

Managing Police Reform: Lessons Learned and Remaining Challenges in Central, East, and Southeast Europe

BACKGROUND:

During the past decade, the majority of states in Central, East, and Southeast Europe have been working on transforming their police organizations from “forces” that were tools for population control to “services” for the protection of safety and the public order for all of the state’s citizens.

Numerous donor initiatives, including initiatives of international organizations such as the Council of Europe, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), NGOs like the International Red Cross and the Open Society Institute, and bilateral Western government initiatives, have played a key role in facilitating and supporting, if not initiating, these processes.

Many of these initiatives have focused on human rights issues, and in recent years, increasingly on cooperation in combating organized crime, money laundering, and trafficking in human beings. The primary goal of bilateral cooperation among police departments has been to promote cross-border cooperation in reducing international crime, rather than promoting what is commonly referred to as “democratic policing.”

Ten years and millions of dollars later, progress has been achieved, yet in many cases, the process has been uneven and incomplete. This project will explore why this may be the case, and test the hypothesis that part of the reason lies in the lack of a comprehensive, or wholistic vision of reform: reform has been carried out without thinking through the implications that certain reform objectives have for the overall organizational structure and its operational subsystems.

PROJECT GOALS:

This project seeks to facilitate the reform of police organizations in the region by identifying the issues left unaddressed by existing reform efforts, and provide the rationale for investing in them. The focus will be on structural changes that underpin this process, and on strategic planning (or lack thereof) required to achieve systematic and progressive, if gradual and incremental, change.

The project will achieve this by (1) mapping out the key regional police reform initiatives and their areas of focus; (2) elaborating an overview of existing and emerging standards for policing, and the (neglected) consequences these imply for reform initiatives (e.g. management practices); and, (3) summarize the remaining unmet needs in a policy paper targeted toward both national police organizations as well as international organizations and donors carrying out and supporting police reform initiatives.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES:

(a) At the initial stage, in close contact with advisors (police experts who have worked on police reform issues both from the region and from Western Europe), project will establish a tentative matrix of benchmarks, or standards of policing in a democracy. This will include a survey of existing standards as elaborated by international organizations such as the United Nations and the Council of Europe, and also widely accepted norms articulated in the form of principles or priorities in the relevant policy and academic literature.

(b) The project will then go on to map out the most important police reform initiatives carried out by international organizations in the region, and highlight unmet needs in light of the abovementioned matrix.

(c) In order to root the more theoretical aspects of this project (elaboration of standards) in the reality of police reform in practices, the research will be complemented by an in-depth case study (Serbia), as well as a comparative review of police reform in several Central and East European states through participation in a comparative study organized by the Geneva-based Center for the Democratization of Armed Forces (DCAF).

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

The research will identify gaps in reform efforts, particularly the operational and management consequences of key reform objectives. The results, particularly the policy recommendations, will be formulated as practical implementation guidelines both for the decision-makers in national police organizations as well as for implementing organizations and donors.

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