Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1741 (2006)[1]

Social reintegration of prisoners

Parliamentary Assembly

1. A prison policy aiming at the social reintegration of prisoners is an important factor when it comes to assessing the functioning of democracy in Council of Europe member states.

2. In this connection, the Parliamentary Assembly recalls the Committee of Ministers Recommendation No. R (83) 7 on participation of the public in crime policy and its own Recommendations 1257 (1995) on conditions of detention in Council of Europe member states and 1656 (2004) on the situation of European prisons and pre-trial detention centres.

3. Even though the purpose of a prison sentence is to punish offenders and put them where they can do no harm, while preparing them for eventual release and reintegration into society, the Assembly notes that, in all Council of Europe member states, imprisonment does not achieve the second objective as a large number of former prisoners reoffend within five years of their release.

4. There are many causes for this: failure by prison authorities to provide prisoners, at the end of their sentence, with significant help in their search for a job and housing; socialisation to prison culture; lack of family support; lack of education and vocational training; and social prejudices.

5. Spending many years in prison may be a factor leading to desocialisation as it very often destroys prisoners' ties with their families, friends and the rest of society.

6. The chances of successful social reintegration also depend on the nature of the offence committed and the sentence served. In this connection, the Assembly draws attention to the possibility of alternatives to imprisonment for petty offenders.

7. The Assembly, noting the high level illiteracy amongst prisoners, underlines that education is a fundamental human right and that prison authorities should provide appropriate measures of education for prisoners for up to twenty-five hours per week. Further recognising that sport, particularly team sport, can help divert young people from crime, the Assembly believes that sporting activities should be more widely available in all prisons.

8. As knowledge of events in the outside world is also an important factor, prisoners must have access to information.

9. Since adjusting to freedom can often be difficult for individuals who have served long prison sentences, the Assembly believes that a system of conditional release, prison leave and day release can help ensure their successful reintegration into society.

10. The Assembly underlines the importance of the proper organisation of prisons and of the role played both by prison staff and by social, medical and judicial services.

11. Prison policy must be geared towards enabling prisoners to lead socially responsible lives when released and preparing them for this during their imprisonment.

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1. Assembly debate on 11 April 2006 (11th Sitting) (see Doc.10838Doc.10838, report of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mr Gülçiçek). Text adopted by the Assembly on 11 April 2006 (11th Sitting).

12. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers ask the relevant committees of experts to:

12.1. draw up a recommendation to member states on the social reintegration of prisoners, urging them to:

12.1.1. provide social reintegration counselling;

12.1.2. train prison staff appropriately by creating special training centres, if these do not exist;

12.1.3. take steps to keep first-time offenders and young offenders separate from repeat offenders and other prisoners;

12.1.4. organise information for prisoners' families;

12.1.5. use alternatives to custodial sentences (placement, conditional release, electronic tagging), in appropriate cases;

12.1.6. apply flexible and tolerant rules on visits, including "conjugal visits";

12.1.7. take the necessary steps to enable and encourage prisoners to follow vocational training courses;

12.1.8. allow prisoners to keep up with events in the outside world through newspapers, radio and/or television;

12.1.9. launch awareness-raising campaigns to combat discrimination based on criminal records;

12.2. organise exchanges of information between European prison governors so that they can share their experiences with a view to improving detention systems;

12.3. give specific consideration to:

12.3.1. the situation of women and minors in prison;

12.3.2. health, hygiene and the drugs situation in prisons;

12.3.3. the particular needs of long-term prisoners.

13. In addition, the Assembly calls on Council of Europe member states which have not already done so to sign and ratify without delay the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.