

Opening address

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*22nd Council of Europe Conference of Directors of Prison and Probation Services
“STAFF RECRUITMENT, TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY”
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Allow me to thank the State Secretary Anette Elsethand and the Directorate of the Norwegian Correctional Service, her Director General, Marianne Vollan and all her staff for hosting and for the excellent organisation of the Conference.

I would like to congratulate the hosts on the new building where are situated the headquarters and the University College. This modern building in which we are today and its splendid equipment are best suited for the present occasion in view of the topic of this year's Conference, namely staff of the 21st century – who they should be, how they should be trained, what professional qualifications and ethics they should possess and what conditions of work should be guaranteed to them in order to effectively and humanely work with offenders and protect our societies from crime and injustice.

Usually the focus of these annual Conferences is mostly on prison and probation work related to dealing with offenders. This year for the first time the Conference will focus exclusively on staff and this is very timely.

Our societies change and prison and probation systems need also to reflect these changes and to be modernised. Any such change, any reform is heavily dependent on the human factor. In this respect our more and more diverse and multicultural societies require a diversity of staff working in prison and probation services. A variety of personal and professional backgrounds helps developing new perspectives and work styles, contributes to enriching values and beliefs and enhances human performance by creating an environment in which staff and offenders learn to accept, respect and effectively use the diversity as a source of added value.

New technologies bring in positive changes but also challenges and require acquiring new knowledge and expertise by staff. Staff need also to be trained to use these technologies to the benefit of their work and at the same time to avoid replacing with technical equipment the so needed every day human contact and positive interaction with offenders.

Staff at all levels need to respond to a rising number of everyday tasks and to work with a variety of offenders, including foreigners, offenders with different mental health and addiction problems, sex offenders, organised crime gangs, radicalised offenders and returning foreign fighters. Therefore a rising variety of requirements regarding their selection and training needs to be taken into consideration.

Eleven years ago when the new European Prison Rules were adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (2006) a significant part of the standards developed related to staff which allowed striking a balance between standards concerning the treatment of prisoners and standards related to the selection, training and working conditions of staff.

This is commendable as without proper selection, training and development of staff and ensuring good working conditions, status and job satisfaction, it is not possible to ensure humane and efficient treatment of offenders. The same approach you will find also in the Council of Europe Probation Rules (2010) as well as in CM Recommendation (97) 12 on staff concerned with the implementation of sanctions and measures which applies both to prison and probation staff.

Despite the adoption of these European standards by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, there are still significant differences among our member States regarding required starting educational level at recruitment, regarding training curricula, duration of training, working conditions and staff development. There is an evident need to harmonise standards across the continent.

I note in relation to this that a range of topics will be discussed at this year's Conference. This year for the first time we have 9 different workshops on a number of important topics, chosen to cover the main issues of interest or concern for both prison and probation services. There is a remarkable list of presenters during these workshops (more than 30), whom I would wish to thank warmly. Allow me also to thank the delegations for bringing a lot of printed and video material, which is a sign of both the importance and the interest regarding the subject.

The role, status, personal qualities and professional qualifications of staff being of great significance, this year it is suggested that the Conference as a whole adopts a set of conclusions to be addressed to your national authorities and to the Council of Europe itself in order to further stress on and promote the importance of recruiting, training and developing staff of high quality because of their important part in preserving the safety of our societies.

The Council for Penological Co-operation Working Group (PC-CP) has drafted a preliminary version of the conclusions of the Conference in order to facilitate your work and I wish to thank them for this and for moderating the different workshops. In the light of the discussions during these two days it might prove necessary to revise this draft text further (you have received a copy of the draft conclusions). You are therefore invited to approach the Council of Europe Secretariat and moderators in case you have suggestions and comments regarding the draft conclusions before they are adopted at the end of the Conference.

I wish you a very successful and fruitful Conference!