

**Jan Kleijssen's closing words at the occasion of the 25th Council of Europe
Conference of Directors of Prison and Probation Services**

(10 November 2020, 11h30, Room 11, Palais or KUDO)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

These were two very intense working days of the first ever remotely held Conference of Directors of Prison and Probation Services. Despite the distances and the connectivity challenges some have experienced, it was a success as usual. I cannot hide though my regret for not being able to see you and speak with you informally, to share some nice moments around a cup of coffee or a glass of wine and to network in a more traditional way.

We are all facing difficult times, but such periods bring also positive experiences and opportunities for greater flexibility, tolerance and patience, learning to communicate differently, being innovative regarding working methods and achievement of our objectives.

Allow me to convey the Council of Europe's special thanks to all speakers and moderators who managed to overcome distances and animate so successfully the audience and share their own knowledge and experience.

My special thanks go also to the Working Group of the Council for Penological Co-operation whose members continued debating and taking decisions remotely in the course of the year and who organised a much-appreciated PC-CP plenary meeting last month (in a remote format as well). I would also like to thank them for following closely the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the work of the prison and probation services in Europe and for adopting two statements in relation to this, which contain a number of observations and practical recommendations. I invite you to make full use of these texts.

I would like to underline that the Council of Europe offers and will continue to offer guidance and support in all areas of its competence to the national authorities. Do not hesitate to address your queries, requests for information or advice to the Secretariat.

The discussions during the Conference were interesting, the presentations were very useful, and many persons could watch the event remotely via the live-stream.

As already stated during the Conference, it is very important to invest in evaluating your experiences in relation to the current situation and, based on the conclusions reached, to agree on how to plan the next steps. It is also important to agree on a more general strategy regarding facing similar challenges in the future in a well prepared and organised manner. In this respect, we note that thanks to the timely measures taken, the spread of the virus was relatively contained by your services. It should also not be forgotten that investing in adequate compensatory measures to alleviate the restrictions on visits, contacts, interventions and activities is an important element of the whole set of containment measures. Respect and human rights protection of offenders and staff are a guarantee for the important social role your services are playing in ensuring crime reduction.

We are looking forward to seeing the end of this pandemic in the coming months and to being able to meet face-to-face again. Therefore, I am eager to see all of you next year in September in Portugal, and I would like to express our special thanks to the Portuguese prison service for their kind invitation to host this important event.

Thank you all, take care and see you next year in Portugal!