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## 72nd Annual Conference of the Prison Officers' Association

Sligo (Ireland), 02-03.05.2019



The Prison Officers' Association of Ireland, member of Eurofedop, held its 72nd Annual Delegate Conference at the Radisson Hotel in Sligo.

One of the speakers at the opening session was Charlie Flanagan, Minister of Justice to Ireland.

First of all, he expressed appreciation, on his own part as well as on the part of the Justice Administration, for the professionalism and dedication shown by the prison officers. One of the recurring problems is the violence against prison officers. Zero tolerance will always be the rule and the Minister announced that measures would be taken to bring about positive changes with the aim of better dealing with highly violent prisoners. He also announced salary adaptations and thanked the prison officers for the patience they showed in the last ten years when salaries were restricted because of the crisis.

In his reply, POA President Tony Power said that negotiations since 2017 are now showing their first results. Brexit should not be a reason for the authorities to abstain from discussing further salary adaptations. Other problems that need to be addressed are the trafficking of drugs in prisons by using drones, the remuneration of the nursing staff, the detention of prisoners with mental diseases, ... He asked the Minister to keep investing in prison officers and showing recognition for their many years of service, in particular by setting up corresponding celebrations.

General Secretary John Clinton as well as the other leading officers of the POA held speeches in which they spoke about the items which currently concern the organisation and its members.

It is still unknown what the impact of Brexit will be and how this will affect the Irish prison service. Although for most public servants recruited prior to 1st April 2004, the compulsory age of retirement has been raised from 65 to 70, prison officers will not fall under this new Act. A new training facility, which will make the POA ready for the future, has been inaugurated.

Bert Van Caelenberg, secretary general of Eurofedop, attended the conference and was given the opportunity to address the POA delegates. He gave an account of what happens at EU level, namely as regards the important initiative of the European pillar of social rights, which is an initiative to make Europe more social.

He supported the initiative, although he has doubts about what the effects of globalisation are for the most vulnerable citizens in Europe. He concluded his speech by welcoming the initiative taken by the POA to visit all local branches, which is a win-win initiative.

