

European trade unions say: Fewer prisoners - Better prisons!

(Athens, 12 May 2011) Ahead of the largest gathering of European trade unions organising prison staff in Athens on 12 May, a European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU)-led delegation visited Korydallos prison, one of the biggest prisons in Greece.

The delegation from 17 European countries was appalled by the dreadful detention conditions and the implications for staff.

Prison overcrowding and lack of staff jeopardise the health and safety of staff and inmates alike and prevent the rehabilitation of inmates. This is the outcome of failure of successive Greek governments to tackle social problems, and instead resort to imprisonment as a quick fix.

On the basis of one prisoner per cell, Korydallos should house 900 inmates, there are 2.300! At night there are 280 inmates under the supervision of one prison guard per wing. At any time there is only one nurse on duty for 2.300 inmates!.

“The situation in Korydallos is dramatic and well below the minimum standards of the European Prison Rules . In the face of the unprecedented public spending cuts in Greece as well as in other countries, we fail to see how governments will redress the situation and invest in the required staff to carry out the public service mission of security and rehabilitation” Said Conference chair Jean-Paul Devos from Belgium.

This was also the view of Andrew Coyle, Professor at the International Centre for Prison Studies (UK) and co-drafter of the European Prison Rules as well as Greek Member of Parliament Dimitris Lintzeris. The situation is compounded by the lack of a coherent and humane migration policy at European level. This means that prisons are used as dumping grounds for people who are only seeking a better life.

“Another consequence staff shortages is that staff are working overtime, which is often unpaid. Instead of increasing staffing, the government opts for increasing working time. We also need a common European migration policy based on human

rights and solidarity between EU governments because, failing this the situation in Greek prisons will be untenable” Said Spiros Karakitsos, OSYE General Secretary.

It is EPSU policy that undocumented migrants that have committed no crimes should not be detained.

On the day of the conference, delegates discussed prison privatisation that governments may be tempted by in the face of high public deficits and debts, an option which is opposed to by EPSU/OSYE..

A press conference will be held on 13 May at Hotel Classical Imperial at 10:00 to further expose the concerns of EPSU and outline ways of improving prison services in Greece and the rest of Europe.

EPSU is the European Federation of Public Service Unions and represents over 8 million public service workers in Europe.

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