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Social reintegration of prisoners

Recommendation 1741 (2006)

Reply from the Committee of Ministers
adopted at the 978th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (25 October 2006)

1. The Committee of Ministers has taken note with interest of Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1741 (2006) on the social reintegration of prisoners, sharing the Assembly's concerns and fully agreeing with its analysis of the root causes of problems of returning to society encountered by prisoners upon release. It has transmitted the text to the European Health Committee (CDSP), the Committee on Social Cohesion (CDCS) and to the Co-operation Group to Combat Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking in Drugs (Pompidou Group) for information and possible comments.

2. The Committee of Ministers has always devoted sustained attention to the problems related to detention and the need to encourage prisoners to reintegrate into free society successfully. It points out in this context that the issues raised by the Assembly in its recommendation are entirely taken into account by Committee of Ministers' Recommendation Rec(2006)2 on the European Prison Rules adopted on 11 January 2006, updating the previous Rules contained in Recommendation No. R (87) 3. These constitute a set of comprehensive guidelines for member states on conditions of detainment, based on the principle that "All detention shall be managed so as to facilitate the reintegration into free society of persons who have been deprived of their liberty" (paragraph 6). The European Prison Rules deal with all issues raised by the Assembly's proposals as set out in paragraph 12 of the recommendation, including provisions on women, infant children, juveniles and young adult detainees, communication with the outside world and families, visits, work and vocational training, as well as the release of prisoners. Part III of the Rules concerns the health of prisoners, and Part V establishes rules for the selection and training of prison staff.

3. In this context, the Committee of Ministers also refers to the draft recommendation on the use of remand in custody, the conditions in which it takes place and the provision of safeguards against abuse, which is expected to be adopted shortly by the Committee of Ministers; to the current work on a draft recommendation containing European Rules for juvenile offenders deprived of their liberty or subject to community sanctions or measures, as well as to the work due to start early next year on probation and aftercare services in the European criminal justice systems.

4. As regards the Assembly's request in paragraph 12.2 that the Committee of Ministers organise exchanges of information between European prison governors, the Committee draws the attention of the Assembly to one of the projects implemented in the Programme of Activities for 2006 and foreseen in the Programme for 2007, concerning prison systems and alternatives to imprisonment. Within this framework and as part of the measures accompanying the European Prison Rules, a number of meetings and seminars have been held or are planned, including a Conference of Directors of Prison Administration in 2007, which will provide the opportunity for exchanging experience and good practices between the penitentiary systems of member states.

5. Therefore, the Committee of Ministers does not see the need for a new recommendation on the social reintegration of prisoners, as the new European Prison Rules contain sufficient provisions to guide member states in this area. However, dissemination and implementation of these Rules must be encouraged at all levels, and it welcomes the opportunity for added visibility given to the issue by the Assembly's recommendation. It will transmit the recommendation to the European Committee on Crime Problems (CDPC) as suggested by the European Committee on Social Cohesion in its opinion, as well as to any other committees it considers could usefully bear the Assembly's concerns in mind in their work.

Appendix to the reply

Observations by the European Committee on Social Cohesion (CDCS) on Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1741 (2006) on the social reintegration of prisoners

"The CDCS welcomes this recommendation as a very positive step towards furthering social cohesion since the aim is the preparation of prisoners for their release and reintegration into society. For this purpose, alternative sentences, education of prisoners including vocational training courses as preparation for their future employment, access to information from the outside world, permanent contacts with families of prisoners, would prove to be helpful. In this connection, the CDCS also stresses the importance of job possibilities during imprisonment in cases when the nature of the offence committed and the sentence served would allow it.

The CDCS hopes that the principles of the recommendation are fully implemented in the system of execution of punishments of member states. The CDCS also suggests sending this recommendation to the European Committee on Crime Problems (CDPC)."