



WE WOULD LIKE TO INVITE YOU TO READ THE CONVERSATION OF THE HEAD OF RIGA CENTRAL PRISON, COLONEL RAIVIS RUNCIS, AND HEAD OF DAUGAVGRĪVA PRISON, COLONEL VALERIJS TVERDOVS.

RAIVIS RUNCIS IS CURRENTLY THE HEAD OF RIGA CENTRAL PRISON. PREVIOUSLY, FROM 2012, HE WAS THE HEAD OF BRASA PRISON UNTIL IT WAS CLOSED ON 1 APRIL 2019. HE STARTED WORKING IN THE PRISON SYSTEM IN 1996. BEFORE, HE SERVED THE COMPULSORY MILITARY SERVICE.

VALERIJS TVERDOVS HAS BEEN THE HEAD OF DAUGAVGRĪVA PRISON SINCE 2008. PREVIOUSLY, FROM 2003, BEFORE THE MERGER OF GRĪVA AND DAUGAVPILS PRISONS, HE WAS THE HEAD OF DAUGAVPILS PRISON. HE STARTED HIS CAREER IN PRISON SYSTEM IN 1992 AS A MONITORING OFFICER. BEFORE 1991, HE SPENT 14 YEARS IN THE ARMY.

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS SHARED THEIR EXPERIENCE ON SPECIFICS OF BEING THE HEAD OF A PRISON, EXPERIENCE GAINED WHILE WORKING IN PRISON SYSTEM FOR A LONG TIME, MANAGING A LARGE TEAM, CHANGES EXPERIENCED AND CONCLUSIONS DRAWN AFTER THEIR TIME SPENT IN SERVICE.

DESCRIPTION OF THE POSITION, INDUSTRY AND PROFESSION

WHAT ARE THE JOB RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE HEAD OF A PRISON?

Raivis Runcis: The responsibilities of the Head of a prison are provided in the job description and daily work is planned accordingly. Among other things, it is working with documents — about 13,000 documents to be sent and 12,000 prisoners' complaints a year. Document flow is massive.

Valerijs Tverdovs: I agree, the job description provides all the information on the responsibilities of the Head of a prison, but briefly, the Head of a prison is responsible for running the whole prison. Prison is a huge, living mechanism that not only keeps prisoners, but also provides them with food, clothing, work, medical care, and education. It should be noted that Daugavgrīva Prison is a unique prison, because it consists of two departments — two prisons — Daugavpils and Grīva prison departments. They are located about 7 kilometres apart from each other and work in both prison departments has to be facilitated by basically the same management team — the Head of the prison, his deputies and Heads of departments. Daugavpils and Grīva Prisons were merged on 1st November 2008, and at that time, we had to decide how to organise work in these two prison departments. We started using video conferencing because me and my deputies could be in different departments. Me and my three deputies each have a different area of responsibility. Although our legal address is in Grīva prison department, one of us has to be in Daugavpils prison department. For example, I am there on Mondays, my deputy is there on Tuesdays, and so on. I agree with Raivis — we also have a huge number of documents to be processed.

” You need courage to make a negative decision, taking responsibility for the consequences.

Raivis Runcis

WHAT ARE THE NECESSARY CHARACTER TRAITS FOR A HEAD OF A PRISON?

Raivis Runcis: Courage. Courage to make negative decisions. It is always easy to make a positive decision. Negative, painful, problematic, sometimes for yourself, sometimes problematic for the prisoners — you have to “feel the prison”. You need courage to make a negative decision, taking responsibility for the consequences. Not everyone will like your decisions, so be prepared that there will be some negativity.

WHAT GIVES YOU THE GREATEST SATISFACTION IN YOUR WORK?

Valerijs Tverdovs: I am satisfied at moments when there is no disagreement between the personnel and the task is fulfilled — when instead of coming to complain about each other, they solve the task at hand via co-operation. I remember visiting a Polish prison in 2005. There we were shown the departments working with the prisoners and told how the work is going. The same as at our prisons, there also was a resocialisation department, security department and monitoring department, only other names were used there. There I experienced something that was a great surprise to me. We had the opportunity to see the work of a Polish team who had to solve a problem. I immediately tried to understand which of them was the team leader, because I was used to a situation that one person needed to be the “leader” to make a decision. I was told that they have to agree on this among themselves. I continued to ask this question to this Polish prison team for several days, and I received the same answer — that they themselves needed to agree on who would be the leader. I have to be honest — I liked this idea and therefore I took it as the basic principle to organise the work of my subordinates, too.

Raivis Runcis: I am satisfied when everything works as a clockwork. There should be no outbursts. When everything is quiet and calm, when all the personnel is satisfied and the prisoners are satisfied, but such days are quite rare, at least in here. This is such a dynamic environment that rarely something like that happens here. I am glad to hear in the report of the previous 24 hours that nothing has happened during the night. Then I think “Oh, today will be a calm day!” When everything is resolved, it means that it is a successful day and that is gratifying.

WHAT, IN YOUR OPINION, IS THE PUBLIC OPINION OF THE PRISON WORK?

Raivis Runcis: Unfortunately, the negative opinion is also formed by the prisoners themselves. They tend to present themselves as victims and argue that someone was not allowed something, while for someone else it was allowed, thus creating dissatisfaction. Many Latvian residents have been in prison as prisoners and, as a result, form this view. They say “I am not allowed to do this! I am not allowed to do that! I was forbidden to do that!” This is what creates the negative opinion.

Valerijs Tverdovs: As a positive example, I can quote the project created by the news portal TVnet, “Invisible in Prison”, which was the first real action to explain to the general public how life is in prisons and that these processes should not be hidden. What has been started needs to be continued to explain to the general public what a prison is and to attract people from the community maybe to work with prisoners in this way.

We were recently approached by the representatives of the parliament of our local city school to take part in an event where young people will be introduced to the representatives of various professions. We, of course, delegated people to explain to the last grade students the specifics of working in prison and to improve their understanding that going to work at prison is not just as a “guard” or “monitoring officer”. At prison, there are also lawyers, psychologists, teachers, and social workers. These are professions that you can choose and continue working at prison. Indeed, we are still quite closed, and only one-sided information about the prison is coming to the general public.

As to the public involvement, I can tell you that this year started unusually for us. We were approached by representatives of Daugavpils Theatre. The theatre was staging a play based on Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel “The Brothers Karamazov”, and the director had the idea to talk to prisoners convicted of murder. The outcome of this collaboration was amazing. The theatre personnel, the convicts who took part in the project and the personnel involved were amazed. They all were inspired. The convicts came to the psychologist and said: “We have started to talk differently among us”. The psychologist said that previously three people out of nine who participated in the project did not communicate with the psychologist. During the project they started to talk.

” Prison is a huge, living mechanism that not only keeps prisoners, but also provides them with food, clothing, work, medical care, and education.

Valerijs Tverdovs

HOW DID YOU COME TO BE THE HEAD OF THE PRISON? HOW WAS IT DIFFERENT TO PREVIOUS RESPONSIBILITIES?

Valerijs Tverdovs: I had a smooth transition. I was the Deputy Head of the prison. This was followed by a short break and then I became the Head of Daugavpils Prison. Daugavpils Prison, when it was a separate structural unit, was a small prison, although the work there was intense. The workload

increased significantly when Daugavpils and Grīva prisons were merged, until all processes were put in order.

Raivis Runcis: I can tell you about the differences between the Head and the Deputy Head. As a Head, you are the last to make that important decision, because the Deputy Head can come to the Head and ask what to do and how to do it. The most responsible thing is that the Head has to make a particular sphere. He has his own area of responsibility. The Head of a prison, in turn, is responsible for everything, including the competencies of all his Deputies. Therefore, the Deputy Head is in a slightly more privileged position, and if he is unable to resolve an issue, he approaches the Head to see what he would decide.

WHAT CHANGES IN THE SYSTEM HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED PERSONALLY?

Raivis Runcis: Closing of Brasa Prison. This process took about half a year. In general, maybe this process was a little longer, but the actual process – transportation, disposing of old belongings – lasted six months. The personnel reacted differently. I would not say that the personnel reaction was positive, rather the opposite. Everyone was used to the situation and would have continued the work. People do not want to lose jobs. The future vision that they should trade in their usual environment for the Central Prison, which, by reputation or aura, is not the most positive place in our entire penitentiary system. Someone had to go to Olaine Prison. It seems that it is not that far from Riga, however, with the salary of 700–800 euros, it includes travel expenses and the time spent commuting. An hour to go, an hour to return – two hours out of the day.

Valerijs Tverdovs: The period from 2008 to 2010, when Daugavpils and Grīva Prisons were merging, was very difficult. We had to find several solutions. It was very important to divide the responsibilities. I do not have to bear the burden alone, but I have to share it among my Deputies. I had to delegate the authority and responsibilities that they had to perform independently. As the Head, I have the privilege of being in one department or another every day. There are a number of documents where authority cannot be delegated to Deputies. Although Deputies also have the authority to control the entrance permit regime, handle incoming and outgoing correspondence, they do not have the authority to sign orders and review reports. Sometimes there is a call which requires me to go to another department. And then I have to go. But such cases are rare. If the process is in order, everything happens autonomously. Now, we are starting to actively use electronic signature.

” The convicts came to the psychologist and said: “We have started to talk differently among us”.

Valerijs Tverdovs

WHAT METHODS DO YOU USE TO EFFICIENTLY ENSURE WORK OF THE PRISON PERSONNEL?

Valerijs Tverdovs: We organise personnel training on regular basis. We meet with some department heads at least twice a month to discuss all changes and orders. We meet with officials once a month for our own thematic trainings. This takes an hour and a half and consists of three parts. The first part tells of new orders and changes. In the second part, we spend time on a particular, current topic. The third part is devoted to discussion of different issues.

I can also mention that for more than 10 years we have been hiring people not individually, but in groups, thus preparing people for work. The group may consist of 5–7 people. First, they attend a medical examination, a physical fitness test. After that, time is scheduled and specialists from all parts of our prison work with them for at least 2–3 days. They are told about our place in the public administration to which we are subjected to, what the types of prisons are, who and what is placed in prisons, what the status of our prison is, what we do, then we patrol the territory and show all the parts of the prison. It does not matter what function this person will perform — whether he will be an official, a security guard or a



monitoring officer, or an employee. I remember a case where we hired a cleaning person and she then expressed her admiration for how well the introductory training had been conducted. The personnel are then photographed for documents and placed in specific departments. Thus, when they start working, they already have an overview of their work and this makes it easier to get started.

HOW ARE THE PRISON PERSONNEL MOTIVATED?

Raivis Runcis: Personnel motivation — this is rather limited here. There are statutory frameworks that determine what tools are available to us, and there are non-statutory tools — praise, gratitude, meeting half-way, help. This is what we can use. We use the types of motivation prescribed by the law when we are offered such an opportunity. It can be a holiday or another important day. This is a rather limiting factor for us. But in daily life we widely use things that are not written down anywhere — carrots, small whips, harsh words. A person understands how to do something, if you say “Thank you! Well done! You are great!” “Next time I will be very happy about it!” It is a motivating factor, he’s happy about it, I can see it.

WHAT CHANGES ARE NECESSARY TO ATTRACT PERSONNEL?

Raivis Runcis: There is research on personnel motivation and I have my own opinion. We have to know why they do not come. It is necessary to understand what motivates to come to a negative environment, let’s say, to work with the criminal world. What is the reason to come and work with prisoners? What makes people come and work here? Remuneration, social guarantees, early retirement, those are the things. If we look at classical theories and research, remuneration is not mentioned, but in everyday life, when talking to people, it is clear that remuneration is a very important factor for them. The relationships, praise, gratitude and everything else just follows. In research, remuneration does not take the first place. When you start talking with the personnel about incentive they would like, they say – “I would like a bonus!” And what if there is no bonus? No money, there is no money in the system! Then they ask for a paid holiday. They do not want gratitude or an honorary certificate! And that is the case with almost everyone. There are people who want medals. They are fine. They just want medals.

HAVE YOU EVER MET A REALLY MOTIVATED PERSON WHO WANTED TO WORK IN A PRISON?

HAVE YOU EVER MET A PERSON WHO REALLY HAS SET FIGHTING THE CRIMINAL WORLD AS A GOAL OR WISH?

Raivis Runcis: I had a conversation with the psychologists who came to work to prisons, and they said – “I want to study exactly those people.” And then I realised – “Yes, this man is telling the truth and I believe his reason.” I know that no one would come here in a good mind. They all have a reason. The private security staff have smaller salaries, no social guarantees, compared to us. They come from other services. They are in the system and want to continue doing it. Everyone has a different reason.

Valerijs Tverdovs: I understand that financial incentive is at the forefront, but I am pleased to note that I have met people in my team (they are, of course, a minority, I agree with Raivis on this one), who said: “I would prefer an honorary certificate. The time will pass and I can show it to my children and grandchildren, because, if I take the money, I will spend it.” There are some people like that, but they are there.

Raivis Runcis: What if I would put two incentives on the table — financial and honorary?

Valerijs Tverdovs: There is never enough money. No matter how much you increase the salary or give bonuses, it will be nice at that particular moment. Tomorrow you will want more and more. We do not live in another world, we all live in one country, and for our region, to be honest, we receive a decent salary on all levels. Monitoring officers, security guards, inspectors, according to the level of responsibility. If we think further? If we increase the salary? By how much should we increase it? Should we double it? For how long will it suffice? Will it suffice for 3 months or 6 months? After 6 months, you will get used to living with this salary and it will not be enough, and you will want more. There has to be some non-financial incentive as well. Of course, people need to understand that, as Raivis said, we have social guarantees. There is a holiday benefit, retirement pension, health insurance. This all is provided; it has to be appreciated and talked about. At the same time, there is such thing as personnel burn-out. Someone has it after 5 years, someone has it after 10 years spent at the same position. People simply burn out. Of course, it is not possible to artificially create the ideal conditions for everyone, but in Daugavgrīva Prison we make extensive use of personnel rotation. We have the opportunity to rotate employees by departments — from Grīva to Daugavpils and from Daugavpils to Grīva. Why does it happen that an employee loses the motivation and does not want to work anymore? Because you have been at the same place for too long. Every day the same. If you move from one department to another, it makes you think differently. I am deeply convinced that if a person is capable and to have a result, the person must know the specifics of work at least in three departments. The specialist of the Monitoring department will not be able to listen to the opinion of the specialist of the Resocialisation department. He will still try to do his job first and pull the blanket to his side, but if he had worked in both the Monitoring department and the Resocialisation department, he will treat the work of the other department completely differently. He will understand what processes take place there and work together to achieve the result. I can tell you that 80% of the personnel who became Deputy Head of prison or Head of department are people who went through at least three departments — Monitoring, Security and Resocialisation. And I see the result.



COMPARISON OF PRISONS

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR PRISON? FOR INSTANCE, IF WE COMPARE BRASA PRISON WITH RIGA CENTRAL PRISON, ARE THERE ANY DIFFERENCES?

Raivis Runcis: Of course! These are two different prisons. Brasa was a small, compact prison where inmates served their sentences. Here, in Riga Central Prison, most of the prisoners are arrested persons. These are two different types of prisoners. An inmate behaves completely differently. This is his home for a period of time. The arrested persons know

that they are here for a while and the things they do here will not be taken into account at the place of serving the sentence. He is moved there and there starts his new “credit history.” That is a completely different attitude. Many hopes for a conditional release, therefore the behaviour is different. If we talk about differences in terms of size, in a small prison, one sight from above is enough to see everything; here, in Riga Central Prison, something happens in one department, in the next two, something else is just beginning.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE DAUGAVGRĪVA PRISON?

Valerijs Tverdovs: Daugavgrīva Prison has a very wide range of work — it is a closed type prison with closed and open departments and an investigation unit. Besides all this we have a department for those sentenced for life. 80% of persons sentenced for life in the Republic of Latvia stay with us.

ADVANCED TECHNOLOGIES

WHAT ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS DO YOU USE IN YOUR WORKPLACE (PRISON) AND WHICH ONES WOULD YOU LIKE TO INTRODUCE?

Raivis Runcis: We use video conference calls, Skype. Those are used at court hearings, which is very good because we do not have to go to the court. Equipment protects the perimeter. That is a positive thing. Common databases are positive. The electronic signature, which for now still slows down the work, is used.

AND, FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN WORKING WITH PRISONERS? WHAT DO YOU THINK OF USING ROBOTS?

Raivis Runcis: I see it only in a positive way.

“Technologies should be used because they could help to rule out the human factor. The prisoners try to take advantage of the fact that there is a human on the other side.”

Raivis Runcis

Valerijs Tverdovs: Speaking of technologies, I would like to stay more realistic. Yes, of course, everything in the world is evolving and we have to keep up, but I would like to go back to the time 15 years ago. When I became the Head of Daugavpils Prison, we were offered to receive and place prisoners sentenced for life. At that time, this process had just begun — life imprisonment. A moratorium on the death penalty was imposed, after which it was abolished altogether. Many people were sentenced to life imprisonment and these prisoners were placed in Jelgava Prison. There was not enough space in Jelgava Prison and they requested funding to improve conditions — to repair an additional building. We were offered to consider the option of placing prisoners in Daugavpils. We found a solution and offered a place where it did not require large financial investments to fix it. An appropriate environment was also available. They brought in the first prisoners. They were treated more strictly, in accordance with the law. But time passed and it turned out that the legislator has planned everything, but has not thought about the future, i.e., that after 7 years they can move to the medium level of the regime. At the lowest level of the regime, it is assumed that these prisoners are in cells, the cells are closed. When they go out, they are handcuffed. But what about the medium level of regime? In medium regime, the cell must be open. It was not stated anywhere what to do. We only had those people who were due to move to the medium regime and who had to be provided such conditions. We had a very strong technical team then and now. We developed the electromechanical key system ourselves. We engaged a company that made the block itself to meet the legal requirements and safety. It is still working in Daugavpils prison department. This system was invented and developed by the personnel themselves. The used technology seemed to be very old compared to what is happening now, but the system is still working.

Raivis Runcis: Technologies should be used because they could help to rule out the human factor. The prisoners try to take advantage of the fact that there is a human on the other side. They look for weaknesses that can be exploited. If a machine will issue the food — wonderful! You cannot tell a machine that it gave more or less food than necessary. It gave a specific portion and that is it. Otherwise you can say – “I did not get enough soup!” – “Someone was given more than me!” and therefore they use the psychological pressure successfully. But the human factor should not be ruled out at all. You also need to talk, of course.

CAN YOU NAME A SITUATION WHERE YOUR ADVICE OR SUGGESTION LED THE PRISON SYSTEM MANAGEMENT TO IMPROVE SOMETHING?

Valerijs Tverdovs: There have been several cases where we have proposed changes. You should never be shy to express your opinion and make any changes, because everything can be implemented and it can be implemented rather quickly. When I started work at Daugavpils Prison in 2004 or 2005, there was a youth protest by the prison. Under the watch tower there were students with posters – “Get the prison out of the city!” “You are all inhuman!” And so on. We immediately addressed the City Council. — “Yes, they have official permission.” — “How could you allow that?” — “Please, here’s the law!” — “Protests are banned at the police, the courts...” “Prison is not on this list,” and they continued to stand under the watchtower and protest. We prepared documents and applied to the Latvian Prison Administration, the Administration went further and after six months introduced changes to the law to prohibit protests up to 50 meters from prisons. This took place over a rather short period. Many improvements were suggested by the personnel. You should not destroy the desire to act in your personnel. I gather information what employees come and tell me. An employee once came and said: “You know, I saw that we have video calls, but here, look — the Sentence Execution Code allows short meetings up to 1 to 2 hours, long meetings and phone calls.” We addressed the Latvian Prison Administration again and the Administration organised a pilot project on providing video calls to persons sentenced for life, including also Jelgava Prison and Ilūciems Prison. This pilot project was implemented for a year. After which we then analysed the results, submitted the data and developed a legal provision that not only persons sentenced for life, but also patients in hospitals, family members who are abroad and unable to communicate shall be provided with the opportunity to communicate by video call.

INTER-INSTITUTIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

WHAT WOULD BE THE BEST EXAMPLES OF INTER-INSTITUTIONAL CO-OPERATION THAT YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED WORKING IN YOUR PRISON IN RECENT YEARS?

Valerijs Tverdovs: The Agreement between the Latvian Prison Administration, the State Probation Service and the State Police. Relations and inter-institutional co-operation constantly evolve. But, to be honest, we and the State Probation Service are the most interested ones in this process. The State Police is slowly but surely moving in this direction. Initially, they did not participate in these processes — they did not send representatives at all cases, nor did they always respond to requests, petitions and decisions.

As a bad example, I can tell you about the case about 3 years ago. There was a prisoner sentenced to a long prison sentence of about 20 years. He did not take part in any resocialisation processes and was released to his municipality after serving his sentence. The municipality was alarmed because, being a small municipality, they were worried about his arrival. We organised meetings with representatives from all services. In the end, he left for the municipality, but unfortunately not everyone did their job successfully, they lost control and he disappeared from their sight, as a result he had managed to move to another place. The information may not have been passed on, and there he committed a serious crime — double murder. He is now sentenced to life imprisonment. After this case, the State Police itself initiates meetings to discuss further action.

We have close co-operation with the State Probation Service and the work is successful. We also involve other services — the Orphans’ Court, the social services. We recently had a problem — one convict was approaching his release, but he did not have a place to live. He had declared residence somewhere before, but was caught in a completely different place after the crime. In his youth, he had declared his residence elsewhere. But at the moment he had no contacts, no place to live, nothing. And as a good example, I can mention how social services began to communicate with each other. Our county council acted as the initiator in this case and resolved the issue of residence. Shortly before his release, they made contact for him to go to his new home and ensured his further control. There is an understanding that this is necessary.

If at first I could tell more about negative examples, lately I can already tell more positive stories. The initiative does not just come from us anymore. Unfortunately, there is not enough feedback now. We release the prisoner from the prison, he is accepted by the Probation Service, but we would like meetings to be organised from time to time, or as needed, to discuss these issues.

Raivis Runcis: Everything is fine for us as far as inter-institutional co-operation is concerned. We meet with management representatives and discuss all problems, pass the information to the State Probation Service. Everything is right by us location wise — we call, we arrange a meeting and everything is in order.

WHAT IMPROVEMENTS COULD BE MADE TO MAKE INTER-INSTITUTIONAL CO-OPERATION EVEN MORE EFFECTIVE?

Raivis Runcis: Feedback needs to be improved, because we do not know what the recidivism of crimes is. Even I have no idea. But co-operation with other institutions is successful.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

HOW HAVE THE PRISONERS CHANGED OVER THE YEARS?

Raivis Runcis: Once they were people who were prepared for life. They had professions, skills. In the 1990s, every other prisoner had a profession, every other had almost completed high school. They were ready for life. Now there are addicts, not knowing anything, unable to do anything. Dangerous and unsuitable for life. There are unprepared people in all age groups, but most of them are young. Over the last 10 years, they have formed a thick layer that returns to prison from time to time. They do not want to think anything and just want to live at the expense of others. If back in the 1990s, everyone had studied somewhere or got a profession in prison, now no one has done anything outside the prison walls, no one knows anything and does not work.

Valerijs Tverdovs: I would distinguish two categories of prisoners. There are those who really change. Who complies with our rules of the game. They participate in all processes with a purpose to leave prison. Unfortunately, this category does not always succeed either, because they have spent some time in prison, but society has changed in the meantime. When a former prisoner comes out of prison, greater involvement of social services would be highly desirable to really help solve problems. Because even though they are adults, they behave like children. They do not know what to do. For example, the school has a class teacher and teachers who present everything on a plate, but when you enter university, you have to do everything yourself. And there is a shock. You have to walk around and look for options for what to do. The same applies to prisons.

I think, there will be a change in society. It is already happening slowly. But there is also a category of people where I completely agree that they do not want to do anything. They have even changed for the worse compared to previous times. For example, in the past there were far fewer complaints about the administration’s actions, maintenance and the like. There is now a category of people who are constantly complaining. This is not always for the purpose of making improvements. They complain for the sake of complaining and complain about money. For example, in the past, complaints were never received about medical and security personnel because prisoners realised that if they were ill, they would turn to the Security



Department. – “Lock me in, help me, hide me, isolate me!” They asked for isolation. If they were in poor health, they could go to the doctors. What’s happening now? Now they do not care what to write complaints about. During the year, if we have a total of about 13,000 applications, one person can write 427 complaints a year. The number of other applications, if distributed to the total number of prisoners, is 7–8 applications per year per person, which is a normal number, because not every application is a complaint. Prisoners who write more than one application a day are unhappy with everything. It is especially difficult with such people. There are people who, even when ready to be released, when they leave, cannot find a place for themselves and adapt to the new circumstances because they have no support, no family, no relatives. If there are difficulties, the person will not be able to survive in freedom. But what a person, whose only occupation was writing complaints, will do? It is possible that he will succeed in one of the 400 times, the case will go to the administrative court and compensation will be granted. Maybe he will be given 200 euros and for 2 years he will tell everyone that everyone has to write applications, because he got 200 euros. When such people are released in society, they no longer have so many opportunities to write complaints. They will not be able to integrate and survive in society. The prison provided the opportunity to write complaints, the law provided him with everything, the state paid for the postage expenses. Will it be possible to continue in freedom what he has started in prison? He will no longer be able to do so for a state money, but for his own money, even if he gets any, and he will not spend time on this activity.

HOW MANY AND WHAT ESCAPE ATTEMPTS HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED? HOW DO YOU HANDLE SUCH SITUATIONS? IS THERE ANY SPECIFIC ACTION PLAN FOR ESCAPES?

Valerijs Tverdovs: I have been in this system for a long time and I was working at the time when, unfortunately, there were escapes and escape attempts. Firstly, we have to understand that if a person is deprived of something, the person will look for an opportunity to get it back. Escaping is the end point when, for some reason, person’s sole purpose is to leave. Escape attempt is a broad concept. Not so long ago I took the subordinates out of the prison area, showed the places I knew from which people had escaped or where escape attempts were discovered. For example, in the prison

area, there is a sewer hatch with a red triangle painted on it. I explained why this was done. This is because it is a dangerous place for prison communications through which you can try to get out. It is not possible to get out of prison completely, but there is such a possibility. There is a ditch around Grīva Prison and then I can tell — from this place someone made a dig, here someone made a dig, from this place there is a dig. If we talk about all the escapes and escape attempts, we analyse these situations. Even though a relatively long time has passed, we look at the reasons that led to this outcome. What were the reasons? Maybe this will sound harsh, but it is usually negligence on the part of the personnel. If the work is done responsibly, such situations in prison are not possible. I would not like to say that the processes of resocialisation, upbringing and training are our indirect tasks, but these functions are already going to come next, because our main task is to ensure that the same number of people as are put under our responsibility have to remain for the entire term of the sentence.

For example, in 1994, there was an escape in a group from Grīva Prison. Fifteen people left. At that time, I was the Head of Monitoring Department. Bricks were cut out in 2 meters thick wall. It did not happen in one day, it happened over a long period of time. These were very difficult times then.

There were 900 prisoners, only 6–7 people of the personnel remained on the night shift. But this does not mean that there could be uncontrolled places. I do not want to blame the specific officer on duty or monitoring officer. It was a series of infringements. With the permission, the prisoners lived in a room where mattresses were stored so as not to be stolen. Who could steal them? The monitoring officers? An exit was created in this room through which 15 people passed.

Raivis Runcis: There was a case when the janitor took the monitoring officer’s wardrobe keys, the uniform, went to the pass post and said – “I don’t need a pass, I’ll just go to the car to get my lunch here” and left. At that time, the personnel had a common practice — to go out to get food or something from the car. This is no longer the case, it was in the 1990s. The culprit was caught by police on the same day.

Valerijs Tverdovs: In the old times, there were also trench digging. One case was very interesting. The territory of Grīva Prison is very large — 21 hectares. A shaft was built from the central part of this territory and a 38-meter-long tunnel was dug from the shaft in the direction of the Daugava River. At that time, I was younger and more hotheaded, I went through this tunnel to the end and saw what there was. The tunnel was about 1 meter high, with lighting, monorail, trolley, the excavated earth was loaded into the trolley and taken out. There was a coal-fired boiler house in the area. When they got inside the boiler house, they poured the excavated earth over the coal and in the morning this coal was thrown into the boiler. That is it, no traces left. A 38-meter-long tunnel was dug in the direction of the Daugava River. A third of the whole distance was excavated. There have been a lot of cases where digging took place from the side of the ditch. They dug into the shore and continued digging in the direction of the fence, but these cases were also discovered.

Raivis Runcis: It should be added that when a prisoner is preparing to escape, the Security Department must be informed. As soon as the prisoner starts preparing, looking for tools, starting to create some kind of environment, you have to report. Therefore, all departments are involved in this. Prisoners have long known that we do not have enough guards and monitoring officers, but the personnel need to know at the very root if something is planned and tools are prepared. The personnel usually work very well and eliminates all cases in a timely manner. Attempts to escape and planning are repeated from time to time, but we cut them down at the root.

HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE PRISON ENVIRONMENT COMPARING THE 1990S AND NOW?

Valerijs Tverdovs: The situation changed in the sense that the cell system was set up in the mid-1990s. For example, why it was possible to escape from Pārlielupe Prison in July 1994? Because the prisoners were not in their places. When I read the conclusion about escaping from Pārlielupe Prison, these preconditions were there. There were 900 prisoners in Grīva







Prison, 130 of whom lived out of their places and were scattered throughout the prison. They were not controlled and could do what they wanted. They made a lot of forbidden items. We confiscated the forbidden items and reacted somehow, but in the meantime, they were preparing to escape. When the cell system was introduced, it was a great relief for us, because the prisoners were divided into cells. This is one of the reasons why a new prison is needed. The new guidelines stipulate that a maximum of 2 prisoners can be placed in a cell. The more prisoners are divided into separate cells, the easier it is for officials and personnel to work. I would say that there are fewer preconditions for something like this to happen now. Although Daugavpils Prison was still a closed prison at the time, which had only a system of cells, there was also an attempt to escape from the cell. According to eyewitnesses, there were more than 20 people in the cell. They did not go out for a walk for several days. They dug. The entire cell was full of sand. In bags, under the beds, it was stuffed everywhere and they dug in the direction of the fence. After a while, to check where they were, they put a mirror out in the restricted area — between the main fence and the warning area, the security noticed it and prevented the escape. There were only 2 meters left for them to get outside the fence.

But the cell system has its own peculiarities. Even if the prisoner is in cell, he or she needs to be monitored to keep to the agenda, and they need to be called out for interviews more often. I always tell the personnel that a conversation in front of the camera is not appropriate, we need a personal talk. They have to be called out of the cell. It is necessary to enter the cells. According to the monitoring procedure, a cell inspection is planned. It is necessary to do it qualitatively, not just to come in and take a look, but to find out whether something is happening or not. The incident in Daugavpils Prison shows that the cell system is not an obstacle to implement what is intended, if such a wish arises. It cannot be so that we lock them in the cells and that is it, we can relax. That must not be the case. We cannot relax.

Raivis Runcis: It is difficult to hide the sand in the cell. If digging takes place, there is nowhere in the cell where to put the sand. In my practice there was one case — a prisoner dug about 2 meters at night, but he had nowhere to put the sand. Clogs form in the toilet bowl. The sand can be washed away, of course, but in the sewers dams also form, because the sand is heavier, it clogs them up. The prisoner has nowhere to pour the sand. And if the monitoring officer looks carefully, he sees that a mountain of sand is forming in the cell.

We had a case of digging. He dug under the bed. He hit a hole in the concrete with a cup and dug using the same cup, and succeeded. He dug out about 2 meters, through the foundations, which are about 1-meter-thick, but he had nowhere where to put the sand. Such a large amount cannot be rinsed off. Usually, if the sewer system becomes clogged, then the reasons must be investigated in more detail. If they are clogged with sand, you need to start looking for where it came from. There are all sorts of nuances that have developed over the course of life, but in the area of security in particular, their creativity, so to speak, is the reason of laughter and amazement at the same time. How they figure out, how they lie and how they try to get around everything.

HOW DO YOU SEE AND HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRISON SYSTEM IN THE NEXT 10 YEARS?

Valerijs Tverdovs: This is a philosophical question. On one hand, we are talking about openness and attracting society to work, because we work with people. On the other hand, we talked about the human factor, where a human can be replaced by a robot to perform all the functions. What will we achieve with it?

For example, I can tell you about persons sentenced for life. While they were with us, the world's vision of this category of prisoners also changed. It was originally intended that they would be kept in very strict isolation and under supervision. By the way, it also had a positive aspect, because now they have no problems with keeping to the agenda. It is the only department where at 6:30 a.m. sharp everyone gets up, the beds are arranged, cleanliness and order. At 10:30 p.m. everyone is sleeping in their places and there is no movement anymore. But when we realised that the legislator has provided an opportunity to release the persons sentenced for life or pardon of the President of the State, or parole, we wondered — if they were treated as some category that only robots would work with, but a deadline would come and we would release them into society? Will it be fair to society? Did we do our job honestly? If we turned off their communication with other people, we provided complete isolation! But the time came and he was released into society. He will behave completely differently. I think we need to act differently; we need to give them opportunity to connect with others more. If there is an illegal connection or other violation, then it is our problem and responsibility. We need to address these issues in a different way than by replacing everything by technologies or banning everything. We also gain experience from trips abroad. I have been to Norway, Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine once. Norway is another story altogether. Everything is fine there. In 2015, I was in Ukraine, where I participated in a conference on the training and maintenance of prisoners sentenced for life. In the early 1990s, we, the countries of the former Soviet Union, were on an equal ground, when I came to Ukraine in 2015, I felt as if I had gone back to our situation in 1995. I got the impression that during those 25 years, they went a 5-year path, but we evolved further.

“ For a change to happen, everyone involved needs to change, both our personnel and prisoners, because the prisoner will only change when we change. We have to set an example of change.

Valerijs Tverdovs

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SAY TO THOSE WHO WILL BE WORKING IN THIS INDUSTRY IN 10 OR 100 YEARS?

Valerijs Tverdovs: Keep on developing. We cannot create a model individually; we have to use the basis of what has already been created. What will the prison be in 10 years? It is difficult to say. I have been in this system for 27 years and, remembering the exemplary prison in 1992, when I began to work, and now it is like a day and night. Firstly, the attitudes and relationships have changed. For a change to happen, everyone involved needs to change, both our personnel and prisoners, because the prisoner will only change when we change. We have to set an example of change. And what has happened in 28 years is because we have changed. The laws changed, we changed, our attitudes changed and prisoners were forced to adapt to us. Someone did it consciously, someone was forced to, to proceed in this progressive system of execution of a sentence, to participate in ongoing processes, programmes, to study at school, to go to work. The result can be seen in the evaluation commissions, when they can clearly formulate their opinion and defend their opinion. It is nice to see the results of our work. What will the prison be in 10 years? Or in 100 years? What the prison will be, depends on the foundations laid by the Administration, what innovations will be introduced and how they will affect the overall direction. The new prison is now a very topical issue. Yes, it is a necessity. ■



Latvian Prison Administration
Riga, 2020

nfi.ievp@gmail.com