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Long-term Imprisonment and the Issue of Human Rights in Member States of the European Union

Synopsis

The project on “Long-term Imprisonment and the Issue of Human Rights in Member States of the European Union” – hosted and organised by the Department of Criminology of the University of Greifswald – is a co-operation of 11 research institutions from member states and candidate countries of the European Union. Participating are the following universities and research institutions:

- **Belgium:** Free University of Brussels (VUB) (Prof. Dr. Sonja Snacken)
- **Croatia:** University of Rijeka (Prof. Dr. Velinka Grozdanić)
- **Denmark:** University of Aarhus (Prof. Dr. Annette Storgaard)
- **England/Wales:** University of Nottingham, (Prof. Dr. Dirk van Zyl Smit)
- **Finland:** National Research Institute of Legal Policy, Helsinki (Prof. Dr. Tapio Lappi-Seppälä)
- **France:** University of Strasbourg Marc Bloch (Pascal Décarpes)
- **Germany:** University of Greifswald (Dr. Kirstin Drenkhahn, Dr. Manuela Dudeck, Prof. Dr. Frieder Dünkel)
- **Lithuania:** Institute of Law, Vilnius (Dr. Gintautas Sakalauskas)
- **Poland:** Jagiellonian University, Krakow (Dr. Barbara Stando-Kawecka)
- **Spain:** University of Barcelona (Prof. Dr. Esther Gimenez-Salinas)
- **Sweden:** University of Stockholm (Prof. Dr. Hanns von Hofer).

The project is financially supported by the European Commission for two years (31 December 2006 – 30 December 2008) within the framework programme AGIS.

The project aims at ameliorating the situation of and adherence to human rights in long-term imprisonment and similar sanctions (i. e. more than five years of custody). This also comprises improving the living conditions and the chances of rehabilitation of the prisoners. Long-term imprisonment is a very precarious form of custody

because the number of prisoners with very long custodial sanctions is rising in many European states. These prisoners are exposed to the negative effects of imprisonment to an even greater extent than the average prisoner because of the length of their respective sentences. At the same time, they are often excluded from rehabilitation measures.

The bases of our survey are a statistical analysis of secondary sanctioning data and an outline of the correctional infrastructure as far as custodial institutions and their organisation are concerned in the participating states with respect to long-term imprisonment. In addition, two correctional institutions in each participating country shall be subject of an empirical study with a multi-modal approach which considers the situation and perception of the prisoners themselves as well as the general framework of long-term custody in each institution. For data collection, instruments shall be used which were developed for two previous studies: the first on male prisoners in closed custody in general (the "Mare-Balticum Prison Survey"), and the second on women's imprisonment (see a final report under <http://jura.uni-greifswald.de/duenkel/english/publications/women-in-prison.html>). One particular questionnaire is of particular importance, because it addresses the prisoners themselves who are asked to assess their living conditions. These instruments have been revised with regard to the particular problems of long-term prisoners.

After having applied for financial support to the European Commission in January 2006, the project has been further advanced and developed together with Prof. Dr. Harald Freyberger and Dr. Manuela Dudeck of the Psychiatric and Psychotherapeutic Clinic of the University of Greifswald. In addition to the afore-mentioned data on living conditions in custody, data shall also be collected on psychic and mental problems, especially on traumatisations. Irrespective of the length of incarceration, empirical studies show a prevalence of psychiatric/mental illnesses of up to 95%. The prevalence of traumata as an important risk factor for mental disorders in the prison population is estimated at 95% as well, with 40-60% of the prisoners developing a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Even the predominantly serious offence that they have committed as well as the living conditions in custody may have a traumatising effect. Moderator variables of these detrimental effects of incarceration appear to lay in individual characteristics of the prisoners – for instance personality traits, age and health – as well as their attitude towards the offence and their prison sentence, and living conditions that they experience in custody.

The data shall be analysed with particular regard for practical implications. The main objective is to empirically identify "best practices" for long-term imprisonment as well as risk factors which pose a threat to needs-based practice in corrections. In addition, the level of need for psychiatric/psychological treatment shall be determined.

During the first six months the questionnaires will be translated into the languages of the 11 participating countries. Data collection with prisoners and prison managers will be conducted within the following six months. The second project year is dedicated to data analysis and preparing the final report.

Findings shall be disseminated in publications and presentations. Furthermore, a short report will be compiled which is geared towards practitioners of this field.

