

## JCN FINAL CONFERENCE, ROSTOCK-WARNEMÜNDE, GERMANY

Willem van der Brugge (Secretary General)

---

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

On behalf of CEP (the Confederation of European Probation) I would like to start by giving special thanks to the Ministry of Justice of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania which have made this the Justice Cooperation Network event possible in collaboration with all project partners. I especially would like to thank Mr Jörg Jesse for his efforts as Director of the JCN project. CEP has been pleased to be associate partner to the project and of the Justice Cooperation Network.

The objective of the Justice Cooperation Network project was to develop a European network for best practices of transition management of prisoners leaving custody, with a focus on high risk offenders.

For Probation Organisations in Europe the question of how to organise and execute transition management in daily practice is one of many important challenges which we need to address. In some countries nowadays the resettlement of a high-risk offender into the community can lead to exaggerated media attention, public indignation and even moral panic. More and more Probation professionals in Europe need to find a balance between the needs of their clients and the sensitivities of the community.

To underline the importance of the development of a European network for best practices in transition management I would like to mention the following points:

#### **First**

Common understanding of definitions in the field of high-risk offenders and transition management is crucial for professionals in the judicial field but perhaps also for all those engaged in criminal justice, either on a professional or on a voluntary basis.

The prison population across Europe consists largely of people who have been excluded from rather than included in society. In general ex-prisoners have poor formal educational qualifications and also have few job skills. Many of them have experienced long-term problems concerning housing, family and addiction. It is an understatement to say that people leaving prison are often not well enough equipped with sufficient social skills to make a successful transition from prison to society.

However the same is true vice-versa: often society is not well enough prepared to include ex-prisoners in the community. It is not uncommon that ex-offenders encounter suspicion, rejection and even hostility as they make the transition from prison to society.

As probation activities take place in the community, knowledge of effective resettlement and good practices are crucial for the 50.000 probation professionals in Europe. Knowledge that should be available for every professional in the judicial field and knowledge that needs to be updated frequently.

The development of a network for best practices of transition management of prisoners leaving custody is an important step in broadening judicial cooperation within Europe. Providing professional standards and evidenced based interventions on resettlement and transition management will help probation professionals to understand each other, to share knowledge and information.

## **Second**

The number of foreign nationals in prison nowadays represents 120.000 persons; over 20% of the total prison population in Europe. They are adding a huge range of languages, cultures, religions and nationalities to our prison population. We all know these numbers are still growing due to greater mobility of people, including offenders .

It is widely recognised that resettlement work should be undertaken with foreign national prisoners both during sentence and following release to secure a successful reintegration in their country of origin and to reduce the risk of harm to others by re-offending.

Framework Decisions of the European Union provide opportunities for the transfer of custodial and alternative sanctions. Framework Decisions recognise that resettlement programs facilitate the social rehabilitation of sentenced persons and improve the protection of victims and the general public. However, these provisions will affect only a small part of the foreign national prisoners of European origin as

many Foreign National Prisoners in the EU are in fact nationals from non- EU member States.

The problems of resettlement faced by ex-offenders returning from abroad to their home country are much bigger than those of persons imprisoned within their own country. The risks of re-offending are, it is argued, considerable but can be reduced by dedicated resettlement services.

There are few countries in Europe where services are provided to their nationals detained abroad with the aim to assist them with the resettlement in their home country. In some European countries local prison establishments took the initiative to hold regular meetings between staff and foreign national prisoners to discuss their particular needs and problems such as immigration status, staying in contact with family, language difficulties, access to programmes and facilities and of course resettlement.

We need also to exchange these best practices via the European network for best practice of transition management.

### **Third**

We all know that for high-risk prisoners leaving custody the chance of re-offending is high. Up to 50% of those released have returned to prison within two years. Research shows that effective resettlement programmes can assist in the prevention of further offending, the reduction of victimisation and are in the best interests of the community in general. Across Europe there are good examples of effective resettlement initiatives and good practice. We all recognise the need to share, to learn and to develop best practices for better outcomes. Not only for the prisoners leaving custody but also for communities and the criminal justice systems.

This is also something that we need to explain to the general public. In many European countries, traditional media, sometimes covering events in a biased way, and social media, that by nature do not fall under the code of ethics of journalism, have created a growing anxiety among the public when it comes to high-risk offenders. Court decisions on the release of a high-profile offender, or on cases of re-offending are more and more often challenged by the public crying out for tougher punishment. In these circumstances a Director General must be able to explain to the media which measures a probation service takes to protect the community and all actors in the judicial field must be prepared to legitimize their 'resettlement' activities to society.

## **Finally**

The JCN project may have come to an end; but it is clear to me that further steps need to be taken. In this sense I hope the project is a first step to our own transition management. Cross-border crime requires cross-border mechanisms to fight it. Judicial cooperation between the EU Member States can only function effectively and appropriately if procedures are in place and if the individual professional will recognise the need to cooperate. Focussing on dissemination of project results, knowledge of resettlement and expertise in transition management between professionals is of the utmost importance.

In my opinion the development of a network for best practice of transition management of prisoners leaving custody will help professionals in the judicial field in Europe to understand each other, to share knowledge and information.

Over the next two days this conference can make a major contribution to this goal. The conference programme offers an attractive mix of interesting, instructive and highly topical subjects regarding resettlement, treatment and transition management. As leading experts, you are no doubt eager to get started and meet other government, prison and probation representatives and researchers.

In conclusion, together we can find the best solutions. Solutions that offer maximum benefits in terms of cooperation in the criminal justice field, transition management and a safer Europe.