

For debate in the Standing Committee — see Rule 15 of the Rules of Procedure

Doc. 10936
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European Prisons Charter

Opinion¹
Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee
Rapporteur: Mr Ali Riza Gülçiçek, Turkey, Socialist Group

1. I first wish to congratulate the rapporteur on his excellent report, which has the full support of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee, especially since it is, in a way, a follow-up to the report on social reintegration of prisoners which I recently had the pleasure to present to the Parliamentary Assembly.
2. Our committee shares the rapporteur's concerns about the worrying, and indeed critical, situation of prisons in Europe and can but share with him that prison authorities must pay attention to conditions of health and hygiene.
3. It is true that overcrowding, disease and malnutrition are part of prisoners' daily lives, and we note that, unfortunately, Europe has no genuine penal and prisons policy. This results in deprivations and flagrant violations of human rights, in breach of the European Convention. As the rapporteur states, human dignity must not stop at the prison door, and I also wish to point out that a good prisons policy is one of the foundations for upholding democratic institutions.
4. The totally inhumane conditions and the lack of rules in penal matters lend strength to the proposal of drawing up a European Prisons Charter to enforce respect for the human rights of all persons deprived of their liberty, opening it to signature by member and non-member states and endowing it with a genuine supervisory mechanism.
5. The Social Affairs Committee also notes that there is presently no organised means of exchanging information and concurs with the rapporteur's proposal to set up an observatory which could play the role of European co-ordinating body.
6. I moreover wish to take this opportunity to hail the remarkable work done by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT), whose standards have proved very useful, and the Social Affairs Committee can but back the proposal to reinforce its role.
7. With more particular regard to the wording of the Prisons Charter, I am pleased to note that this document recommends preferring alternatives to imprisonment, as far as possible, which would allow petty offenders not to be cut off from their families, to continue working and to lead normal lives, all of which will make it possible to prevent repeat offending.

¹ See Doc. 10922 tabled by the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights.

8. However, I would like the Charter to pay slightly more attention to vulnerable groups, in particular minors, by making more systematic provision for the possible implementation of alternatives to imprisonment in the form of placement in foster families or in institutions and for support and psychological counselling to help minors avoid reoffending.

9. I would underline the importance of access to training and psychological support for both prisoners and their families, pointing out, in this connection, that education is a fundamental human right.

10. In conclusion, I wish to recall that the primary aim of a prisons policy is to help released prisoners lead socially responsible lives by preparing them to do so throughout their period of imprisonment.

Reporting committee : Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights

Committee for opinion : Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee

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Secretaries to the Committee : Mr Mezei, Mrs Nollinger, Mrs Meunier