



Completed a Masterplan for penitentiary system reform

CARDS

Country
Albania

Implementation period
August 2003 - September 2004

Funding
€400,000

Results
Preparation of a Masterplan for the improvement of the pre-trial detention system

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Partners
Government of Austria
Government of Slovakia
Government of Albania

Ringing the changes in the Albanian prison system

Lately the Albanian government, in accordance with the observations of international and local human rights organisations, has acknowledged that the country's penitentiary system is in need of further reform. While recent years have seen improvements, particularly in the notoriously poor physical conditions of the country's prisons and detention centres, the state of cells in pre-trial detention facilities remains below acceptable standards. Overcrowding and lack of proper heating and ventilation are a common problem.

Agreed need for a national master plan

Prisoners on remand face other difficulties besides being placed in cramped confinement. The legal system infrastructure surrounding their detainment lacks coherence, and many prisoners are unaware that they have legal rights or would know how to seek redress if they were violated. A Grant Agreement of €400,000 was signed on the 31st July 2003 between the European Commission and the Austrian Government for the implementation of the Project "Improvement of the Penitentiary System in Albania", funded under the CARDS 2001 Programme. The Project, twinning the Austrian and Albanian Ministries of Justice, aims at supporting the Albanian Government in the improvement of the penitentiary system, with a special focus on pre-trial detention, and in the speeding up of the reforms to be undertaken in this field. The Slovak Republic, represented by its General Directorate of Prisons, is also active part in the project, as a Junior Partner of Austria.



A Justice and Home Affairs mission made in June 2002 around Albania under the regional CARDS programme, which called for a strategic restructuring of the whole prison system, prompted the idea for the project.

How the review has been carried out

It is the first time that a twinning scheme has been run in Albania and, while teething problems regarding project procedures were initially encountered, a productive *modus operandi* has since been agreed upon.

During the course of the first phase of the project, four working groups from the project partners analysed the prison and pre-trial detention's system in Albania with reference to legal, organisational, infrastructure and human resources issues. The guidelines for the Project were given by a Steering Committee composed by representatives of the European Commission and the Austrian and Albanian Ministries of Justice. The Master Plan was finalised and approved by the Steering Committee in August 2004.



Along the way, meetings and forums involving not only representatives of the Albanian Government, Republic of Austria and Slovakia but also national institutions and NGOs working on the issue of penitentiary system in Albania have been held to review the project's outputs. Their feedback and insight into the issue were included into the Master plan.

Master plan moves forward

All the results of the process were presented to the Albanian authorities for a political decision on its practical implementation. The Master plan was presented to the stakeholders in the sector in September 2004. It contained recommendations, among others, to reform legislation concerning prisoners on remand and its conformity with human rights, and to modernise present living conditions in pre-trial detention centres. If carried out, the Plan should see substantial improvements in conditions for prisoners on remand.