

- EU Ambassador's speech -

Launch event of EU financed Twinning Project

'Improving Capacities and Capabilities within the Prison System in the Republic of Serbia'.

Palace of Serbia - 14 September 2017

Check against delivery

Your Excellency

Dear Minister Kuburovic

Mr Brandstetter,

Ms Tegeder,

Mr Čarkić,

distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

it is a pleasure to be here today for the launch of this Twinning project financed the EU and implemented by Germany and Austria.

The project is to support capacities and capabilities of the Republic of Serbia's prison standards through better training of prison staff, better technical skills of the staff working in the penal system and better professional skills of female inmates. It seeks to support both those who work in the penal system and those who are serving a sentence. After all the execution of a criminal sanction is not only important from the justice perspective; the improved condition of inmates is the assurance of fundamental rights.

The speakers after me will certainly give an important description of the project.

I want to put this important project in the wider context of EU support to Serbia to **Judiciary and Fundamental Rights (Chapter 23)** - one of the **most demanding** chapters in the negotiation for EU accession. Chapter 23 is not only about judicial reforms, but **how a State** treats its citizens and protects their fundamental rights. Rule of law. A fundamental value of the EU.

Negotiations with Serbia on Chapter 23 commenced in June 2016: Serbia took very ambitious objectives as reflected in its **Action Plan on the chapter**, whose implementation is regularly

reported upon by national authorities, civil society organisations as well as the European Commission.

The last report released by the European Commission earlier in June shows that progress has been made, but also that implementation are still at an early stage and that recommendations and follow up **need to be accelerated**.

As we encourage Serbia to step up its efforts I would like to stress that the Serbia is not alone. The EU is your main partner in fostering reforms, through **our pre-accession funds** and additional **bilateral assistance of our MS**.

The EU has allocated over 30 million for reforms in Serbia related to Chapter 23 over recent years.

Prison reform is an important part of this assistance package, worth **7 million** euro, including this 1 million euro project which we are launching today.

European Union standards in the area of prison reform stem for the **European Charter on Fundamental Rights**, which is supported by the **standards of the Council of Europe on prison issues**.

They are based on basic human respect of incarcerated individuals.

As the last EC **report** indicates for example Serbia's plan for reducing prison overcrowding still has to be finalised while the reorganisation of the existing service for alternative sanctions has yet to be completed.

This project is directed to capacity building and therefore compliments other efforts in this area.

A few months ago we launched another project for the renovation and extension of the only female prison in Serbia in Pozarevac and the CFCU contracted the supply of agricultural and other vocational education equipment for male and female prisoners with EU funds. Later this year we will provide vehicles and equipment for probation offices nationwide

We are also currently financing a project, implemented by the **Council of Europe**, related to improvements in the detention of individuals, prison treatment programmes, and aspects of post-penal care.

Next year we aim to commence a project which will support the Prison administration address issues related to **increasing the use of probation, post penal care and healthcare**.

To succeed we need to continue to work in a spirit of partnership and the involvement of the Ministry of Justice and all other stakeholders, both through ownership of the project and their own financial commitment are key for any advancement.

On this regard let me express some words of gratitude;

- To the **Ministries of Justice and of Finance** in their work and commitment to both contract and implement today's important project
- Our EU member state Germany and Austria and their competent staff implementing today's project.
- To the Serbian Prison Administration and Training Centre for Prison staff, the relevant courts and the Ombudsman's Office.
- And finally to **all Prison directors** and their staff for their continued support and dedication to the important area of criminal justice and fundamental rights as supported by the Serbian government and the European Union.

I wish all of you a successful implementation of the project and look forward to achieve concrete results to bring tangible benefits to prison staff and inmates, especially the vulnerable ones.

As it has been said (Dostojevsky) "the civilisation of a Country is measured by the condition of its prisons".

The EU is here to support you in this process.

Hvala vam.