variety of reasons.

In the first place, foreigners sent to prison for their participation in criminal gangs or networks acting across national borders cannot be compared to immigrants or guest workers. In the second place, a considerable number of foreigners are in prison for infractions to immigration laws (Tournier, 1997; Melossi, 2003; Wacquant, 1999), that is to say that they are in prison for being foreigners and not for being suspects or authors of a criminal offence. In the third place, one must take into consideration that the deterioration of most Western European economies since the mid-1970s and the rise of unemployment led to a progressive hardening of immigration laws in such a way that, nowadays, it is very difficult to enter Europe as a legal immigrant. The consequence was an increase in the number of illegal aliens (*sans-papiers*) and asylum seekers, which are in fact the categories that are usually over-represented among offenders (Barbagli, 1998). Killias (2001: 168) suggests that this representation may be linked to the fact that—in contrast with legal immigrants—illegal aliens and asylum seekers cannot make long-term plans because they already know that sooner or later they will be expelled, and therefore some of them may engage in criminal activities that provide quick profit.

Nevertheless, in the context of the specific category of *legal* immigrants, a review of recent European studies (Killias, 2001: 173–9) shows that second generation immigrants present higher levels of involvement in delinquency than their native counterparts. Such finding raises a question: Is this a matter of different cultures or of different socioeconomic status? In fact, this is more or less the same question that was answered by Shaw & McKay (1942) with their studies of the city of Chicago, and we can apply a logic similar to the one used by them to try and give an answer to it.

To begin with, we know that, when they are living in their own countries, Western Europeans present lower rates of delinquency than immigrants coming from other cultures. But what happens when they migrate to other cultures? If their low rates of delinquency were explained by their culture, then they should not present higher rates of delinquency than the autochthones. On the contrary, if their low rates of delinquency were related to their socioeconomic status and they migrate to another culture where they have a lower socioeconomic status than the autochthones, then they should present higher rates of delinquency than them. The problem is that few Western Europeans are migrating nowadays to other parts of the globe and, whenever they migrate, they usually do so because they are sent abroad by their employers and therefore they do not have a lower socioeconomic status than the autochthones.

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6 The percentage of foreigners in European prisons can be found in the Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics (Council of Europe, 2003).

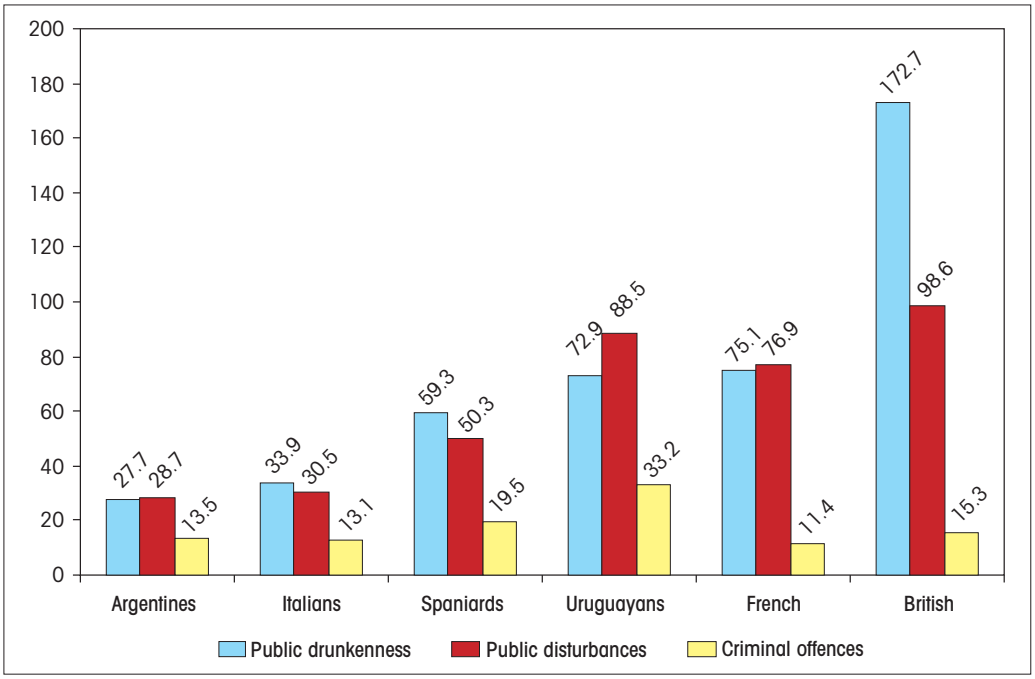

Figure 11. Arrest rates per 1,000 males aged 16–50 by nationality in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1910. *Source:* Blackwelder & Johnson (1982: 368)

However, the situation was completely different one hundred years ago, when Europe was a land of emigration. Therefore, I decided to look for research concerning that period, and particularly for research on emigration to South America, which is usually considered as a subcontinent with a very different culture[7]. Quite a few studies are available—often ignored by European researchers that tend to focus their attention on studies on emigration to the United States—and they arrive to similar conclusions that are best illustrated by the arrest rates calculated by Blackwelder & Johnson (1982: 368) and represented here in a graphic way in Figure 11.

Figure 11 shows the implication in delinquency of ethnic minorities in Buenos Aires in 1910. Interestingly enough, the ethnic minorities of that period were mainly Western European citizens: French, British, Italians and Spaniards. Even more interesting is discovering that they were more implicated in delinquency than native born Argentineans. For example, 99 out of each 1,000 British citizens were arrested in Buenos Aires in 1910 for public disturbances, and the arrest rates were 77 out of 1,000 for French citizens, 50 out of 1,000 for Spaniards, 31 out of 1,000 for Italians, but only 29 out of 1,000 for native-born Argentineans. Thus, one has to admit that the overrepresentation of ethnic minorities among offenders has a lot more to do with their low socioeconomic status—and its conse-

7 For details of my research on that topic, see Aebi (in press).

quences on health, education, neighborhood of residence, group of peers, work opportunities, and other aspects of life—than with their culture.

Therefore, I think that the current European debate on ethnic minorities should focus on improving their quality of life and avoiding the consolidation of ethnic neighborhoods instead of on discussing their cultural differences. The road is long because the mere fact of talking about *second* and *third* generation *immigrants* instead of *nationals* reflects the failure of Western European societies to integrate them. The reason for that failure is quite simple: instead of developing immigration policies, Western Europe has always developed labor market policies for immigrants. Such a situation led to a paradox such as applying social control theory (Hirschi, 1969) to explain delinquency of nationals and immigrants when such a theory is based on the importance of the attachment to parents—considered as one of the main elements of the bond to society—while we live in countries where even legal immigrants cannot always bring their families with them. In fact, European immigration laws help weakening the bond between immigrant parents and their children by creating artificially broken homes.

After all this has been said, I would like to point out that there are also some artificial reasons for the increase in recorded violent offences in Western Europe during the 1990s. In the first place, the increase is partially due to changes in data recording methods—which are sometimes referred to as *better recording practices* although it is questionable if these practices are better or simply different. Regarding assault, this was the case for countries such as Northern Ireland—where the number of assaults was multiplied by four between 1997 and 1998—and England and Wales—where assault increased by 63% from 1997 to 1998—and Ireland—where assault increased sharply in 2000, although the figure is not comparable to the one for 1999 because the latter covers only nine months (*European Sourcebook 2003*: 47). As concerns rape, Finland, Germany, Italy and Spain enlarged their definitions during the 1990s (*European Sourcebook* 2003: 47), but the changes did not introduce clear breaks in the time series such as the ones pointed out for assault.

In the second place, the increase in violent offences in Western Europe seems partially due to an increase in the reporting of offences to the police. In that context, recent research on the Netherlands (Wittebrood & Junger, 2002), England, and the Scandinavian countries (von Hofer, unpublished) has shown that, during the last quarter of the 20th century, victimization surveys indicated a slight increase of violent offences, while according to police statistics there was a huge increase of that kind of offences. In Spain, the increase in assault is mainly due to an increase of more than 100% in the reporting of domestic violence. Indeed, in 1997 there were 3,492 domestic violence offences known to the Spanish police forces, while in 2000 there were 7,122. Thus, in 1997, domestic violence offences represented 27% of the total number of assault offences, while in 2000 they represented 41%. Although in Spain there are no regular victimization surveys that would give an alternative measure of that offence, it seems difficult to imagine an actual increase of more than 100% in domestic violence taking place in only three years.

However, it must be kept in mind that, in 2000, every Western European country included in the analysis presented higher rates of assault than in 1990, and that only three countries (Denmark, Spain and Switzerland) presented lower rates of rape than in 1990.

Indeed, homicide is the only violent offence whose rates remained stable throughout the 1990s. Such stability may be due to two major factors: the relatively low and stable rates of arm possession in Western European households (Killias, van Kesteren & Rindlisbacher, 2001) and the quality of the health services. Harris et al. (2002) have studied the importance of the latter in the United States. They point out that, despite the proliferation of increasingly dangerous weapons and the very large increase in rates of serious criminal assault since 1960, the lethality of such assaults dropped dramatically between 1960 and 1999. According to Harris et al. (2002), this paradox is explained by the developments in medical technology and related medical support services. Without such progress, instead of having a downward trend, the United States would probably have had an upward one. In my opinion, the same explanation holds true for Western Europe in the 1990s.

Finally, it is interesting to point out that, while the analysis of Gottfredson (unpublished) suggests that the general evolution of delinquency in the United States is correlated with the evolution of homicide rates, my analyses show that there is no such correlation in Europe. The availability of guns is probably one of the major causes of such a difference that, in any case, confirms the particularities of the European context.

Conclusion

According to police statistics, between 1990 and 2000, in Central and Eastern Europe there was an increase in drug and property offences, while violent offences reached a peak during the 1990s but were decreasing by the end of the decade. During the same period, in Western Europe there was an increase in drug and violent offences, while property offences reached a peak at the beginning of the 1990s and started decreasing afterwards.

These trends were heavily influenced by the political, economical and social changes that took place in Central and Eastern Europe since the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1989. The political turmoil that followed helped the development of organized crime and led to an increase in violent offences—especially homicide—in that region of Europe. The trend was reversed when the political situation started to stabilize. At the same time, unemployment rose, the socioeconomic status of a good part of the population declined and, even if the development of a market economy increased the availability of goods and improved macroeconomic indicators, it is not clear whether this improvement was also experienced at the microlevel. As a consequence property offences followed an upward trend in Central and Eastern Europe throughout the 1990s.

Moreover, the emergence of a large black market for stolen goods in Central and Eastern Europe seems to be the cause of the increase in property offences in Western Europe at the beginning of the 1990s. The subsequent decrease of such

offences is probably related to a relative saturation of Central and Eastern European markets, a reinforcement of police measures in the frontiers, and an improvement of security measures in Western European households. By the end of the time series, a majority of Western European countries experienced an increase in vehicle theft that could be related to the existence of a market for some specific cars, although more research is needed on that topic. Finally, robbery matched the evolution of property offences until 1995—that is an increase followed by a decrease—but started to increase again from 1996 to 2000. This upward trend in the second half of the decade seems mainly related to the increase in the theft of mobile phones and other small electronic devices.

Regarding the increase in drug offences in both sides of Europe, research on drug use shows that there has been an increase in the number of drug users in the whole continent since 1990, a finding that suggests that the increase in offences is not a mere artifact produced by police statistics. This upward trend could be related to the increased availability of drugs in European markets. In fact, the opening of the European borders helped the development of new lines of transport for drugs and all kinds of goods and commodities—legal, illegal or stolen—as well as for the traffic of human beings—mainly illegal immigrants and prostitutes. Furthermore, the fights over such lines of distribution and potential markets may explain partially the increase in violent offences in Western Europe. Other causes of that increase are the development and consolidation of problematic neighborhoods in some European cities, as well as an increase in the reporting of violent offences to the police and modifications of data recording methods (i.e. changes in the way data are recorded for police statistics).

In sum, crime trends in Europe are perfectly explained by an opportunity-based theory such as the routine activities approach (Cohen & Felson, 1979, Felson 2001). This, of course, does not prove that the theory is universal, but suggests that it works well in market economy societies. Nevertheless, its application to Europe also shows that crime opportunities are heavily influenced by socio-economical factors. In fact, crime opportunities in Europe throughout the 1990s seemed to be shaped by the socio-economic situation of the different countries of the region.

Therefore, I believe that situational crime prevention measures will help reduce crime—and should therefore be encouraged because by reducing crime they will improve the quality of life of the citizens—but they will not be enough if they are not accompanied by a reduction of social and economical disparities between countries. The enlargement of the European Union constitutes a first step in that sense, but the rest of the world should not be forgotten.

A final remark

I would like to end this presentation with a sort of annex summarizing the very interesting discussions in which I took part during this third conference of the European Society of Criminology. In fact, one of the things that I appreciated the most while reading the program of this conference was that the organizers had in-

vited representatives of that wide movement that, for the sake of convenience, I will label here as *critical criminology*, even if such a label includes a series of different views on crime that sometimes are not strictly compatible. I was never really convinced by the methodology applied by critical criminologists in their essays but, as I believe that Karl Popper (1959/1934) was profoundly right when he pointed out that critical thinking is the basic element for the growth of knowledge, I thought this would be an excellent opportunity to confront and criticize different views on *crime*. I must admit, however, that the discussion had a tough start when professor Christie stated in his plenary address: "I do not think crime exists".

Giving a reply to that assertion, I pointed out at the end of my plenary address that the denial of crime implies also the denial of the offenders and the victims. If crime does not exist, then victims of crime do not exist either, and the whole field of victimology should disappear. Of course I agree with the general opinion that crime as well as crime statistics are social constructs. However, it must be kept in mind that the concept of social construct is also a social construct, because language itself is a social construct. In practice, it is very difficult to explain to a person who has been raped that she or he has not been the victim of a crime, because crime does not exist. Therefore, a good way to start a discussion would be to try to find a common field to talk, for example, about behaviours such as intentionally killing a person, inflicting a bodily injury on another person with intent, or depriving a person or an organization of property, as well as about the social reaction to them.

As there was not enough time in the plenary session to continue the discussion, professor Christie gave a short speech during the dinner organized by the Scandinavian Research Council for Criminology in which he pointed out that his assertion should not be taken literally. In my opinion, the problem with that line of arguing is that it puts the discussion right out of the field of science. An assertion that cannot be taken literally cannot be falsified. It is impossible to prove that an author is wrong when you cannot establish precisely what he or she means.

Another interesting and related topic of discussion emerged when, in his plenary address, professor Christie criticized the use of crime statistics by criminologists. The critique was not new but, paradoxically, he was also using crime statistics in his presentation. Professor Christie showed prison statistics from Finland and argued that the decrease in the number of prisoners that took place during the second half of the 20th century was the result of a form of re-integrative shaming from the part of the authorities. In fact, the case of Finland has also been studied by Kuhn (1997) and Törnudd (1993) among others and is probably the best illustration that the decrease of the prison population in a country is to a large extent the result of a political decision. Interestingly enough, the only way to know if the prison population of a country is high or low is to compare it with the prison population of other countries, and this can only be done through the use of prison statistics such as the ones produced by the Council of Europe (2003). Moreover, the best way to show that prison populations are not related to crime rates is to compare them with police and court statistics (see Aebi & Kuhn, 2000). Thus, a radical opposition to the use of crime statistics does not seem very fruitful.

However, during the different discussions with professor Christie as well as with other critical criminologists, I could not help feeling somehow uncomfortable, because I always had the impression of discussing with people with whom I have a lot in common. As I see it, critical criminology was the transposition to the field of criminology of the ideas that prevailed among the youth of the 1960s and 1970s, a generation known in French as *les soixante-huitards* (i.e. the May 1968 rebels). Such ideas were inspired by the perception of the word as a particularly unjust place, and I totally agree with that perception. In fact, life becomes almost unbearable when one tries to think of the number of injustices that are being committed at this very same moment. Nevertheless, I think that critical criminologists made a big mistake when they mixed political engagement with science, because it is a well-known fact that a militant is rarely objective.

Moreover, I think that their radical positions only made things worse during the last twenty-five years. The main message of critical criminology in the 1970s was that crime was not a real problem ("crime does not exist"). As a consequence, the progressive political parties—in which critical criminologists were engaged—never developed a criminal policy. Such a decision, taken in a period of constant growth of delinquency according to all crime measures (Braithwaite, 1989: 49; and Killias, 2001: 113, both with references), was completely irrational and helped indirectly the growth of the most conservative criminal policies. The situation is now critical as extreme right-wing European parties continue to rise by promising simplistic *solutions* to crime.

I hope that in the future critical criminologists and non-critical criminologists will finally manage to work together as a scientific community and help improving that situation, but this may well be the task of the new generation of criminologists. In fact, the first generation of critical criminologists grew up and developed its ideas in a completely different context. Thirty years ago, confrontation was a way of living and one could dream of utopias by the side of the fire provided by the Welfare State. Nowadays, we are trying not to lose what is left of that State. "The times they are a-changing", said the poet Bob Dylan, a verse that could be followed by those of T. S. Eliot that always come to my mind when I read the essays written in those years: "time is always time, and place is always and only place, and what is actual is actual only for one time and only for one place."

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Annex Countries included in each analysis

	Intentional homicide (including attempts)	Completed intentional homicide	Assault	Rape	Robbery	Theft	Motor vehicle theft	Burglary	Domestic burglary	Drug offences
Western Europe										
Austria	YES	YES	YES		YES	YES	YES		YES	YES
Denmark	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES			YES	YES	
Finland	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES		YES		YES	YES
France	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Germany		YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Greece	YES		YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES		YES
Ireland	YES	YES	YES				YES	YES	YES	
Italy	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Netherlands		YES	YES	YES	YES	YES				
Norway	YES	YES		YES	YES		YES	YES		YES
Spain	YES		YES	YES			YES			
Sweden		YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Switzerland	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES		YES
UK: England & Wales	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	
UK: Northern Ireland	YES	YES	YES	YES			YES	YES	YES	YES
UK: Scotland	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES		YES
Central and Eastern Europe										
Bulgaria	YES		YES	YES	YES	YES		YES		
Croatia	YES		YES		YES	YES				
Czech Republic	YES		YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	
Estonia	YES		YES	YES	YES	YES	YES		YES	YES
Hungary			YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Latvia	YES			YES	YES	YES				YES
Lithuania	YES			YES	YES	YES	YES		YES	YES
Moldova	YES		YES	YES	YES	YES		YES		YES
Poland	YES			YES	YES		YES	YES	YES	YES
Romania				YES	YES		YES			YES
Russia	YES		YES	YES		YES	YES		YES	YES
Slovenia	YES		YES	YES			YES			YES
Turkey					YES		YES			