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Correction Service in Albania

Joana Fico

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Abstract

The Correctional Service has an important role in the process of rehabilitation and resocialization of prisoners, with the aim of facilitating their integration into social life after the end of their sentence. However, this system faces a number of serious challenges that undermine its efficiency and functioning, including overcrowding of penitentiary institutions, lack of financial and human resources, as well as the urgent need for in-depth legal, organizational and administrative reforms. In this context, the role of the Correctional Service becomes increasingly important to guarantee not only security, but also respect for the dignity and rights of prisoners, contributing to reducing recidivism and improving public safety. Building an efficient and humane correctional system is essential not only to guarantee criminal justice, but also to protect social order, contributing to the creation of a safer, more just and more inclusive society.

Keywords: Correctional Service, Treatment of prisoners, Reform of the system, Reintegration after prison, DPP, Ministry of Justice, CoE, UN.

1. Introduction

The Correctional Service in Albania constitutes an essential link of the criminal justice system, with the primary mission of ensuring the execution of court decisions in accordance with national and international legal standards, as well as with the respect of fundamental human rights. Beyond its traditional function of maintaining order and security within penitentiary institutions, the Correctional Service plays an important role in the process of rehabilitation and resocialization of inmates, with the aim of facilitating their integration into social life after the completion of their sentence. Nevertheless, this system faces a series of serious challenges that undermine its efficiency and functioning, including the overcrowding of penitentiary institutions, the lack of financial and human resources, as well as the urgent need for profound legal, organizational, and administrative reforms. In this context, the role of the Correctional Service becomes increasingly important in ensuring not only security but also the respect of the dignity and rights of convicts, thereby contributing

to the reduction of recidivism and the improvement of public safety.

This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the structure, functions, and issues characterizing the Correctional Service in Albania, as well as to examine whether the implemented practices comply with the best international standards. The analysis is based on a review of legal and sublegal acts, institutional reports, official statistics, and academic literature, with the aim of providing a complete and reliable overview of the current situation.

This paper aims to address the following key research questions:

- How does the correctional system in Albania currently function, and what are the most significant challenges it faces?
- To what extent have international standards for the treatment and rehabilitation of prisoners been implemented?
- What reform measures can be undertaken to improve the functioning of the Correctional Service and enhance its effectiveness?

The structure of this paper is designed to follow a logical sequence: it begins with the presentation of the legal and institutional framework, followed by an analysis of the current state of the correctional system, then proceeds with a comparison to international practices and models, and concludes with concrete recommendations for potential reforms and improvements.

2.The legal and institutional framework of the correctional service in Albania

The system of execution of criminal decisions in Albania is based on a broad legal and sublegal framework that clearly defines the organization, responsibilities, and functions of correctional institutions. The main legal framework includes Law No. 81/2020 "On the Rights and Treatment of Convicted Persons and Pre-detainees," Law No. 79/2020 "On the Execution of Criminal Decisions," and Law No. 80/2020 "On the Prison Police" (Ministry of Justice, 2020).

Albanian legislation aims to be aligned with international conventions and standards, in particular the United Nations Mandela Rules, which establish the minimum standards for the treatment of prisoners, guaranteeing respect for their dignity and fundamental rights. Furthermore, the framework incorporates the European Prison Rules and the Measures of Pre-trial Detention adopted by the Council of Europe in 2006, which emphasize the importance of humane treatment and a rehabilitation-oriented approach (Council of Europe, 2006).

From an institutional perspective, the Correctional Service in Albania is organized and managed by the General Directorate of Prisons, which operates under the authority of the Ministry of Justice. This service comprises a network of 21 correctional institutions, including prisons and pre-trial detention centers, with a total capacity of approximately 6,284 places (General Directorate of Prisons, 2024). However, in practice, these capacities are often exceeded due to the phenomenon of overcrowding, creating serious difficulties in the management of inmates and in the effective implementation of rehabilitation programs. The structure of the Correctional Service is divided into specialized departments covering various areas such as security,

psycho-social treatment, healthcare services, education, and the schooling of inmates. Close cooperation between these departments is essential for the fulfillment of the service's mission, which is not limited only to ensuring order and discipline but is particularly focused on the rehabilitation and social reintegration of convicts, with the aim of preventing recidivism (Ministry of Justice, 2023).

3. Current state of the correctional service in Albania

3.1 Capacities and the Problem of Overcrowding

The Albanian correctional system consists of 21 institutions, including prisons and pre-trial detention centers, with a total capacity of approximately 6,284 places. According to the latest data from the General Directorate of Prisons, this capacity is often significantly exceeded, making overcrowding one of the most pronounced problems within the correctional system.

Overcrowding directly affects the quality of life of inmates, creating inadequate accommodation conditions and making it difficult to provide basic services such as food, healthcare, and education. Furthermore, overcrowding limits the opportunities for the effective implementation of rehabilitation programs and increases the risk of conflicts and violence within institutions.

3.2 Treatment and Rehabilitation of Inmates

Efforts to improve the treatment and rehabilitation of inmates have included the introduction of various educational and vocational programs. Initiatives have been developed to provide professional training courses and educational activities aimed at enhancing the skills and resocialization of convicts. However, these programs face numerous challenges due to the lack of financial resources and specialized staff. According to reports from domestic and international organizations, the implementation of international standards for the treatment of inmates still leaves much to be desired. Limited access to psycho-social services and the lack of sustainable programs for post-release reintegration also remain significant problems.

3.3 Security and Management of Institutions

Security in correctional institutions represents a continuous challenge for the authorities. Although steps have been taken to strengthen security systems and train staff, overcrowding and the lack of sufficient resources continue to hinder effective management. In some cases, incidents of violence and tensions among inmates have been reported, as a result of overcrowded conditions and insufficient supervision. These situations highlight the urgent need to improve organizational measures, increase the number of trained staff, and invest in security infrastructure.

4. Comparison with International Practices

4.1 International Models of the Correctional Service

In many developed countries, the correctional system is built on humane principles

and focuses on the rehabilitation and reintegration of inmates into society. The Nordic models, particularly those of Norway, Sweden, and Finland, are well known for their efficiency and successful results in reducing recidivism. These countries provide dignified living conditions for inmates, treating them with respect and ensuring access to education, vocational training, and employment. A particularly important aspect of these models is continuous psycho-social support, not only during incarceration but also after release, with the aim of achieving sustainable social reintegration.

In addition to humane approaches, many other countries have applied modern technology in prison administration. This includes electronic monitoring systems, devices for tracking inmate movements, and digital platforms for data and security management. The use of technology has contributed to increased security and more efficient management of correctional institutions.

4.2 Lessons Albania Can Adopt

The analysis of the most advanced international practices highlights several valuable elements that could be adopted in Albania to improve the correctional system, such as:

- Improving inmates' living conditions and enhancing the quality of services requires significant investment, both in the construction and renovation of facilities and in strengthening the professional capacities of correctional staff.
- It is essential to create structured programs for education, vocational training, and psycho-social support, which can genuinely help reduce recidivism after release.
- The integration of advanced electronic monitoring systems and the digitalization of prison administration would enable safer and more efficient management of correctional institutions.

4.3 Comparative Assessment

Comparison with international practices shows that, although Albania has made some progress in improving the correctional system, significant gaps remain, particularly regarding living conditions, the treatment of inmates, and the provision of quality rehabilitation services. The implementation of successful elements from the Nordic models and the adaptation of modern technologies could bring a fundamental transformation to the functioning of the correctional system in Albania, contributing to the creation of a more effective, safer, and more humane system.

5. Challenges and Recommendations for Improving the Correctional Service in Albania

The correctional system in Albania faces a series of significant challenges that negatively affect the efficient functioning of penitentiary institutions and the achievement of rehabilitative objectives. Some of the most important challenges include:

- **Overcrowding in Correctional Institutions:** Correctional institutions often exceed their expected capacities, creating difficult living conditions for inmates

and complicating the work of staff. This overcrowding limits opportunities for educational and rehabilitative activities and increases the risk of internal incidents.

- **Lack of Financial and Logistical Resources:** Limited funding hinders investment in infrastructure, modern equipment, and the implementation of effective rehabilitation and reintegration programs for inmates. Many institutions face deteriorated conditions and a lack of basic services.
- **Insufficient Training and Professionalization of Staff:** Correctional Service personnel often lack continuous training and up-to-date knowledge in prison management and the humane treatment of inmates. This affects the quality of services and the management of complex situations.
- **Non-compliance with International Standards:** Although the legal framework has been aligned with international standards, in practice there are still gaps in meeting the requirements of the United Nations Mandela Rules and the European Prison Rules, particularly regarding living conditions, healthcare rights, and access to rehabilitation programs.

To address the identified challenges and build a more efficient, modern correctional system in line with international standards, the following measures are recommended:

- **Investment in Infrastructure and Expansion of Capacities:** The construction of new institutions and the renovation of existing ones is essential to reduce overcrowding and create more dignified living conditions for inmates. Improving infrastructure will also facilitate the implementation of educational and rehabilitative programs.
- **Increased Funding for Rehabilitation Programs:** Allocating sufficient financial resources for education, vocational training, and psycho-social support programs is necessary to help inmates reintegrate into society after their sentences. Investment in these programs can significantly reduce recidivism rates.
- **Training and Professionalization of Staff:** Organizing periodic training for correctional staff in areas such as security management, humane treatment, criminal psychology, and crisis management is essential for enhancing professional competencies and ensuring a more effective correctional service.
- **Implementation of International Standards:** Concrete measures must be taken to ensure full compliance with international standards in all correctional institutions, including improvements in living conditions, the provision of quality healthcare, and the guarantee of inmates' rights.
- **Use of Modern Technology:** The integration of electronic monitoring systems, information management, and security technologies can increase operational efficiency and help reduce internal incidents. The use of intelligent technologies will support better management of the prison population.
- **Strengthening International Cooperation:** Albania should enhance cooperation with international organizations and European networks such as EuroPris to benefit from the exchange of experiences and the implementation of successful practices from other countries. This will enable the improvement of policies and the raising of correctional management standards.

6. Perspectives for reform and improvement of the correctional service system in Albania

The future of the correctional service system in Albania requires a new, comprehensive approach oriented toward European standards. Reforms in this field must go beyond mere administrative measures, profoundly affecting the way the purpose of criminal punishment is conceptualized, the treatment of convicts, and their reintegration into society. One of the most important directions for the future is the expansion of alternatives to imprisonment. These may include:

- Probation sentences;
- House arrest with electronic monitoring;
- Community service sentences;
- Mandatory social or psychological rehabilitation programs for low-risk offenders;

These measures aim not only to reduce overcrowding but also to enhance the effectiveness of rehabilitation. The use of digital technology will have a significant impact on increasing transparency and efficiency. The key elements of this reform are:

- Creation of an electronic data management system for inmates;
- Implementation of electronic monitoring for individuals under alternative measures;
- Provision of online education and training for inmates;

7. Conclusion

From the study conducted on the functioning of the correctional service system in Albania, it emerges that this system faces serious challenges that directly affect its effectiveness as a tool for the rehabilitation and reintegration of convicted individuals. The analysis has shown that, although Albania has made efforts to improve conditions and align legislation with international standards, significant issues remain in the practical implementation of these regulations.

Firstly, overcrowding in correctional institutions remains one of the most critical problems, negatively impacting living conditions and hindering the provision of quality services for inmates. This situation not only violates human rights but also complicates the rehabilitation process and the preparation of convicts for successful reintegration into society.

Secondly, the Albanian correctional system is still largely oriented toward imprisonment, without fully utilizing alternatives to incarceration. The limited use of these alternatives not only burdens the system but also reduces the possibility of a more humane and effective approach to the treatment of convicts.

Thirdly, the lack of clear and well-structured policies to support inmates after release is another issue that contributes to the high rate of recidivism. Without sustainable social, economic, and psychological support, many former inmates face isolation and

significant difficulties in reintegrating into society.

Within this context, it becomes essential for the Albanian correctional system to move toward a deep and continuous reform. This reform should aim to: reducing overcrowding through the expanded use of alternative sentences, improving infrastructure and modernizing correctional institutions, enhancing the professional capacities of staff through continuous training, designing and implementing clear policies for the rehabilitation and reintegration of inmates after release, increasing transparency, accountability, and effective oversight of the correctional system. Only through these steps can the correctional system in Albania evolve from a traditional punitive model into a modern system that promotes rehabilitation, resocialization, and respect for human rights.

Ultimately, building an efficient and humane correctional system is essential not only to ensure criminal justice but also to protect social order, contributing to the creation of a safer, fairer, and more inclusive society.

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