

**Speech of Mr. Giovanni Russo, Head of the Italian Department of  
Penitentiary Administration delivered at the 36<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the PC-CP  
Working Group. Rome, 17 September 2024.**

Dear members of the PC-CP Working Group, dear experts, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

It is with a true regret that I greet you all from remote, since I cannot be there with you. I wish I had been able to be there, to greet you in person and to participate in the meeting opening.

It is a great honour for our Administration and for our Country to have you here in Rome, in the wonderful setting of Villa Lubin, for which I deeply thank the President of National Council for Economics and Labour, Professor Renato Brunetta, who so kindly put at our disposal this prestigious venue to host the works of the Penological Council of the Council of Europe.

I wish to underline the precious contribution that President Brunetta gave to the Italian penitentiary system as a whole, starting an extraordinary project for the rationalization and the enhancement of prisoners' work, both inside and outside our prisons, with the collaboration of the world of enterprises, of finance, of professions, of volunteers.

It is a pleasure for me to highlight the indefatigable work made by your (I dare say by our) Committee, which has been charting the course for several years now – through the drafting of recommendations about penal execution in prisons and in probation – for our Administrations, so that the penal execution might always be based upon the fundamental rights of the persons that are entrusted to our systems, for their custody and their rehabilitation. Within this framework, the PC-CP is our beacon, since it indicates to prison services the pathway to follow, the steps to make, the practices to implement. We are grateful to you, for that.

The precious work you are going to carry out in these two days deals with topics that are very important also in the Italian prison system: the promotion of mental health of persons deprived of their liberty and the

education in prisons. They are two of the main elements of our work with inmates. Indeed, it is more and more evident that the mental discomfort of many inmates makes it difficult for our prisons to function properly. Therefore, the contribution of all the institutional stakeholders involved is crucial to ensure the best care to the persons suffering from that kind of troubles.

As for education, then, the Italian Penitentiary Act puts it among the so-called “pillars” of treatment, that is among the unavoidable activities to be offered to each sentenced inmate, because school is not only about gaining knowledge, but it is also about taking responsibility upon oneself, exchanging and sharing with others, establishing correct and respectful social relations, improving oneself. Education is a door opening on a different, new and better future.

Let me also say a few words about the topic of the fight against organized crime in prisons.

The mafia-type criminal organizations have been for decades the protagonists of the Italian criminal scenario. As a consequence, the action of the State – and namely of the Italian Penitentiary Administration – to fight against them has been increasingly strengthened, through both normative instruments and methods of prevention, fight and intelligence by the Penitentiary police.

That fight is not over yet, but during the years, it gave very meaningful results.

We must consider that the illicit activities carried out by the various mafia-type organizations existing in Italy – that today are taking roots also in Europe and in other Continents – are characterized by the strength of their membership bond and by the condition of subjugation and the code of silence deriving from it to perpetrate crimes, to gain the direct or indirect management of or the control over business activities, or to manage or gain public services with the aim of earning unfair profits and benefits for themselves or for others, hindering – for example – the free exercise of vote in case of elections.

This is why our Country has been constantly integrating and improving the existing laws, thus providing the law enforcement agencies and the judiciary with more and more efficient instruments to fight against that phenomenon.

At the same time, also the norms regulating the execution of sentences have been drafted and amended to make them more effective.

The subdivision of inmates into categories – that is the grouping of inmates by homogeneous categories, as well as the organization of the spaces in the penitentiary facilities in bedrooms and rooms for the inmates' activities in common – allowed to optimize the management of the prison population, ensuring different levels of security and treatment according to the different categories of the imprisoned subjects.

In order to contribute – under the organizational aspect – to achieve the goal of prevention of crimes perpetrated in the framework of criminal organizations, it was necessary to aim at cutting the contacts between the imprisoned members of criminal organizations and their comrades still at large. To cut their contacts, the principle of sentence territorialisation – that is the assignment of an offender to the penitentiary establishment closest to his/her area of residence – is not applied, while, on the contrary, every other inmate is entitled to it.

The added value of the penitentiary system is therefore to affect in a meaningful way the flows of communications which are the vital nourishment of criminal organizations.

Hence, the need arose to establish the regime that today is provided for by article 41-b of the Penitentiary Act. In compliance with the principle of lawfulness, a person can be submitted to a special regime – considering its derogation from the normal penitentiary discipline – by order of the administrative Authority only in the cases and with the modalities provided for by the law. In addition, it is possible to lodge an appeal against those provisions before a judicial authority.

Besides the ability to manage the daily life in detention of the inmates belonging to organized crime, the gathering of information, the monitoring and a careful observation of the prisoners are a fundamental support to the fight against criminal organizations. Every detail collected through the intelligence by the Penitentiary Police allows to adopt prevention measures also in coordination with judicial authorities and other law enforcement agencies.

In conclusion, we can say that it is exactly in the action of organizing and managing the prison population that we can find the opportunity to tackle criminal activities and namely mafia-type criminal organizations.

Therefore, the assignment of inmates to different categories allows to shape situations of experimentation, of revitalization and enrichment of life in prisons, through cultural, work and socializing activities. This can be carried out thanks to the contribution of all penitentiary workers, as well as of volunteers from the community, who work every day to establish an environment of exchange and to facilitate the process of inmates' social reintegration.

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I wish you all a fruitful meeting dealing with those delicate and exciting topics of promotion of mental health of imprisoned persons and of education in prison, that are the expression of the true care that in every Country the society on the whole must put on the prison population, as an absolute priority.

Thanks to each one of you for the precious work of study and exchange that you will carry out in the next days.