

EUROPRIS INTERVIEW

EuroPris talks with

Celso Manata

Director General of Reintegration and Prison Services, Portugal



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

My career started in 1981 as a Public Prosecutor and I have always been interested in criminal trials. In 1993 I was invited to work at the Ombudsman Office and, in that position, I was responsible for the monitoring of Portuguese prisons. Taking into account that experience I was invited to become Deputy Director General of Prison Service in 1994 and, 18 months later, Director General. Since then my work in this area never stopped, neither in Portugal nor abroad. At an international level the most important experience I had was to be member of the Committee for the Prevention of Torture of the Council of Europe for 10 years. Currently I am – for the second time – Director General of Probation and Prison Service.

This is the most difficult position one can have. In fact: it's not easy for society to understand the work done in prisons, and very often people ask us for one thing and it's the opposite; prisons and prisoners are not something that make politicians win votes (although serious problems in a prison system can lead to a loss of votes) and, for that reason, our budget and resources are always substantially smaller than our needs and, for some media, "good news" are "bad news". Of course, these immense difficulties are very challenging and every significant "victory" is extremely rewarding.

Above all, what is most important to me as Director General is to have the real possibility to contribute to changing the path of another human being.

How many Prison establishments do you oversee?

The Portuguese Prison System is composed by 49 prison establishments, spread all over the country (including Madeira and Azores autonomous regions).

These prison establishments are classified in terms of the Security Level and Complexity of Management. Accordingly, we have 1 special security prison, 43 high security and 5 medium security prisons. As to what concerns the level of complexity there are 21 high level and 28 high medium level of management complexity prisons.

In addition, we also have under our jurisdiction five centres for juveniles deprived of liberty, 11 teams of electronic surveillance of people that are serving measures or sanctions in the community and 48 teams of probation officers.

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

The most updated data (from 01.08.2018) shows that we have 13.108 prisoners for a total of 12.934 places. During the last two years the population has steadily decreased (e.g. due to the increment of electronic surveillance) and the rate of overcrowding is now 0,2%.

In addition, we also have 172 juveniles in the Educational Centres and around 1500 people in the community under electronic surveillance.

How many staff do you manage?

In the overall (Prisons + Juvenile Justice + Probation) we have 6734 professionals, of which 65% are prison guards, and out of the remaining 35% we have Rehabilitation staff (12%), Governors, managers and internal inspection staff (4%) and Ministry of Justice Medical staff (2% - Healthcare is outsourced or available at the Ministry of Health Departments) among others.

In total, our annual operating budget is around 270 million euros.

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

As I stated before, prison work is very demanding, and this certainly applies to prison officers who must have several important attributes and qualifications that are not easy to summarize. Anyway, and to begin with, a prison officer should have some educational degree (in Portugal is the 12th decree of schooling), a good cultural status, adequate physical condition and no criminal record. The psychological profile should allow them to deal with very stressful situations, to prevent them from accepting illegal advantages, to have the strength and the wisdom to enforce the law, and, more importantly, to be able to build a good and professional relationship with others and especially with prisoners, having a good balance between discipline and humanity.

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

In my view women can perform any role at the correctional field and, particularly, a good gender balance is crucial for the good performance of the several teams that work for/inside prisons. For instance, in Portugal the majority of prison directors are female and the director of the maximum security prison is also a woman.

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

Our biggest concern as to what concerns security is the entrance of forbidden items, especially drugs and mobile phones.

What do you consider to be the biggest achievements for your service in 2018? What challenges you had to overcome?

The biggest achievements will be the end of overcrowding of the Portuguese Prison System (a problem in Portugal for a very long time), the new work schedule of prison officers (also a problem that lasted decades) and the new relationship with Ministry of Health. As to what concerns this last topic there are a lot of achievements that could be mentioned, starting with the creation of a working group composed of staff from both Ministries (including people from Minister's cabinets) who is mapping all the needs of prisoners and giving articulate answers to those needs. Just to give one example of this coordination, last July 37 protocols were formalized in order to connect every prison to a specific hospital for the treatment of HIV and Hepatitis, being the medical staff who goes to the prisons and not the opposite (this approach was given by the United Nations as an example of good practices).

What are the challenges for your service for the coming year?

The improvement of the material conditions at several prisons (some of them are very old and dilapidated), the acquisition of several equipment (namely security equipment) and perhaps even more importantly, the recruitment and training of staff (there are still significant gaps in several professional groups, namely in the security, healthcare and technical areas)

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

The biggest challenges for the European prison and correctional services are mostly related with the new profile of the prisoners. These "new" inmates pose very complex and difficult problems in several areas and especially as to what concerns the ones related with security and the process of reintegration of these prisoners. One of these new problems, and perhaps the most visible, is the danger of radicalization of the prison population which represent a big concern not only for our services but for society.

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

To begin with and to stress the importance of this organization I would like to state that, although we only became a full member in 2015, the engagement of the Portuguese Prison and Probation Services with EuroPris started at the very beginning of the establishment of this European network. There are several benefits to being a member of EuroPris, such as the opportunity to discuss with other members different approaches for similar problems, to share the findings of different international projects, to benefit from the outputs of the most recent academic researches and to be always updated regarding new technological solutions, among others. Last but not least, through this network we have more visibility, and for that reason it's easier to present our needs and challenges at a political level and to ask for more support, both to the relevant national and international political stakeholders and the European funding bodies.

Do your prisons engage with NGO's / Charities?

Yes, we have a historical and strong connection with NGO's who work with inmates inside and outside prison. In fact, we have been enlarging the number of entities from the community that have protocols with us in order to develop and implement projects and activities that complement the work that our staff is doing with regards of the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners.

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?

It is difficult to summarize... What I like most in my work is to feel that we can make a difference in the lives of our co-citizens who have been deprived of liberty. The most challenging aspect is to build solutions that can *really* improve the living conditions of people deprived of liberty and promote their *concrete* reintegration in society. When we achieve those goals, we feel that our very difficult work was worthy and it is very satisfying, it's almost divine. What I really don't like is the somewhat lack of sensitivity of some decision makers and the unfair "judgment" of some *media* about our work. But this will always be part of our work (resources will be always insufficient to complete all our projects and to be deprived of liberty never will be natural) and we must look at overcoming such obstacles as the other, more stimulating challenge.

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

Just one thing? I am not so modest but perhaps the definitive end of overcrowding.