



Criminal Justice Platform Europe

Radicalisation and Violent Extremism Conference, Barcelona, 14th October 2015

Workshop 3 : Religious care and Interagency cooperation

Chair: Kirsten Hawlitschek

Experts: Finn Grav
Steve Gorman
Hedi Selmi
Said Aberkan

Participants: 31

Notes: Anna Esquerrà

Impression: Good atmosphere: lively discussion and interaction with questions and general comments from the floor.

Kirsten Hawlitschek introduced the workshop and stressed the added value of the CJPE bringing together practitioners and experts from the three areas of the criminal justice chain.

Finn Grav, RAN chair from the Norwegian Prison and Probation Service explained with regard to chaplaincy in prisons that sometimes there is suspicion between imams and prisoners, therefore it is important to build a trust relationship. During the four years working in the RAN Network it was expressed in many forums that Radicalization is not only a religious matter, it is about people wanting for having some goal in their life. Radicalisation is also about people's identity and about persons feeling without hope. Most important challenge in the work on radicalisation is how to make all agencies and organizations work together and establish a good coordination.

Steve Gorman, NOMS, said that in England it is required by law to provide chaplaincy in all prisons. He mentioned that it is important to understand that the Islam is not a one size fits all religion. Also, politics have an influence on how the role of imams is seen and changes in this role could mean that the trust relationship between imams and prisoners needs to be re-established. Many terrorists hate chaplains or imams because of the role they have in prisons and communities. But imams are highly respected



persons and so they can help to share with the communities that the Prison Service is not against Muslims. He stressed his respect for the role of imams in prisons.

Hedi Selmi and **Saïd Aberkan**, Islam Counselors from the Belgian Prison Service expressed that the religion can be understood in many different approaches. Many people feel lost in society, they do not have a goal or a purpose and then they are open to persons who give them a purpose and in some cases this is radicalism. The role of imams in the prison system is to work with faith. The imam should not be seen as someone who is part of the system, since this could have a negative impact on the very important aspect of building a relationship with the prisoners. And it is important that imams can also give advice to the Prisons service.

The workshop continued via questions from the floor:

- *How is the recruitment process for prison Muslims counselors organized?*
In England a good knowledge of English language is required and an interview to assess their skills is taken. The Prison Service takes the decision about the recruitment. Norway cooperates with the Board of mosques and try to recruit imams from the relevant mosques. It was also added that not all imams are fit to do this kind of work so a good recruitment process is essential.
- *How do you deal with the credibility of imams and how do you involve them in the detection of radicalized offenders?*
Selmi said that through building a faith and trust relationship they can get to the radicalized prisoners and see how they respond. If they accept to have a conversation, that is already something positive. But it is not always possible to identify radicalized Muslims, especially because the symbols are not clear.

Other comments:

- The Catalan example was introduced. In Catalan prisons multi-religion attention is offered, trying to make lives and services inside prisons as similar as possible to normal society (outside prisons). In Catalonia a Partnership Agreement between the religious institutions and the Catalan Ministry of Justice is developed. Within this framework the religious institutions are asked to select the required professionals for the Catalan prisons that deal with religious matter.
- Aberkan mentioned again his idea of an international network of prison imams. The RAN network also got a request of bringing together an European network of imams and practitioners (not limited to prison). EuroPris and RAN will discuss this further.
- A representative from the Belgium staff training Centre introduced a specific case of radicalized prisoners that did not want to talk to the imam, but accepted to talk to another chaplain. Meaning it is important to not only focus on imams when talking about religious care. It is important to build an approach based on the human relationship. The perspectives should be widened to include persons from different religions learning to live with each other. Similar to the presentation of Tim Chapman about building relationships between Catholics and Protestants. It is about building relationships that are based on mutual respect.

