Criminal law: European network of national contact points for crime victims. Initiative Belgium

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This document consists of the explanatory statement issued by the Permanent Representative of Belgium on the proposal for a Council Decision with a view to setting up a European Network of national contact points for Restorative justice. Restorative justice refers to a novel and comprehensive view of the criminal justice process, in which the needs of the victim are prioritised and offender accountability is emphasised in a positive manner. Restorative justice has thus far mainly found expression in different forms of mediation between victims and offenders (victim-offender mediation). Another method increasingly being applied is that of family group conferencing. However, restorative justice actually denotes a much broader approach, in which the material and immaterial reparation of the disturbed relationship between the victim, the community and the offender constitutes a general, guiding principle in the criminal justice process. Thus, restorative justice reflects a body of ideas that is relevant to various forms of sanctioning and conflict handling in the successive stages of the criminal justice process. Restorative justice aims both at less and more serious forms of crime committed by juvenile and adult delinquents. Criminal justice authorities, but also police, prisons, probation and victim aid, all find inspiration in the principles of restorative justice. Because one of the key elements in this approach is the active participation by the victim, the offender and their supporters, restorative justice also offers concrete opportunities to involve citizens in crime-related issues in a constructive and balanced manner. This promising, new approach to criminality needs to be further conceptualised, developed and evaluated. Belgium wishes to effectively support this new pattern of thinking and the associated practice. An official European network, composed out of national contact points, can be the forum for a permanent exchange of information and expertise. Besides the exchange of information, the Network can also promote the research on the topic of restorative justice, contribute to identify and develop the main areas for training and evaluation, organise conferences, seminars, meetings and other activities to promote restorative justice practices and to stimulate and improve the exchange of experiences and best practices so that the European Union will be able to develop an own vision and policy on restorative justice.