



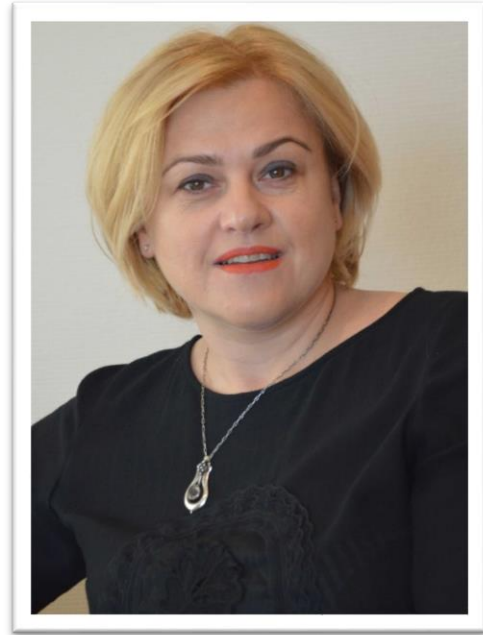
THE EUROPEAN ORGANISATION OF  
PRISONS AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

## EUROPRIS INTERVIEW

### Živile Mikenaite

EuroPris talks with Živile Mikenaite, Director General of the Prison Department Lithuania

Živile Mikenaite started her career in law enforcement as a junior inspector for juvenile affairs at Šiauliai Police Office; later on she was promoted to a Commissioner Inspector at the Police Headquarters, at the same time she also gave lectures at Mykolas Romeris University. She joined the penitentiary system in 2003 as the Head of Personnel Division at the Prison Department, later on she became Director of Kaunas Remand Prison and in 2015 she was appointed the Director General of the Prison Department.



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

**Živile Mikenaite** I've been in the prison system for more than 10 year: first as Head of Personnel Division at the Prison Department, later on became the governor of Kaunas Remand Prison and starting with 1 June 2015 I am the Director General of the Prison Department under the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Lithuania.

My professional background proves that I was moving forward step by step getting to know the prison system from inside, witnessing the challenges it was facing and its achievements; learning from the experts in the field of corrections.

#### **How many Prison establishments do you oversee?**

11 establishments, of them: 1 Closed Prison-Remand prison, 6 Correction Houses, 2 Remand Prisons, 1 Juvenile Remand Prison-Correction House, 1 Central Prison Hospital; 5 probation services and a Training Centre. A State Enterprise Mūsu amatai operates within the penitentiary system.

#### **How many prisoners are in prison at the moment in Lithuania?**

In August 2015 the prison population was 7392, of them: 685 detainees and 6707 sentenced inmates.

#### **How many staff do you manage?**

In June 2015 we had 3475 employees (40% women) working for the penitentiary system, of them: uniformed staff – 2707 (78%), civil servants – 64 (1,8%), working under labor agreements – 704 (20%).

29 employees (15 uniformed and 14 non-uniformed staff) work for the Training Centre. 140 non-uniformed employees work at the State Enterprise.



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

Essential human features are common to all employees of the system: like responsibility, honesty, dynamism, psychological and physical fitness. Specific qualification requirements depend on the position a person is applying to.

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

All the women working in the correctional field kind of mitigate the system. Their presence releases tension, creates normal atmosphere and has positive influence on all aspects of life behind the bars. Women at management level are the leaders having achieved the highest level of professionalism. They communicate effectively the exemplary role and change human attitude thus „lighting up the employees eyes“.

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

Prison overcrowding, outdated infrastructure which prevents from improvement of detention conditions, lack of human resources, inefficient organization of work, placement of inmates in dormitory type premises.

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

Has long since been known that working environment has direct influence on working results. In my opinion, it is not only the working microclimate that matters but also improvement of staff working conditions and efficient security. In 2014 while the Director of Kaunas Remand Prison I launched the social project Green Oasis and initiated it in all the Lithuanian penitentiary institutions due to which the principle of normality became the key aspect of detention. Slowly but successfully we are doing our best to reduce the number of prison population, improve detention conditions, increase the level of occupation of inmates.

**What are the challenges for your service this year?**

We are facing many changes – the new Statute, amended Code of Penal Sanctions Enforcement and Law on Pre-Trial Detention have already come into force, important projects supported by the Norwegian Financial Mechanism are in the process of implementation. We need to achieve the higher level of professionalism with the use of available funds and existing staff, promote staff motivation and improve their working environment. The greatest challenge for the whole system is the construction of a new prison. We hope to start mediation in probation and expand the use of electronic monitoring system, install more modern digital technologies. This year the professional training system for staff is being launched.

We should be moving forward making the Lithuanian penitentiary system a modern one which is focused on people and assists the offenders to choose the decent way of life.



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

Solving the problems of prison overcrowding and improvement of inmates occupation may contribute to management of radicalisation, wider application of IT is the priority in all systems, proportionate and appropriate use of security measure is also the important factor.

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

I will not be telling you anything new when I say that the greatest value is information. And, of course, the sense of belonging. EuroPris is the perfect platform where countries with different background, experience and resources meet and communicate, learn from each other's achievements and mistakes. Communication and cooperation where each country has an equal voice are the strength of the organization.

**Do your prisons engage with NGO's / Charities?**

The Prison Department and its subordinate institutions keep expanding cooperation possibilities with different NGOs and religious communities. Penitentiary institutions are open to anyone willing to assist people who have once misbehaved to return back to normal life. The volunteers help to maintain the ties with the outside world, demolishes stereotypes, therefore we encourage and appreciate any initiative.

**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?**

Public attitude makes me very upset. I love the process of search and introduction of innovations and novelties. What inspires me most is the change of staff attitude seeking to get adapted to the new conditions.

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

I have so many good memories that I cannot figure out the one and only. When released inmates leave with the words of gratitude you know your work wasn't in vain. Another example: one of the inmates was active in artistic activities when serving his sentence and upon release he proposed to keep on working with inmates on voluntary basis. Such things warm up your heart. But the most important thing is to see eyes ablaze and trusting.