

**Presentation of the Project for the Design of New Prisons and Pre-Trial Detention
Centers
Ministry of Justice
23 January 2009, 10:00**

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

- First of all, I am glad to see that another EU-funded project, intended to improve Albania's penitentiary system, is coming to a successful end.

- Preliminary designs for three new prisons in Fier, Gjirokastrë and Shkodër and three new pre-trial detention centres in Elbasan, Berat and Kukës have been completed. The designs fully comply with EU and international standards in addressing problems such as overcrowding and poor living conditions.

- Our assistance will not stop here. In fact, our experts have provided cost estimates for the actual construction of these buildings. As a follow-up to the designs provided by this project, the EU has already foreseen funding (€15.5 million in total) for their construction through its Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance.

- However, there is a discrepancy between the funds available and the preliminary cost estimates provided. Currently, experts are working to diminish that discrepancy without affecting the quality and the standards of the prisons and pre-trial detention centres.

- Another way to overcome this issue is, of course, co-financing between the EU and the Government of Albania. The Government is, in fact, strongly encouraged to consider the matter in its budgetary planning.

- Furthermore, it ought to be noted that based on past experience, the sustainability of these projects has become a central concern. Assurance of the functionality of these prisons and pre-trial detention centres is now a pre-condition for their financing. Guarantees that the necessary utilities will be in place in order to make the prisons and

pre-trial detention centres operational, in order to make operational the facilities the EU finances, will have to precede the decision to finance.

- As the prison directors present here will confirm, work to improve Albania's penitentiary system does not, and must not stop with construction. Setting the infrastructure is certainly important, but, taken alone, it is insufficient. A structure needs to be filled with substance and that substance is the prison staff and its relations to the inmates.

- These relations are inevitably difficult and misconduct, mistreatment as well as inappropriate handling of conflicts in prisons are all reflected into a country's general human rights record and standing. Prisons must not only serve temporary punitive purposes however. They should also prepare a safe return of detainees to society. Therefore, respect for human rights is of extreme importance in the prison environment.

- Respect for human rights is one of the founding principles of the EU, and a requirement for all countries aspiring to membership. Through another project, the EU is attempting to help Albania meet the required standards of respect for human dignity. Trainings have been provided for prison administration focusing on prisoners' rights, handling of conflicts, staff code of conduct etc.

- Much more needs to be done, however, and Albania ought to take ownership of the process through which it seeks to abide by international conventions in the area of human rights.

- Clearly, improving the penitentiary system is a complex job. But I believe that through our common efforts and resources much can be achieved.

Thank you.