

Closing remarks

Sander van den Eijnden, President of Nuffic

Ladies and gentlemen,

As it showed on the bulletin, the extra Nuffic bulletin, I had the honour of opening the conference on Monday evening. I explained the concept of future search, I told the participants that they had to leave behind all their conference routines, as there were no plenary sessions, no forum discussions, no presentations of papers. Because I saw a bit of wilderment on their faces, I tried to reassure the participants by telling that this approach would not only be productive, but also quite enjoyable. And the question is: was it enjoyable? I have not been part of the process as a whole, I have just seen glances and when I came yesterday round noon I noticed that your communication seemed to have become more direct. A little bit less polite perhaps, less prudent, more direct, quite lively, and that was good. On the other hand, I also noticed some confusion and not the mental confusion, the conceptual confusion that apparently is inherent in the process, but confusion on a more personal basis. I mean, many of you hold very important positions in the countries you come from and you have grown used to the burden of that responsibility. But many of you have also grown used to the support of staff and other resources. When you then find yourself in a position of self-management and having nothing to rely upon, except for yourself, I can understand that this can be a bit confronting. And for some of you it was. But for me it was quite a useful experience.

Another thing was that most of us have had an academic training and we like to analyze things, we know that input is not enough for output. Well, there was no lack of input if you look at the sheets, and many people were wondering where is this going to, if anywhere? We like to be in control. Well, this morning when the weather brightened there was more focus, there was more boiling down, all the expressions that we use for things like that. And when I see with what energy, and how lively, and how enthusiastic you have presented the recommendations up to the last minute after two days of hard work, there is no doubt in my mind it has been enjoyable, so that's the first conclusion.

On the other hand, we did not invite you just for the fun of it. We wanted something to come out of it and I tried to explain that we would like to have recommendations which are experienced based and which may help us to redesign our support programmes in such a way that they become more effective. Well it is quite clear that you have come up with those recommendations. I won't repeat them, won't judge them, the important thing is you have come up with them.

The problem is that after the closing speech of Mr Hoekema, after the cocktails and when you have gone home, the things that will remain are our sweet memories and the conference publication including the recommendations. And as we say in Dutch: paper is patient. What can we do to actually keep them alive? I think the thing to do is that we link them to the strong commitment that I have witnessed in the last two days, that we take them home as work to be done. Not in isolation, but together with all the others in your own home environment but also using the network that we have established here. You have received a list of names and e-mail addresses, there will be the publication of the conference, there is the conference website, and Nuffic will stay in contact with all our guests, be it through the NPT programme or the NFP programme or in another way. We will do our best to support you in that and we hope that we will find a way to enable you to use the strength of this network.

And for Nuffic itself, the recommendations will be a great help in rethinking and redesigning the programmes that we operate and in helping the ministry to restructure our NPT programme and our NFP programmes - because, as we learned this afternoon, there is room for improvement.

Nuffic has a tradition of organizing a conference like this every ten year, this is the 4th time we have done it. If I look at the amount of work that we have to do with these recommendations, I would not be surprised if we organize a conference in ten years time to see what we have accomplished in the

decade which is yet to come. If we do so, I hope that you will be our guests. I hope that we will meet on a more regular basis, though.

Thank you very much for being here, thank you very much for your work and for your inspiration.