REVIEW

by Prof. Dobrinka Ivanova Chankova, PhD, Professor at the Criminal Law Sciences Department of the Faculty of Law, Varna Free University "Chernorizets Hrabar", Professional field 3.6 Law, appointed by order of the Rector of Varna Free University № 635 /01.10.2026 г. as a member of the scientific jury for the public defence of the thesis of

KRENAR BARDHI

Doctoral student of self-study in the Criminal Law Sciences Department of the of the Faculty of Law, Varna Free University

on the topic:

INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS FOR EFFECTIVENESS OF PENITENTIARY SYSTEMS OF BULGARIA AND ALBANIA (CRIMINOLOGICAL AND CRIMINAL LAW ASPECTS)

For acquiring the educational and scientific degree DOCTOR in the Higher Education area 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, Professional field 3.6 Law, Doctoral Programme "Criminology"

1. **Brief biographical notes on the doctoral candidate**

The PhD candidate, Krenar Bardi, has studied at several universities in Albania and holds degrees in various fields: Social Work, Government and

Public Administration, and Law. Most relevant to the present dissertation is his Master's degree in Criminal Law, obtained from Albanian University in Tirana. He has had an extensive and diverse professional career, notably including work at the General Directorate of Prisons, practice as a lawyer, and a lecturer on Criminology and Penology at Alexander Moisiu University in Durrës. All of these have been particularly beneficial for the development of his dissertation.

In 2023, Krenar Bardhi enrolled as an independent-study doctoral candidate at Varna Free University "Chernorizets Hrabar" (VFU) in the professional field of Law (3.6), specializing in Criminology. In 2026, after fulfilling the requirements of his individual study plan and completing the dissertation draft, he was formally released from the program with the right to defend his thesis. Throughout his doctoral studies, he participated in the academic life of the university and the Faculty of Law. He has completed numerous additional training courses and participated in academic conferences, among other activities. The submitted documentation demonstrates compliance with the minimum national requirements set forth in Article 2b, paragraphs 2 and 3 of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and its implementing regulations, as well as VFU Ordinance No. 12 regarding the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" and the scientific degree of "Doctor of Sciences."

2. General characteristics of the dissertation

The dissertation is dedicated to a topical and significant issue: the current state of the art of the penitentiary systems of Bulgaria and Albania, both long criticised for non-compliance with international standards and violations of prisoners' human rights. Although the problem has been explored theoretically, the dynamic of the legal developments needs periodical review

and re-thinking, and due attention has to be paid to the practical aspects of the issue. That is why I find the thesis completely dissertable and necessary.

The object, subject, aims, and tasks of the study are very well defined and fully studied, and the results have been achieved. The adopted scientific methodology is correct. Based on a thorough and precise analysis, good knowledge of the theory and legislation - national, international and comparative, as well as the ECtHR jurisprudence, and skilful use of numerous research methods and scientific tools, many new theoretical conclusions and generalisations have been made, as well as institutional recommendations and proposals de lege ferenda, representing a contribution to penitentiary law and science.

The dissertation is a 190-page study comprising an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, an appendix, and a bibliography in Bulgarian, English and Albanian, as well as relevant national and international acts, Internet sources, and case law. The dissertation includes 124 footnotes, demonstrating conscientiousness and the ability to work with scholarly apparatus.

3. Evaluation of scientific and practical results and contributions of the dissertation

The **introduction** outlines the factors that determine the research's relevance and the reasons for the doctoral student's engagement with it. Numerous and reasonable arguments are provided, but it should be noted that it also contains elements which have to be part of the author’s abstract.

Chapter I examines the INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS FOR GUARANTEEING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PENITENTIARY SYSTEMS AND FOR PROTECTING THE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS OF DETAINEES

AND PERSONS DEPRIVED OF THEIR LIBERTY. Due attention is paid to the relevant international and regional - European- human rights instruments. The analysis is correctly based on the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the European Convention on Human Rights, the European Prison Rules, the practice of the European Court of Human Rights and other relevant sources. The various mechanisms to ensure the proper implementation of the established legal framework and penitentiary law principles are also explored.

Due recognition should be given here to the international organization known as the Association for the Prevention of Torture (www.apt.ch) and to the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture; both have recently contributed significantly to establishing and implementing standards within places of detention that are consistent with fundamental human rights.

The chapter provides a correct and in-depth discussion of the principles governing penitentiary law and systems. However, when addressing the principles of aligning prison life with life outside and providing support both before and after incarceration, it is also necessary to consider restorative practices within places of detention—practices that are widely applied in a comparative context and have demonstrated numerous benefits for the social reintegration of prisoners and the improvement of their quality of life upon returning to the community.

The second chapter explores the PENITENTIARY SYSTEMS IN THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA AND ALBANIA. Legal and institutional frameworks are under scrutiny as well as the existing challenges and best practices. A high level of knowledge has been demonstrated, and the analysis regarding compliance with international regulations is thorough and comprehensive. Attention should also be paid to the Implementing Regulation of

the Law on the Execution of Penalties and Pre-trial Detention, as well as certain other pieces of secondary legislation which, given the specific nature of the Bulgarian legal landscape, are of particular importance. The role of the Bulgarian Ombudsman as the National Preventive Mechanism should also be highlighted.

The third chapter is central and dedicated to RESEARCH OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PENITENTIARY SYSTEM IN ALBANIA FOR CRIME PREVENTION. The study is based on first-hand data collected directly from penitentiary staff working in some of Albania's largest detention facilities. This empirical component of the study is grounded in qualitative and semi-quantitative methods, combining a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, and its results bring significant added value to the dissertation. The findings are rightly interpreted, and the relevant conclusions are drawn. However, the results could be better visualized. The recommendations for improving the effectiveness of Albania's penitentiary system are well justified.

The conclusion summarises the most important findings. We must agree with the conclusion from the comparative analysis confirming that both Albania and Bulgaria face similar structural challenges, despite differences in institutional maturity. The international standards function as guiding frameworks whose practical effectiveness depends on the interaction among legal norms, institutional capacity, the professional integrity of staff, and available resources. With its outcomes and recommendations developed the study could be of use for both countries.

I highlight the following **key scientific and practical results and contributions that enrich existing knowledge**:

- The carried-out comprehensive comparative analysis of the impact of international standards on the penitentiary systems of Bulgaria and Albania, integrating legal, institutional, and criminological perspectives;

- The empirical study conducted on the Albanian penitentiary context—covering rehabilitation, working conditions, institutional capacity, and the prevention of recidivism—along with the interpretation of the findings;

- The identification of specific gaps and weaknesses within the Albanian penitentiary system and the forming of a vision to address them, including by drawing on the Bulgarian experience;

- The way in which the dissertation links international legal standards with criminological effectiveness;

- The formulated *de lege ferenda* proposals and institutional recommendations aimed at improving legislation, institutional management, staff professionalism, monitoring, and inter-institutional coordination. These proposals and recommendations can and should be taken into account by the legislature and implemented in practice.

There are three publications related to the dissertation topic—all in Bulgarian journals—that meet the required standards. Overall, the author's abstract has been prepared in accordance with the regulations and provides an objective and comprehensive reflection of the dissertation's content. However, the observation made earlier should be taken into account.

4. Opinion on the presence or absence of plagiarism

In the course of my work as a member of the scientific jury, no signals were received, argued in accordance with the relevant legal order in writing for the presence of plagiarism in the submitted thesis and other research works of the candidate. And I, as a member of the scientific jury, have not identified elements of plagiarism and unscrupulous use of foreign scientific results in the works of the candidate. The work is the author's own, and the contributions are original.

5. Notes and recommendations

Nevertheless, it is necessary to make some additional observations and recommendations; while these do not affect the merit of the research, they aim to guide any potential future work on the subject:

The language and style of the dissertation—including its grammar—could be improved. Technical errors should be corrected.

Standard bibliographic conventions should be consistently observed.

Some of the *de lege ferenda* proposals are rather general and require further elaboration and refinement to be of immediate practical use to the legislator.

To achieve the dissertation's intended impact, publications containing these recommendations should also be produced in Albania.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, *the dissertation contains sufficient theoretical summaries, findings, and ideas, representing an original contribution of both scientific and applied nature that enriches the theory of penitentiary law. Therefore, I find that the presented work meets the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation and the internal rules of Varna Free University regarding the awarding of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor".*

For these reasons, I give a positive assessment of the doctoral dissertation by Krenar Bardi and consider that he should be awarded the

educational and scientific degree of Doctor in Professional Field 3.6 Law, Doctoral Program "Criminology".

17.10.2026 Reviewer :

Prof. Dobrinka Chankova, PhD