



Ministero della Giustizia

DEPARTMENT OF PENITENTIARY ADMINISTRATION
OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

Bucharest, 9th June 2015

Some information concerning the fight against radicalisation in Italy

In the last three years, the Italian penitentiary Administration has put into practice a programme of normative and organizational interventions, aimed at implementing the principles set in the Italian Penitentiary Act since 1975, through the establishment of a new model of detention, in line also with these draft Guidelines of the Council of Europe on radicalisation and violent extremism in prisons.

The project of the new detention model in Italy, based upon the differentiation of the penal establishments, provides for the assignment of the prisoners to prisons and to wings of prisons separated into homogeneous groups and for setting up the conditions for every inmate to spend most of his day outside his cell, in canteen and in spaces where activities in common are carried out.

That system of “open prison”, where prisoners are encouraged to take upon themselves their responsibilities and where rehabilitation and treatment activities are facilitated, allows to assess the time of detention through an effective observation carried out by the various penitentiary professionals and by volunteers.

All the aspects connected with prison life (work, sport, education, cultural and leisure activities), its organisation, the acceptance of and the compliance with the rules of cohabitation, the modalities enabling relations with family members and the outside community aim all at testing the inmates’ behaviour in a community, in order to develop a perspective of life outside of prison respectful of other persons’ rights.

Such a detention model has positive effects in terms of social reintegration in particular for those prisoners who have family, emotional and work links in our Country, since they are interested in participating in their rehabilitation programme as well as in accepting the prisons rules as concrete opportunities in view of their resettlement.

However, many foreign prisoners who do not have any roots in our Country can instead be an obstacle for the successful implementation of said model, since they lack any perspective of social reintegration at the end of their sentence, and this is a cause for them of maladjustment, of inner suffering and of a feeling of inadequacy towards their co-inmates; those feelings can often frustrate their social reintegration, and can also lead to behaviour of self-harm or of aggression to others.

The considerations above refer in particular to foreign prisoners of Islamic faith, among whom the risk of radicalisation and of violent extremism is very high.



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The radicalisation of Islamic terrorism in prisons is a well-known problem to the Italian penitentiary Administration. In our prisons there is a concrete risk of proselytism aimed at armed fight, which is therefore kept under constant monitoring: the inmates under surveillance have a very particular profile, who have received a military training also with reference to the fight against a penitentiary environment. Recent researches highlight that in our prisons there is a dangerous work of indoctrination and recruitment made by veterans, sentenced for crimes related to terrorism, towards compatriots imprisoned for drug-pushing or minor crimes. Studies and analysis show that the Muslim subjects who are vulnerable because of their conditions of social or financial maladjustment turn to the extremist and violent Islam in order to find their own identity and they radicalize themselves mainly after having been conditioned by their extremist co-inmates.

Among the foreign prisoners of Islamic faith detained in our prisons there are also some hundreds coming from some European countries; many of those subjects, since they do not have any root in our country from the social and family point of view, are a potential high risk in terms of radicalisation and violent extremism.

As a consequence of what above and given that many countries now have implemented the EU Framework decision 2008/909/JHA relevant to the transfer of foreign inmates to their countries of origin, our Administration committed itself in developing that important instrument of cooperation, based upon the undisputable principle that a successful social rehabilitation of offenders can only be achieved in their places of origin, where they have social, family, emotional, cultural and language links. Please let me address a warm invitation to all the Administrations here to do the same, in order to offer the best reintegration opportunities to the persons serving a sentence.

Coming back to the fight against radicalisation and violent extremism in Italian prisons, some directives have been issued by the Department of Penitentiary Administration Headquarters about radicalization and the risks of radical religious proselytism in prison. Currently, there are 11 persons imprisoned for international terrorism of Islamic origin.

Those people are constantly monitored by the Investigation Unit of the Penitentiary Police Corps, which analyses all the relevant aspects of their daily life in prison—relations with other inmates, composition of their cells, discipline, etc. – as well as of their contacts with the outside community, through a database including SIAP-AFIS system data and prison data.



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The prison staff members, in particular the Penitentiary Police officers, are trained to manage and to observe prisoners also in order to identify and to report possible situations of proselytism at risk or of ideological indoctrination.

In order to avoid any possible situation at risk, the prisoners charged with or sentenced for crimes of terrorism are included in the penitentiary level named “High Security 2”, which provides for their strict separation from all inmates assigned to other security levels present in the same establishment. Also for all other prisoners, assigned to lower security levels, a close monitoring is carried out of behaviours showing any signs of radicalization. An activity of inquiry is carried out every year in each Italian prison on the following issues: how Islamic prayer is carried out, who are the Imams coming from the local community, who are the cultural mediators active in the prison, who are the inmates leading the Islamic prayer, and so on. All the materials circulating in Arabic language are also kept under particular control (books, CDs, publications, graffiti, and so on). This activity of control has been even strengthened, following the terrorist attacks in France of early 2015 and the more recent events in Tunisia.

Depending upon their situation, those inmates undergo different levels of supervision and monitoring¹.

In the case of reports of dangerous proselytism or of radicalization, the subjects involved are put under monitoring or under observation and, in some cases, they may even be transferred to other prisons, which seems to be an effective measure to break the radicalization cycle.

Each case is individually evaluated by the investigative and institutional offices. Currently, the subjects charged with Islamic terrorism are allocated in just one prison.

There is a strong collaboration with other law enforcement agencies through a Strategic Analysis Counter-Terrorism Committee, based at the Ministry of Interiors, in order to assess and to take the most adequate measures concerning radicalized subjects on release. As for IT, all the Italian law enforcement agencies will soon be connected with the Police software linked to the USA “Terrorist Screen Center” database.

¹ The different levels of supervision and monitoring are the following: “**monitoring**” (*monitoraggio*), intended as the gathering, from the prisons where the inmates concerned are held, of all the data on their prison life (behavioral relationships, composition of their cell, discipline records, etc.) as well as their contacts with the outside community (flows of mail, visits and telephone calls, money available, etc.); currently, 86 prisoners are under that specific monitoring. “**Signaling**” (*segnalazione*) is intended as a specific in-depth analysis of the report sent by the prison, which is sometimes lacking of details; currently, 21 prisoners are under signaling. “**Supervision**” (*attenzionamento*) is intended as a report drafted by the Penitentiary Police staff of the prison where the inmate concerned is held, aimed at better determining the danger represented by the subject. Currently, 61 prisoners are under this specific supervision.



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It must anyway be underlined that the Italian Constitution (art. 8) recognizes the right of everyone to profess their religion. Therefore, in prison, detainees can profess their faith and can gather to pray and to assist to the rites of their faith. In 65 Italian prisons, there are rooms set as Mosques. In addition, prisoners can hold, in their rooms, religious symbols, prayer mats and books, also in foreign languages. They are also allowed to wear their traditional clothes as well as to respect Ramadan obligations, as for work and food. In some prisons, Islamic inmates can even have their halal food.

There are no "institutional" imams, therefore the prayer is led by some prisoners acting as "leaders", chosen by co-inmates. Only 14 Imams come from the outside communities, and they are acknowledged by the Ministry of Interiors.

According to a recent survey (December 2014) on the religious faiths of the Italian prison population, the Muslims prisoners held in the Italian penal establishments are 5,613, but it must also be said that the religion was not surveyed in 13,000 cases, so the number of Islamic prisoners can be much higher.

At present there are no "procedures" of de-radicalization.

THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT
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