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**SPEECH**

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**LITHUANIA**

**ESSENTIAL CHANGES IN THE PENAL SYSTEM OF LITHUANIA**

**Punishment, communication and society: the challenges and opportunities of the probation system reform in Lithuania**

Research and practical experience show that the isolation of an offender from society cannot always be treated as a justifiable and adequate means of achieving the objectives of punishment. Recidivism studies have shown that probation is more effective than an actual prison sentence in seeking to ensure that convicted persons do not commit a crime again. Therefore, one of the most ambitious and most important priorities of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania is to develop an effective probation system orientated towards recidivism risk management and to reform the standards of performance of the probation agency, replacing them with high-quality new ones focused on social work and effective resocialisation of convicts.

In an effort to achieve qualitative changes in the area of probation, I have initiated the drafting of the Law on Probation and related legislation and submitted them to the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania. The national probation system is being reformed in view of both the positive experience of foreign countries and research findings. The leitmotif of the probation system reform is the replacement of prevailing convict isolation and behaviour control measures with a balanced system of resocialisation. We have set ourselves the objective of introducing methods of differentiation of convicts by the risk of recidivism and work with their problems based on the latest scientific achievements. In addition, we will seek to ensure that resocialisation measures are not selected spontaneously but are chosen upon assessing the individual social needs of convicts and criminogenic factors.

It should be pointed out that these projects also open the door for psychologists, social workers, volunteers, non-governmental and religious organisations to participate in the process of resocialisation of convicts when taking key legal decisions (social research findings) as well as in the activities of social rehabilitation of convicts (correctional programmes), thus making the correctional system open to society. In addition, convicts are planned to be enabled to choose volunteers responsible for their supervision after they are released.

We will also seek to modernise the probation process by introducing electronic surveillance. Thus, the public will be able to feel safe and taxpayers will not have to bear such a heavy burden of maintenance of prisoners. Probation officers will also apply modern technologies, which will considerably facilitate supervision, but not archaic physical examination. Electronic surveillance will help to solve the problems of protection of victims of crime and supervision of released sex offenders.

The achievement of these objectives is expected to result in a reduction in the recidivism rate, the number of persons kept in custodial facilities and the costs of maintenance of these facilities as well as enhance public safety. These changes should also gradually change the public attitude towards convicts and their problems, encourage sociality and

help convicts to become social members of society while enduring punishment. We also hope that having attained its objectives, Lithuania will be able to harmoniously integrate into the European modern probation culture. To conclude, I would like to cite philosopher Duff's idea that the purpose of improvement of punishment is not to find a theory justifying practice, but to change the content and context of punishment.