

Campus Vesta – Conferentie SHOTPRO

14th of September

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

Warm welcome in Antwerp Province at Campus Vesta,

Irrefutably, **present times** are extremely **challenging**. Due to many crises: covid, the Ukrainian war, inflation, high energy bills, climate change... We're living in a shift of era, a period of radical transition with a lot of uncertainty, fear and anger. Moreover, challenges appear to be **faster, more diverse and radical** than ever.

Change can fuel frustration, aggression, fear and anger.

Change can and will also fuel great innovation and creative thinking.

That is what Campus VESTA and all of you prove with this conference: an inspiring and successful focus on innovation, creative thinking and stimulating co-operation with many partners.

Yesterday, the minister of Internal Affairs, Annelies Verlinden and I had the privilege to witness some of the achievements of 3,5 years of hard work on new, advanced and promising methods and tools for the close to reality training of policemen and women. It was quite an experience!

With this conference and the results of 3,5 years of hard work in and as a firm network you show that you had the right 'instinct' or '*Fingerspitzengefühl*' for what's really at stake. You also show the **open-mindedness, creativity and innovative spirit** to look for new ideas and solutions, to catch up and to keep up.

The **right instinct or Fingerspitzengefühl**...

The **challenges faced by the police forces** grow in **direct proportion to the complexity of our society**.

The overall increasing numbers and personal testimonials of **aggression against emergency workers** are shocking. Of course we can't tolerate aggression and violence against emergency workers, against policemen and women.

Sadly enough all of you and your colleagues not only face more but also much more complicated phenomena such as unpredictable behaviour caused by addictions, mental illness and

delirium, the risk of escalating of aggression during mass-manifestations, hostage-taking, domestic violence, drug related crimes ...

As if that weren't enough police officers must be constant aware not only of the risks for your own safety and security and those of your colleagues, but also of the fact that your response as police-officer is probably filmed and instantly put on social media with all the risks of further escalation that this might generate.

Of course dealing with violence and the proportionate use of is will always was a main part of your education and training. But as this project proves: new challenge, **multiplex phenomena** require a specific as well as a **multi-agency approach**. In the interest and for the wellbeing of the policemen and women. But also in the interest of the entire society.

The better police officers are trained to take the right decisions and act accordingly in stressful and in high-risk operational situations, the lower the risks of injuries, traumata for police-officers, but also for those responsible for the aggression.

Aggressive behaviour remains of course intolerable. When possible: a successful de-escalation of aggression remains a win-

win for the police, as well as for the aggressor and his/her family and for the society as a whole...

Ladies and gentlemen,

The SHOTPRO project also proves to excel in open-mindedness, innovation and creativity. Of course Virtual Reality Training tools will always come in addition to more classical ways of training and practicing.

As the minister and I saw yesterday: **VR-training** has assets the more traditional methods alone can't offer with the same efficacy. Such as the amazing flexibility, the inexhaustible possibility of scenarios and environments, the actual stress and performance measurement and objective feedback...

As if more arguments are needed: it's probably only by investing in new and innovative tools and methods for the well-being and safety of police officers that we will be able to convince youngsters to consider a career in the police, and an engagement for the safety and security of the society and its people.

No wonder that I'm grateful and proud that **Campus Vesta** - as active partner of this project and host of this conference- **understood this all very well.**

Dear Pieter, Gunter, colleagues and friends: many thanks for this engagement, great results and achievements as partner of SHOTPRO and for bringing for bringing Europe to Antwerp, be it physically or virtually.

As governor I have the privilege to be the chair of the **Multidisciplinary And Innovative Safety Fund Antwerp (MEIVA).**

With this fund, we contribute to **solid, multidisciplinary safety projects** in the Antwerp province. And therefore, by extension, to the **safety** of our **emergency people** as well as that of our **total community**. Without firm promises, because we didn't receive a project-proposal yet, we will kindly consider if and how we can contribute to the implementation of VR police-training tool in our region. That would be rewarding.

It is also **rewarding** to notice that the **European Union and various other European partners** share these ambitions and goals.

It is reassuring that the European Union, and many partners **invest in innovative and beneficial safety programmes**, like the SHOTPROS project.

As some of you heard yesterday: our Minister of Internal Affairs Annelies Verlinden promised to share the information and results of this important project with her European colleagues-Ministers of Internal Affairs, at their next meeting.

Of course I hope that in the near future other emergency services will also have the opportunity to **add such VR programme applications** to their training courses.

Ladies and gentlemen,

That brings me back to the start of my message. As governor of Antwerp I count my blessing for the work and role of the **state-of-the-art multidisciplinary training institute, Campus Vesta**.

Together, with the Antwerp provincial Government we **continue to invest in and to fulfil the ambition** to grow even further as a multidisciplinary knowledge and innovation centre, with the firm engagement to share expertise and cooperate with many partners.

This conference, attended by people **from more than 17 countries**, is a great step.

In 2019 the project started with **6 law enforcement Agencies** together good for 250.000 police-officers responsible for the security of 60 million European citizens. 3,5 years later the SHOTPROS-conference gathers 18 law enforcement agencies who deploy 825.000 police-officers for the security of 230 million citizens. Impressive numbers, such as the opportunities of VR-learning itself.

And what **applies to the SHOTPRO project** certainly also applies to Campus Vesta: **European support** is welcome, much appreciated and needed!

Congratulations and many thanks to all of you, to everybody who contributed to the project and the conference. Warm regards and fast recovery to the SHOTPROS Coordinators.

I wish you a wonderful conference day and all the best of success with the scaling-up and integration of VR training in reality!