



## Imprisonment: European Perspectives

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This volume of contributions to the study of European prisons and penal systems appears at a time when, perhaps more than ever before, problems of imprisonment are at the forefront of public consciousness and debate. In the United Kingdom, the penal system has broken out of its traditional invisibility, through a succession of prison disturbances, industrial disputes and increasingly spectacular riots and roof-top protests and subsequent judicial enquiries. In attempts to understand and come to terms with a penal system that is commonly regarded as being "in crisis", academic commentators and newspaper editors have begun to look elsewhere - notably other European countries - in what can only be described as a desperate search for instances of good practice which could help politicians and penal administrators find a solution to current ills. A desire and energy to reform the penal system is arguably greater now than at any time since the rehabilitative vision of the Gladstone report of 1895. This volume is intended as a contribution towards enhancing the quality of such debates. It underlines the importance of comparative study at a time when the economic, legal and political integration of all European nations is high on the political agenda. It does so by firstly reminding us that a willingness and desire to learn from the practices and policies of other countries has strong historical precedents dating back at least to the 16th century, and reaching its apogee in the work of John Howard at the end of the 18th century. Secondly, this volume explores contemporary penal policies in a number of European countries - notably England, Wales, Scotland, Germany, Holland and France - with a view to highlighting the diversity of practice that can (and does) exist within roughly comparable industrial societies. Thirdly, the final section of this volume considers the possibilities for the future convergence of policy and practice under the auspices of the 1987 European Prison Rules as well as the influence of the European convention on Human Rights, especially via its judicial arm - the Court of Human Rights at Strasbourg.

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