

31st Conference of Directors of Prison and Probation Services

Valletta, Malta — 4 June 2026

CLOSING SPEECH

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Distinguished guests, colleagues, friends,

Two days ago, I spoke about a Victorian building and a twenty-first-century mission. I said that the tension between the two was not incidental to our work in Malta, that it was, in many ways, the honest starting point for any serious conversation about what corrections is for: not just inside prison walls, but across the full continuum of care that extends into the community.

What this conference has done, through four workshops and the voices of more than thirty-nine delegations, is demonstrate that the tension I described is not a Maltese tension. It is a European one. It is a universal one. And it is not resolved by new buildings alone, important as infrastructure is. It is navigated, sometimes imperfectly, always with effort, by the quality of our thinking, the honesty of our self-examination, and the depth of our commitment to the people in our care.

WHAT WE HAVE HEARD

On foreign nationals: what has emerged clearly is that majority-foreign prison populations are no longer an exception. They are the new reality for many European systems. Language access, cultural competence, consular liaison, and family contact across borders are not supplementary services.

They are core obligations, and they demand systematic responses, not improvised ones.

On women: the conversation has consistently returned to a single point. You cannot retrofit gender-responsiveness onto a system designed by and for men. The needs inside and the support required on release are structurally different, and as the data remind us, the majority of women interact with our systems not through prison at all, but through community sanctions and probation supervision. That demands structural thinking across both environments, not just additional programmes, but a fundamental rethinking of the baseline model.

On older persons: we have confronted some of the most difficult questions in corrections, dignity in the final years of a long sentence, access to healthcare that prison environments were never designed to provide, and the point at which continued imprisonment and humane treatment become genuinely incompatible. These conversations are not comfortable. They should not be. But they are the ones that define the moral seriousness of our field.

On prison-probation cooperation: what has come through most forcefully is that continuity matters — it is something that makes a real difference to outcomes. It is, for many of the people we work with, a matter of survival. The evidence on risk in the weeks following release is clear. Proper transitions between prison and probation, shared case management, real coordination: these are not luxury additions to good practice. They are its foundation.

THREE THINGS TO CARRY HOME

Vulnerability is not a category.

It is a condition that layers, compounds, and resists administrative simplicity. Our systems must be built for that intersection, not despite it. The foreign national who is also a woman, the elderly prisoner who also has dementia, the person on probation who has no housing, no family, and no mental health support waiting in the community; these are not edge cases. They are the people our systems most frequently fail, and they are the people this conference exists to serve.

The quality of corrections depends, above all, on the quality of the people delivering it.

The staff who carry this work every day: the officers, the clinicians, the probation officers, the educators, do so at real personal cost. If we want humane, effective, and dignified corrections, we must invest in the well-being and professional development of the workforce that makes it possible. That investment is not a luxury. It is a prerequisite.

And finally: we share a purpose.

Across all our differences of scale, language, legal tradition, and resource, we are all trying to answer the same question: how do we manage the deprivation of liberty — and the supervision that follows it — in a way that is safe, lawful, and humane, and that leaves each person better equipped for a life beyond the prison gates, and beyond the probation appointment, than when they arrived?

That shared purpose is the reason this conference exists and the reason it matters.

IN CLOSING

In Malta, we are still on the journey, both in our prison and in our probation and community supervision services. We have not arrived. I suspect none of us has. But what I take from

these two days is the quality of the people in this room who are making that journey seriously.

Practitioners who shared what they actually do: not the theory, but the practice.

Policymakers who heard difficult evidence and asked difficult questions.

And the **Lived Experience** speakers, whose honesty reminded everyone of us, as nothing else can, why this work matters at all.

I want to thank the Council of Europe, the PC-CP, and the CDPSP Secretariat — and in particular Ms Louise Riondel — for organising a conference of this quality.

I want to thank every speaker, every moderator, and every delegate who brought their knowledge, their honesty, and their commitment to this room.

And I want to thank Malta, this small island that has punched above its weight in this conversation, as it so often does. Our Correctional Services Agency, our staff, and the people in our care who shared their own voices in the lived experience session: they have shown you something of who we are. Not a perfect system. But an honest one, trying to do better.

Travel safely. Carry this conversation home. And remember the people it is about.

Thank you.