

13 October 2011

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**16th Conference of Directors of
Prison Administration
with the participation of
Directors of Probation Services**

**“Working together to promote
the social reintegration of
prisoners”**

OPENING ADDRESS

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Thursday 13 October 2011, 9.30 am, room G03, AGORA

Mr President, ladies and gentlemen,

- I have great pleasure in opening this 16th Conference of Directors of Prison Administration and welcoming you all here in Strasbourg. The significant participation of Directors of Prison Administration and Directors of Probation Services underlines the importance of this event and the prime importance of the conference theme: working together for a successful social rehabilitation of prisoners.
- One of the themes of the 30th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers of Justice, which took place in Istanbul in November 2010, concerned prisons, and the Conference ended with the Ministers adopting Resolution No. 2 on “prison policy in today’s Europe”. This text deals with some of the major problems which European prison systems encounter today. It proposes establishing a genuine European prison policy to help the competent national authorities cope with the problem of prison overcrowding, improve the conditions of imprisonment, and prepare for the release and supervision of offenders under custodial and semi-custodial arrangements.
- Your replies to the questionnaire sent out in preparation for this Conference showed yet again that the most serious problems continue to include overcrowding, lack of staff and lack of constructive activities to occupy prisoners and improve their occupational, educational and personal capabilities in order to ensure a future without crime.
- Obviously, the work of the staff responsible for enforcing sanctions and measures, both the staff working in the prisons and the probation officers, is crucially important. Consequently, it will be necessary to step up efforts to raise the awareness of the national authorities and of civil society in general as regards their professional needs. We all know that under overcrowded conditions in prisons, the prison staff can only deliver a minimum service aimed solely at ensuring security and good order on the premises. Neither existing standards at national and international level, nor the good practices for effective treatment of prisoners and quality preparation for their release, can be applied under such conditions. Overcrowding and staff shortages undermine any

prison reform and help create conditions allowing diseases such as HIV, tuberculosis as well as mental diseases to spread.

- In the present period of economic crisis, it is hard for governments to justify expenditure to improve the quality of life in prison. For prisons to be managed effectively within the limits of the restricted existing resources, the number of prisoners needs to be reduced, and a general review of policy on criminal justice and enforcement of sentences is called for. This also requires a constructive dialogue with the judiciary and legislative authorities.
- The political authorities, members of the judiciary, the media and society must be kept better informed about the true complexity of our prisons. It must be acknowledged that a large proportion of the inmates have often gone astray because of family and social problems, and suffer from addictions, behavioural disorders, etc. In short, from social maladjustment. Prison is thus used as the easiest and cheapest solution, but also the one least suited to their circumstances. The authorities and society must agree to finding other ways of caring for and assisting such people, and keep the prisons for the real criminals who are impossible to deal with effectively in an open environment.
- Imprisonment has a particularly negative effect on juveniles who need to be treated differently and separately from adults. The Council of Europe is campaigning to promote children's rights and protect them from violence. This includes, of course, children in conflict with the law who are prone to physical and mental suffering while in detention.
- For over 50 years the Council of Europe has advocated the use of prison sentences as a last resort, and for as short a time as possible. That is one of the basic principles of our penitentiary standards, standards recognised not only in Europe but also worldwide. Our SPACE statistics, and I would like to underline their importance and the quality of their data collection, unfortunately show quite the reverse tendency in many countries over the past decade.
- Changes in policy and practice must start with better information, communication and training for the persons concerned. This demands considerable time, but the results can be spectacular, for a change of political as well as professional approach can alter thousands of lives and rescue many people from a criminal existence. Since the 1990s, the Council of Europe has spent years in the pursuit of assistance and co-operation projects in order to help the new member states in several priority areas, including prison matters. A key aspect is the training of staff at all levels and the training of trainers. Thought should be given to the possibility of expanding these programmes of assistance in order to involve a larger number of European countries in them.
- Releasing some of the prisoners now held and imprisoning fewer people in the future also requires the reinforcement of the welfare services and probation departments. We are aware that in many European countries these services have for years been chronically understaffed. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted Probation Rules last year. Your replies to the questionnaire show that some countries have already translated these rules into their national language, even revised their respective laws, and included these standards in the training curricula of their staff. However, much still remains to be done, since implementation is the most important part of the job. We may have excellent national and international standards, but unless they are really implemented nothing will change.
- The Council of Europe has developed a significant number of standard-setting instruments on extradition, transfer of prisoners and of course landmark texts like the European Prison Rules.
- The European Court of Human Rights has built up a large body of case law relating to cases concerning conditions of detention. The Vice-President of the Court, Judge Tulkens, will give you more detailed information on the relevant case law in a moment.
- Coming back to the Resolution adopted at the last Conference of Ministers of Justice, I should like to emphasise that the Ministers asked the Council of Europe to assess the measures taken by member states to apply the Council of Europe's standards, and on that basis to consider whether the legal framework in this field needs strengthening by

certain means including a legally binding instrument. They also asked for Council of Europe to propose other measures if necessary, including the identification and dissemination of best practices.

- It is therefore up to you as professionals to look at these questions during this Conference and to present your conclusions. There are several options: if it is a matter of implementation, how can this be improved? If it is a matter of training or lack of knowledge, how can exchanges of best practices and their effective adaptation within each country's national system be speeded up? One might also consider whether it is helpful to agree at European level on binding basic requirements. All this may help you solve such problems as overcrowding and manage prisons and prisoners' release more effectively.
- We have among us the founding members of a new non-governmental organisation, Europris, soon to hold its constituent meeting in Edinburgh. I should like to wish them every success in this endeavour, hoping that, on the basis of Council of Europe standards, it may contribute to the improvement of conditions of imprisonment, the quality of prison officers' work and status, and greater effectiveness in the enforcement of penalties.
- Lastly, Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I wish you every success in your work and your discussions. Solutions emerge from dialogue. The Council of Europe has always worked to maintain a constant, constructive dialogue between the authorities, professionals and experts of our member states. During such encounters, our Organisation provides a broad platform for exchanges and co-operation, and for creating professional networks. This Conference has been organised for over 35 years now, and the professional contacts and exchanges, often also friendships, which have resulted over the years cement the foundation of prison policy and practice in Europe.
- Thank you for your attention!