



THE EUROPEAN ORGANISATION OF
PRISONS AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

EUROPRIS INTERVIEW

Marianne Vollan

EuroPris talks with Marianne Vollan, Director General of the Directorate of Norwegian Correctional Service

Director General of the Directorate of Norwegian Correctional Service since 2009. She was formerly head of the Penal Law Section in the Department of Legislation in the Ministry of Justice. She is a lawyer by profession and has also worked as a judge in the Court of Appeal. She is currently one of the Vice Presidents of EuroPris.



EuroPris Could you tell us about your career path? Why have you chosen to work in the prison and correctional field?

Marianne Vollan Penal law and criminal procedure have been a common thread through most of my professional life. It started with a book I wrote in my last year as a student, about compensation for victims of violent and sexual offences. After my graduation, I started a long-term relationship with the Ministry of Justice, where I started in the Department of Legislation – the Penal Law Section. Later in my career, I served as a judge in the Court of Appeal. Six years ago, I was so fortunate to move on to the final step of the penal chain: Correctional service and the execution of punishment. I have had various leading positions for more than eight years.

How a country deals with offenders and also with victims of crime says a lot about its values. Our mission in the Correctional service is to ensure safety and security, and to reduce recidivism. Our ambition is to motivate the convicted persons to choose a crime-free life after release.

How many Prison establishments do you oversee?

Approximately 50 prison establishments. In addition there are 17 probation offices in almost 40 locations in Norway. I am very pleased with the Norwegian "combined" model, where the prison and probation field are parts of the same service.

How many prisoners are in prison at the moment in Norway?

About 3800.

How many staff do you manage?

Some 4 400 full-time staff.



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What are in your opinion the required attributes and qualifications of someone wanting to be a prison officer?

It is crucial that their attitudes coincide with a humanist view of man, a view on which the Norwegian Correctional Service is based. Ethical reflection and critical thinking are keywords. Furthermore, we want our officers to be cooperative, motivated and have an ability to positively influence others as well as setting boundaries.

In my view, prison officers have a key role in making the inmates wanting to choose to live a life free of crime after completing their sentence. I look upon them as “agents of change”.

What is your opinion on the role of women in the European correctional field?

About 40 percent of prison staff in Norway are women. During the 1980s the share of female prison officers increased rapidly. As a consequence we witnessed a positive change in the behaviour of many inmates. The atmosphere in general became calmer.

In short, female officers have a positive impact both on the working environment and the prison environment as a whole.

We still have a way to go in increasing the number of women in leading positions. I genuinely believe that we need a good balance between the sexes at all levels of an organisation.

What is the biggest concern with regards to security in prisons in your country?

Our job number one is to ensure safety and security, for the victims, the society as a whole, the staff, our cooperation partners and the inmates. Our security "recipe" consists of dynamic, static and organisational means.

The fact that some of our prisons are very old and beyond repair, poses a potential security risk. Having said that, the number of escapes is very low.

In the Norwegian Correctional Service we put a lot of emphasis on giving our staff a proper training and our prison officers go through a two-year training program. Compared to many other countries, we also have a high ratio of staff.

We work constantly to prevent violence against staff. When incidents occur, it is important to have a close following-up of the people involved.

What do you consider to be the biggest achievements for your service in 2014? What challenges you had to overcome?

The main challenges were a lack of prison capacity and a significant maintenance backlog. Nevertheless, we managed to keep “full house” and maintain a high level on our services. I am satisfied that we do not overcrowd our prisons. However, we have to accept a “waiting list”, which currently consists of approximately 1200 people. I underline that these people do not pose a risk to society.

I am also proud of our international engagement, both through Norway Grants (EEA) and through participation in organisations such as EuroPris, CEP and ICPA, where Norwegian representatives hold board positions.



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What are the challenges for your service this year?

Lack of prison capacity and the maintenance backlog will still present a big challenge in 2015. At the end of 2014 the government, however, presented a white paper concerning the state of our prisons and the need for future prison capacity. Hopefully this will improve the situation, both in the short and long term.

Last week a treaty between the Netherlands and Norway was signed, regarding renting a prison in the Netherlands – with the suitable name "Norgerhaven". A cooperation agreement was also signed between the DG of the Dutch Custodial Institutions Agency and myself. If the Norwegian parliament ratifies the agreement, the first Norwegian inmates will be transferred to the Netherlands in September 2015. The prison will have a Norwegian management and Dutch staff, and the Norwegian Execution of Sentences Act shall apply. I am looking forward to this cooperation!

Another challenge is the change over the last years in the prison population. At present one third are foreign nationals. As well as putting a pressure on our capacity, the composition of our prison population challenges some of our basic principles. Our reintegration policy must be adjusted when an inmate shall not be released to the Norwegian society, but to another country – not in terms of the quality level, which shall be the same, but in terms of the content.

The Correctional Service was last year commissioned by the Ministry of Justice and Public Security to look into a new organizational model where the regional level is removed. It is still not decided whether this model will be implemented, but if so, this will imply changes for the entire service.

In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges for the European prison and correctional services at the moment?

Radicalization is a major challenge in European societies, where also the Correctional services need to look into their practices, attitudes, cooperation with other relevant bodies, etc.

Many countries have overcrowded prisons, which can lead to challenges in providing the inmates with adequate activities and care.

What benefits do you see being linked as a Member to an organisation such as EuroPris?

I believe EuroPris' most important role is to be an arena for practitioners to exchange ideas, experiences and best practises.

Do your prisons engage with NGO's / Charities?

NGOs play an important role. Last year the Directorate of Norwegian Correctional Service distributes 2, 3 million euros among 27 charities and non-profit organizations for initiatives that can contribute to the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners.



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What are the most important personal satisfactions and dissatisfactions connected with your occupation? What part of this job do you personally find most satisfying? Most challenging? What do you like and not like about working in the correctional field?

My occupation gives me the opportunity to work with issues I am deeply engaged in. Our mission is of great importance to society as a whole, and I believe we can make a difference. I am proud of my service and my people!

Last year we developed an operational strategy for our service, where our vision is: An active Correctional Service – a safer society. Combined with our values – Openness, Respect, Professionalism and Commitment – we have a solid, common base for our day-to-day- work as agents of change.

If you could be remembered for one thing whilst being in charge what would it be?

I am the first appointed Director General in the newly established Directorate of Norwegian Correctional Service. In that connection I am also proud to have introduced a policy of wearing a uniform.

However, if I were to look back, the test I was put on as a leader after the terrorist attack 22 of July 2011, will be the most significant.