

Prof. dr. Miguel De Jonckheere, Dean of the faculty Law and Criminology, kindly invites you to the public defence to obtain the academic degree of

## DOCTOR OF CRIMINOLOGY

of Ms. Francesca Capano

which will take place on

Monday 31 March 2025 at 3:30 pm

In Auditorium I.2.01 and [online](#)

At the VUB main campus, Pleinlaan 2 - 1050 Etterbeek.

## THE IMPACT OF THE TERRORIST THREAT ON THE PRISON SYSTEM.

### Comparative analysis of Italy and the United Kingdom from the 1960s to the present day

#### SUPERVISOR

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**Dr. Lorenzo Vidino**  
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Are you not able to come in person? You can watch the livestream [here](#).

A map of the campus and directions to reach the VUB can be found [here](#). If you are coming by car, please register your numberplate [here](#) in advance for easy parking access.



## Abstract

The research takes inspiration from the increasing level of attention dedicated to prisons in relation to the terrorist threat over the last fifteen years. The role of prison in the life of a terrorist group was not a new phenomenon. However, what has been the impact of terrorism-related incarcerated persons on the prison system?

Combining two relatively new disciplines (criminology and terrorism studies) and designed as a thematic comparative study, the research investigates the evolution of prison policies in Italy and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the 1960s to the present day. The first step of the research is to define conceptual and temporal boundaries. Thus, it defines *domestic terrorism* the type of terrorist threat that Italy and the United Kingdom faced from the late 1960s to respectively the end of the 1980s and the end of the 1990s. *International terrorism* is used to refer to the threat represented by Al-Qaeda and its affiliates, in the United States and in Europe following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Finally, *new domestic terrorism* refers to the latest evolution of the terrorist threat that has its main point of reference in ISIS. The following step of the research is to understand the relevance of prisons. It does so by referring to the concept 'performativity of counter terrorism' in relation to the public perception of prisons. In order to overcome the popular belief that prisons are only places of radicalisation, it describes the use that terrorist groups have made of prisons in the past and highlights four areas of actions relevant for prisons in the context of a terrorist threat.

The core of the research is represented by the in-depth analysis of the evolution of the penal and penitentiary legislation in both countries. In particular, five trends have been identified in the response of Italy and the United Kingdom to the threat across decades: interdependence between the prison system and the evolution of the threat; protests within prisons; emergency legislative and administrative tools; so-called "pro-cyclical measures"; particularly severe high-security regimes. Having analysed how the legislative and constitutional systems of Italy and the United Kingdom were impacted by the terrorist phenomenon, the research continues by investigating the practical realities of managing terrorists in detention under various aspects: organisational structure, monitoring and intelligence gathering, security regime, risk assessment, prison conditions and the use of violence, and, finally, staff-prisoner relationship. The conclusions of the research summarise the findings and offer the reader further reflections on policy implications and avenues for future research.