

9th CONFERENCE FOR DIRECTORS GENERAL OF PROBATION

PROBATION IN THE NEW NORMALITY

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“MAKING THINGS BETTER: WHY QUALITY ASSURANCE MATTERS”

Before entering into the subject matter of my intervention, it is worth briefly recalling Italy's overall system to enforce criminal sentences, both inside and outside prisons.

The competent departments of the Ministry of Justice are two:

- i) the **Department of Penitentiary Administration**, which deals with the penitentiary sector and its 54,307 adult inmates in 190 penal institutions on the national territory;
- ii) the **Department for Juvenile and Community Justice**, which manages the whole juvenile penal sector as well as all the probation services for adults.

This rather original organisational structure was created by the Reform of 2015, which intended to administratively and physically separate the "*Prison*" and the "*Probation*" sectors. By placing all the Probation services within the Juvenile & Community Justice Department, which always made probation the pivot of its mission with young offenders, we meant to reinforce this sector, also by making it really independent from the Prison Administration. The *Directorate General for Community Sanctions and Probation* that I have the honour to lead in the Juvenile Department manages 11 Inter-District Offices throughout the whole country, where 72 Probation Services are located.

In recent years, the number of probationers in Italy (i.e.: 67,792) has far exceeded the number of inmates (i.e.: 54,307). Another very important reform, which will come into force within a year, provides for more probation measures that shall be issued by the

Trial Judge directly, and not by the Surveillance Judge, when the sentence does not exceed 4 years.

In this context, now more than ever there is a need in Italy to discuss on the quality of our interventions, taking into account the growing number of probationers and the staff resources available to the system. As of today, probation officers in Italy amount only to 1,230 for adult offenders, so the most serious problem for our social workers or probation officers is to keep ensuring the same quality intervention in each single case they deal with while each one of them has to handle so many cases, with an actual ratio of about 1 to 55.

Moreover, Northern and Southern Italy are characterised by uneven wealth and standards of living, while the organised crime affects especially Southern regions; for these reasons, the job opportunities offered for social reintegration of probationers into the community are much higher in the North of the country.

My Directorate has clearly instructed all the services across the country to diversify their work with probationers so as to ensure, at the same time, the best quality of social reintegration opportunities, the fight against organised crime and a balanced management of such a large number of cases in such diverse social and cultural contexts within the same country.

- The *first* operational guideline provided by the Head Office in Rome consisted therefore in cooperating always with the local institutional stakeholders in each territory (first of all with the judiciary, both Trial Judges and Surveillance Courts) by signing *ad hoc* protocols to agree upon both the contents of the relevant social reports and the timeframe for their delivery.
- *Secondly*, it was necessary that our staff learned how to distinguish between probation measures with a purely deflationary function (which basically serve to

avoid imprisonment to offenders who were sentenced to short terms) and probation measures with a specific function of social reintegration, which require more attention in working with probationers and accompanying them. Therefore, in order to ensure quality professional interventions, we asked our local probation officers to work in teams that specialise in the same type of measure (judicial probation *versus* probation in the enforcement stage, as well as relations with either penal institutions or inmates themselves) so as to be able to provide the highest quality of expertise in either form of probation.

- The *third* indication given was to work jointly in team with other professionals on each single case, by involving not only social workers and probation officers then, but also psychologists, educators, volunteers, criminal mediators and staff from municipal services. Compared to other European realities I visited in recent years, I must admit that this teamwork may be sometimes quite hard to achieve in my country.

In conclusion, despite the effective strategies already put in place - of which I have spoken above - in addition to the reform under way in Italy, it would be very appropriate to double, at least, the number of probation officers currently available in staffing levels in my country. Only in this way we will be able to ensure the quality of interventions that is essential for truly re-integrating offenders into society as well as to lower their re-offending rates and build up a real justice and security space.

Thank you for your kind attention.

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