

Justice Cooperation Network (JCN)

European treatment and transition management of high risk offenders

Final Conference

September 3 – 5, 2014 in Rostock-Warnemünde, Germany

Opening Address

Dr. Karin Dotter-Schiller

Ministers,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am most grateful to Justice Cooperation Network for the opportunity to address you at this Final Conference of the EU Project “European treatment and transition management of high risk offenders - Justice Cooperation Network JCN)”, the organisers of which are to be congratulated.

From my basic profession I am from the Austrian Prison Service, working with the Federal Ministry of Justice as Deputy Head of the Prison Administration Department and actually the topic risk assessment and risk management of dangerous – especially violent and sexual offenders – is on top of the agenda of our Service. We are preparing a national-wide risk management regulation at present.

It is a real pleasure for me to share some thoughts with you - within the scope of a welcome address - in my function as Board Member and Vice President of EuroPris and in this role I would like to use this opportunity to present the European Organisation of Prison and Correctional Services to you.

To start with some facts on the history of the organization:

EuroPris was established in 2011 as an initiative of a number of Directors General of European Prison Administrations who had been meeting already for many years in the Framework of two Roundtables, the International Roundtable for Correctional Excellence of the Northern and some Western European countries and the Middle Europe Corrections Roundtable (MECR).

This international exchanges had been and are still very useful to them and they decided to open it up to a wider group of prison professionals. In this way the idea of EuroPris was born and finally EuroPris registered in The Hague at the end of 2011.

The European character of the organization is not only reflected by its international Board but also by its international staff that works from offices in The Hague, Brussels and London.

Concerning our Members, which are only national European Prison Administrations, we are really proud that - within this relatively short period of existence - already 18 Prison Services have joined EuroPris. And there are more that expressed their intention to join in 2015. So we are rapidly growing.

Existing for 2.5 years EuroPris is still a young organization. But we are convinced to play a crucial role in the field of prisons and corrections to promote ethical and rights based imprisonment.

There was a need in the European correctional arena for such an organization. Certainly a significant number of European initiatives are already working in the field of prisons and corrections but all of them are focused on specific subjects rather than covering the whole spectrum of prison matters. That is why EuroPris is well on the way to become THE recognized authority on prison practice and expertise in Europe.

I'd like to refer to EuroPris as a “one-stop-shop” on prison matters in Europe.

Another relevant particular of EuroPris is the fact that we are an organization of practitioners. Our members are those persons responsible for the operation and delivery of prison services. Our task is to listen to them and serve their needs and to be their voice – the voice of the prison professionals.

EuroPris works jointly with other European organizations and prison administrations on reducing re-offending and improving public safety and security. This is of course a continuous process and can only be achieved by continuously working on improving the level of detention standards and practice and on advancing the professionalism of staff working in the correctional field.

You may wonder now what EuroPris is actually doing. EuroPris links up with organizations that are active in the field of prisons and corrections in order to prevent duplication, to strengthen their work and to give them the opportunity to share their activities and results with a broader audience via our website or the media.

The whole concept of encouraging prison administrations to network and establish mechanisms for the exchange of best practice is in line with the aspirations of the EU; such as the need for closer cooperation between judicial authorities in the EU, the need to strengthen the mutual knowledge about our systems and the need to reinforce mutual trust. The work and network of EuroPris supports this agenda; amongst others by close cooperation in the support of the implementation of EC legislation.

In cooperation with the Council of Europe we have a role to play in providing practical expertise to their work in developing standards for the prison sector.

Being a one-stop-shop on prison matters also means that individuals and institutions call upon EuroPris to obtain prison related information. In order to facilitate this we are building databases and we developed the *European Prison Information System* (EPIS) which is an online system on our website providing extensive European prison data and information that can easily be found and compared.

EuroPris is very much a network organization. Within this network we associate with and partly have institutionalized regular contact with other European organizations that operate in the criminal justice chain.

For example with CEP, the Confederation of European Probation, and the European Forum for Restorative Justice EuroPris has established the Criminal Justice Platform.

Listening and serving the needs of the Prison Administrations, learning from each other - rather than reinventing the wheel - are one of the most important tasks of our organization. We do this in a very practical way. We organize expert groups and workshops as a means to address these needs. Bringing together experts on a specific topic and from different European countries has been proven a fruitful approach.

Lately we have been working on the following topics: transfer of prisoners under the EC Framework Decision 909, the use of digital technology in prisons, staff training and development, foreign nationals in prison, victims issues and research and statistics for the development of the EPIS system.

The need for cooperation between European agencies is also very visible in the joint implementation of multilateral cooperation projects such as the Justice Cooperation Network on the Reintegration of High Risk Offenders.

Building an European network, developing common understanding, defining new work models and choosing best practice are key tasks in European cooperation. Doing all of this is essential for being able to increase the professionalism of our staff in their daily work and contact with prisoners.

The vast majority of persons in custody are there for only a limited amount of time and will return to society eventually. It is of common interest, not only to prison services, but to society as a whole that their return to this society is prepared in such a way that it does neither cause harm to the prisoner him- or herself, nor to the victim or any other member of society.

This is never a simple task and a specific challenge concerning High Risk Offenders. Prison services face this challenge in balancing the rights of dangerous offenders with the need to provide security in society. Therefore it is vital to develop methods and instruments enabling us to identify these groups of offenders; it is important to choose effective treatment methods and - last but even more important - to carefully prepare their transition into society and support them in living a life without crime once they have left prison.

On behalf of EuroPris I can assure you that we are excited to learn of the project results in the next two days and to share them with our stakeholders.

Finally let me thank all project partners for their work and efforts to make this project a success and I wish you – and all of us – a very fruitful conference.

Thank you for your attention!