

30th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers of justice
"prisons in today's Europe"
Istanbul, 24 – 26 November 2010

SPEECH

Mr Loucas LOUCA, Minister of Justice and Public Order
CYPRUS

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to intervene again on the second sub-theme of the agenda, dealing with "Prisons in today's Europe". I will briefly refer to the aspect of prisons' overcrowding and also to the initiatives taken by the Government of the Republic of Cyprus as regards the use of non custodial measures and sanctions, to restrain the problem.

Overcrowding and prison population growth is indeed a problem which, almost all European prisons face and it is also a significant administrative challenge to the world's criminal justice systems, as a whole.

Despite the increase of the capacity of our Prisons, through comprehensive medium and long term building programmes and the recruitment of additional Prisons staff, unfortunately, during the past years, we have also experienced growing numbers of the population in prison which result periodically to overcrowding problems.

The efforts of the Government to tackle this problem are concentrated to the wider use of non custodial measures and sanctions. In fact it can safely be stated that it has been and still is a goal of national policy in Cyprus to extend the use of non-custodial sanctions in substitution of custodial ones. A series of judicial decisions over the last decades suggest that imprisonment ought to be a measure of last resort and, in the case of young offenders, a measure to be avoided.

The most frequently used measure of dealing with young offenders is the probation order placing the convict under the supervision of a probation officer of the Welfare Office.

It is worth mentioning that since 1996 the community service, another non custodial sanction, may be combined, with the consent of the offender, to the probation order.

For the wider and more effective implementation of this community service measure, we have reinforced, since 2004, our administrative infrastructure.

Also, since last year Cyprus is harmonized with modern approaches on the treatment of offenders and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights, establishing, by law, an independent Council dealing with prisoners' release, under conditions and permit, to continue their sentence out of Prisons. We believe that this latest measure will contribute to decreasing the overpopulation problem, in our Central Prison.

Now, we are in the process of putting in place the necessary infrastructure facilitating the implementation of the recently enacted legislation, which provides that prisoners who have been admitted to the Open Prison, may be released under "Electronic Monitoring".

Also we are working on the amendment of our prisons rules and particularly those regulating solitary confinement, in line with the case law of the European Court of Human Rights.

Furthermore, until the end of this year a decision will be taken as regards building New Prison Facilities.

Last but not least, I would like to express my belief that mutual trust among the members of the Council of Europe, as regards good conditions and treatment of prisoners and respect for the unhindered exercise of their rights, contributes to increased co-operation, in particular as regards transfer of prisoners.

Before concluding this intervention, I would like to signify our agreement to Draft Resolution 2.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.