



THE EUROPEAN ORGANISATION OF  
PRISONS AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

## EUROPRIS INTERVIEW

### Miklovan Kopani

EuroPris talks with Miklovan Kopani, Director General of the  
General Directorate of Prisons Albania



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

**Miklovan Kopani** My educational background is related to the law field. After finishing my university studies I have been engaged in various occupations linked to my field of study and developed my professional experience in the administration of public services and the public security. Working in the prison and correctional field is a unique opportunity for personal and professional growth, challenging assignments and above all to set strategies to help people to make positive changes in the society. In addition, as a day to day challenging work, it is an ideal work to develop a model of managing and administering, and above all contributing to the security and wellbeing of the society.

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

I oversee 23 penitentiary institutions around the country, of which one institution for juveniles, one for women, and another one categorized for elderly prisoners.

**How many prisoners are in prison at the moment in Albania?**

At the moment there are 6161 prisoners in the Albanian prison system, of which 89 foreign prisoners. The overpopulation is 13% over the prisons capacities.

**How many staff do you manage?**

The total number of the Albanian Prison Staff is 4156, of which 3217 prison police staff. An indicative policy has been set up by the Government regarding the gender balance and increasing the number of the female staff in the prison system.

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

Prison systems can be considered as the most challenging places of work. Not only prisoners, but as well prison officers perform their duties in a closed environment, supervised and under continuous monitoring. Taking into consideration these aspects, a prison officer must be able to work in unexpected and stressful situations, independently and in a team. Also, in addition to his/her



#### THE EUROPEAN ORGANISATION OF PRISONS AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

custodial duties, a prison officer must realise the important role in achieving the successful rehabilitation of a prisoner. It is for sure that the prisoners will turn back into the society despite their length of sentence. A measurable indicator of a prison service effectiveness remains the number of the successfully integrated prisoners into the society. Knowing this fact, a prison officer must be aware about their educative role and establishing a supportive environment through balancing security and authority with constructive communication.

Referring to the day to day duties of a prison officer, in my opinion, self-motivation, self-confidence and emotional intelligence along with strong interpersonal skills comprise the engine of this profession. Also, personal integrity can be listed as a necessary attribute. It is so sad when those officers who have been given the public trust of security and safety are involved in non-ethical acts.

At the present situation the academic qualification are key criteria of employment in the Albanian Prison System. Based on positive practices of other European countries we are working on setting personal qualities and practical experiences as main criterion in assessing the candidates who are willing to join prison service.

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

The developments of the prison system after '90 have also advanced the idea of increasing the role of women in the correctional field. In the beginning, women officers could work only in the female prisons. After a period of time, it has been supported the idea of females working even in male prisons. Considering the high profile of Albanian traditional culture I was surprised to see how women have performed their duties in a very high professional standard and how it was easily acknowledged by the society. So, I believe that women have broken up the prejudices of the dominated or only male professions. On the other hand, it had positive outcomes related to the general ambience of the prison environment. At the most recent physical and intelligence test a considerable number of female officers had outstanding results to their male colleagues. This shows that women are not the weakest part of the chain of prison security, but are intellectual and important assets for the operation of the prison system.

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

In terms of infrastructure it remains the modernisation of the supervision systems. The camera systems are outdated, and only 9 penitentiary institutions are equipped with the latest technology. Related to prohibited items, mobile phones entering into the inner regime of prisoners remain the main concern. For the alleviation of this problem a specific article in the Albanian Code of Penal Procedure was added, defining it as a "criminal offence".

#### **What do you consider to be the biggest achievements for your service in 2016? What challenges you had to overcome?**

Changing the philosophy of management of the prison system, by developing contemporary methodologies for managing the security of the penitentiary institutions, daily routines of prisoners, assessing individual performance of staff and institutions, establishing important bases for the organisation and functioning of institution at the central and local level, can be listed as some major achievements. In addition, I would consider strengthening of anti-corruption measures and enhancing the request-complaint mechanism. The main challenge relates to culture of working or doing things. Sometimes it is really difficult to introduce new methods of working, because people



THE EUROPEAN ORGANISATION OF  
PRISONS AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

are used to work let's say on old mechanisms. That's why training and staff discussion are important while introducing new things.

**What are the challenges for your service in 2017?**

Most challenges are related to the staff motivation, especially for the police staff. Actually, we are working on creating a stable system of motivation for the staff, including the improvement of recruitment procedures and career. In terms of prison infrastructure, some of the institutions that have been inherited from the past do not meet the standard criteria for the treatment of persons deprived of their liberty. Immediate intervention or a plan of intervention should be taken into the near future about the existence of this category of institution.

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

Seeing the big picture radicalisation and extremism is becoming a real challenge to face in various fields of the society. As part of the society and being comprised of various communities of different status, prison and correctional services will or are facing this issue.

Staff-prisoner relationships, terminating a hunger strike of prisoner without his/her consent, balancing of security with rehabilitation programs remain issues of discussions and concerns in various levels.

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

Sharing good practices and experiences and above all acting as a join community for building stable politics and rules for the treatment of persons deprived of their liberty. In addition it serves as a professional network of sharing information and discussing issues of concern.

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

The General Directorate of Prisons has a close collaboration with NGOs operating in the field of human rights. 14 collaboration agreements have been signed with NGOs having as subject staff training, organisation of educational activities of prisoners, monitoring and inspections, etc.

**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?**

In short term perspective it is somehow difficult to talk about satisfactions in our occupation. The future depicts if the strategies that we have put in place are the right ones or not. Nevertheless, when realising that our efforts are rewarding, I get a satisfaction about what we are contributing for a better society. We are implementing a new program called "Parenting at distance". There are a number of female prisoners that for many reasons do not have contacts with their children. So, when we could enhance family contacts and relationships, it is a satisfaction in my work.

On the other hand, dissatisfactions are related mostly when a prisoner has been released and it turns back in a short period, and in some cases for a heavier offence compared to the first one. This should be an alert not only for the prison staff but even for the social agencies. In addition, successful integration of prisoners into the society and reducing the rates of recidivism comprises one of the main challenges.



THE EUROPEAN ORGANISATION OF  
PRISONS AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

About likes or dislikes about working in the correctional field, I think that this should not be a relevant issue for a prison director, for the simple fact that likes are related mostly with the feelings. Of course we should be compassionate but above all stand on feet and think reasonably.

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

Prison system cannot be harsher than the court decisions. I am not in this duty just to discipline, but to offer the perspective of education and of a second chance, and above all to believe that prisons have potential capacities to make a new start for a human person.