

EPSU prison staff network to maintain pressure on prison overcrowding

(9 December 2008, Brussels), Meeting in Brussels on 4 December 2008, the EPSU prison service network gave a very positive assessment of its first coordinated trade union Action Day against prison overcrowding of 28 February.

It was agreed to maintain the pressure against prison overcrowding using the European elections 2009, in the framework of the EPSU public service pledge, and the Swedish EU presidency in the second half of 2009.

There is some scope for cooperation with the European Commission which has taken some initiatives to alleviate prison overcrowding. Thomas Ljungquist, DG Justice, Freedom and Security, presented a recently agreed Decision on mutual recognition of supervision measures as an alternative to provisional detention for EU non-resident detainees (known as a European supervision order).

EPSU policy officer Nadja Salson stated that; "We are pleased that the European Commission is taking the issue of prison overcrowding seriously. It recognizes that prison overcrowding is a European problem and is in breach of the Council of Europe's prison rules. We look forward to staff expertise being recognized as essential to policy developments in this area, both at national and EU levels."

This decision enables EU Member States to share ways of keeping non-resident defendants out of prison ahead of their trials. Initial proposal by the Commission was that it would reduce by 8000 detainees.

The EPSU prison action plan (2006) recognizes that the excessive use of pre-trial detention, which represents from 11 to 58% of all prisoners (depending on Member State), is a key cause of prison overcrowding and should therefore be reduced for non serious offences.

The Commission said it is conducting a survey on minimum standards on pre-trial detention procedure and routines for review of the grounds of detention (initial findings will be presented in February 2009).

Updates on prison policy around Europe:

In addition to prison overcrowding, participants discussed staff shortage, high rate of prisoners with mental health problems, collective bargaining and legislative developments. The Norwegian union has lodged a complaint to the parliamentary ombudsman for non-compliance with European prison rules' provisions on training. Prison officers have no right to strike in Estonia, France, UK, Poland and Sweden. In France, this ban extends to probation and rehabilitation advisers who are under a special status of civil service. Trade union density is however, high on average 60% in the EU,

It was reported that in the UK 2 new private prisons are due to be built and run by the private sector. In the Netherlands a special prison for detainees with mental health issues will be run by private sector. It was reiterated that EPSU is against privatisation of prison services. It is not a solution to prison overcrowding whilst it leads to worse working and detention conditions in prisons.

EC Presentation : "Future of detention conditions in Europe"

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