

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Guests,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to Krakow – a city rich in history, but also a place of lively reflection on law and justice – for the 30th Council of Europe Conference of Directors of Prison and Probation Services.

The theme of this year's conference – “Can we move away from overuse of penal sanctions?” – poses a fundamental question. Not only about how to punish, but above all about whether imprisonment is the best solution, both from the perspective of the offender, the victim, and society as a whole.

There is no doubt that crime – as a social phenomenon – is one of the most serious threats to public safety. Therefore, the state has a duty to pursue an effective crime control policy. However, it must do so in a thoughtful, rational manner, based on proven, empirically validated solutions.

We cannot allow criminal policy to be based on outdated concepts or short-term political needs. We need evidence-based policy – policy based on data, research, and real social impact.

In this context, imprisonment appears to be one of the most controversial instruments of the penal system. Practice and research show that its effectiveness in the process of rehabilitation is limited, and its costs—both economic and social, as well as psychological—are very high.

Penitentiary isolation entails a number of negative consequences: deprivation of basic needs, loss of family ties, emotional emptiness, the risk of prisonization, as well as stigmatization and marginalization of convicts and their families. Therefore, we must ask ourselves: does this form of punishment always serve justice and security?

A modern approach to punishment requires reconciling two realities: on the one hand, recognizing that imprisonment is still a necessary sanction for serious crimes, and on the other, recognizing that its abuse generates enormous social and psychological costs and often fails to produce the desired results.

The basis of any model of criminal law response should be respect for human dignity and effective protection of human rights. Convicts cannot be treated as objects of repression, but as individuals who should be given a real chance to return to society.

Therefore, the enforcement of punishment must be based on clear and transparent rules, effective legal and administrative protection mechanisms, and the possibility of appealing to international institutions that monitor human rights compliance.

Contemporary justice should move away from mass isolation and instead develop tools for individualizing and personalizing penalties based on a reliable assessment of the risk of reoffending. In particular, we must recognize the needs of people with mental disorders, addictions, or intellectual disabilities. It is precisely this precise diagnosis of risk and criminogenic factors that should be the starting point for effective secondary prevention.

In this perspective, the probation systems and non-custodial measures become crucially important and should not be treated as gente alternatives, but as fully-fledged, modern, and humane tools of criminal justice. The probation is not only about the control, but also about opportunity—the opportunity for maintaining family ties, for social rehabilitation in a natural environment, for the real responsibility of the perpetrator towards the victim, for compensation and for the damage repaired.

However, moving away from isolation automatism requires strong cooperation: between the justice system and science, social organizations, probation officers, therapists and local communities. Only together we can create a system that not only punishes, but also repairs and prevents.

Reform and improvement of the justice system are not possible without open debate, a critical look at our current practices and a willingness to cooperate – across national borders and systems.

Citizen safety, justice and the common good are values that must go hand in hand – although it is not always easy to achieve both at the same time. It is our duty—as lawyers, civil servants, scientists, and practitioners—to constantly seek this delicate balance.

Let the words of Gustav Radbruch serve as a reminder of our responsibility: “A law that is against to morality loses its binding force – *lex iniustissima non est lex.*”

I wish you fruitful discussions, inspiring meetings, and creative exchanges of ideas.

I invite you to join me in reflecting on how to transfer the challenges and values we are discussing today into specific standards for sentencing and executing sentences – standards that will serve justice, strengthen security, and create space for social readaptation.

Thank you.