

DINNER

Dear Mr John Millard, dear guests, dear colleagues.

Welcome again to all of you after this long day filled with a lot of interesting presentations – thanks to the volunteers having done the job – and visits of Liverpool's museums. Congratulations to the team of the customs museum of Liverpool for the well-planned organisation and last, but not least, many thanks to Mr Millard for having given the OK to our conference and general assembly being held here.

When preparing my speech of today, I was asking myself what to tell you this evening. I was sitting in a lovely place in Southern France, in the shadow of the trees, enjoying a glass of fresh rosé wine, when I remembered a sentence, I read in a German newspaper some months ago. “Damit Vergangenheit eine Zukunft hat”, translated it means “That past has a future”. I think that's true for every kind of museum, but it is even more true concerning our special museums. We are representing an endangered race who was seriously in danger to disappear some 15 years ago, the customs officer and his work. The daily life of customs develops today as fast as our society grows. New techniques are presented daily. Just take the example of IT systems, if you buy one today, you can be sure that tomorrow you can get already a better version or a new one. And this procedure is the same for customs. If I compare the work of our administrations when I integrated customs in 1990 with the work done in 2009, it is a completely other world. As instructor at the customs school, I'm telling the new officers born in 1988 to 1991 examples about borders and permanent customs controls at the borders, they look at me as if I would tell them a new story of the brother Grimm. And that's the reason why the existence of our museums and the work done by us to preserve the history of customs and revenue, not to forget, is extremely important, not only for new customs officers, but also for the great public. More and more people are born without knowing what customs are really doing and where this funny men and women are coming from. So if we lose our traditions and our history, I'm sure, we are also losing our basement for the daily work of customs. If you don't know, where you come from, how do you want to know where you are going? When the borders were eliminated in January 1993, the politicians, the European commission, the people in the street and even members of customs administrations wanted to abolish everything related to customs. Most of the customs houses were demolished and a lot of material, valuable material for our museums would have been lost, if the museums or persons interested in our traditions would not have existed at that time to collect these precious items of our history. It was at that time and it is still today our duty to prevent that a big part of every country national history is simply destroyed and lost for ever. But I see sunshine coming up at the horizon. Since two or three years, I notice a change in the policy. Many governments and also the European commission remembers the efficient work of customs administrations and give them new tasks especially concerning security matters. And that's also a great chance and challenge for our museums. We can't sit looking at our exhibitions and museums, just as they are now, saying well done and look at the time passing by.

But I'm glad to see that we are moving, we can see it at every conference. Our museums have changed their look, are going with the time, modernizing, inventing just like the new technologies. Perhaps not so fast, but considering our budgets, we are well placed. So we could see last year in Hamburg a totally new designed museum, this year here in Liverpool exactly the same. Or do you think the exhibition we saw yesterday, is the same we saw 12 years ago? Ireland and Moldavia have completely new museums till 2 years. Even our friend

Ferdinand from Austria was allowed to built up a small, but new exhibition about the customs guard in a police school. France told us last year that they are renovating step by step. The Netherlands are at the beginning of a complete renovation and rebuilding. Completely new museums in new buildings are planned in Belgium and Luxembourg. That are all signs that make me optimistic for the next years.

But we must not forget that for the moment, we are crossing an economic crisis and therefore we must surely struggle very hard so that all the plans will be fulfilled. We must be on alert, because it is much easier to take money away from the budget than filling up. All of us must keep that in mind and the IACM must be prepared to help members asking for assistance when problems will grow up. And I'm sure, this kind of problems will arise.

Nevertheless, I'm optimistic that we will succeed in our mission and that we can present our history to the visitors for many years to come.

I want to finish my speech now with the words of Mr Jacques Santer, our former Prime Minister of Luxembourg and former President of the European Commission, who I had the opportunity to meet at several occasions: "I come to the end of my speech, because I hate to drink hot wine".

Thank you for your attention.