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Public Trust and Confidence in the Hungarian Police Today

has been improving steadily over the past thirty years, and trust has played an essential role in this. Crime and other man-made dangers encourage members of our society to isolate themselves from other people and organisations. People who have experienced harm would turn away from other social actors and services that provide security. Trust is an extremely important factor in crime prevention and detection. In my study I will present the situation of trust in the

Hungarian police and the importance of trust.

I. Introduction

The change of regime in 1989 was of particular significance in our history. Hungary was not only challenged by the battles carried out in the political arena, but also by the establishment of public security as a product, which meant a greater burden than before. Until then, closed borders, socialist ideology and a highly stagnant social image had stifled crime, but the change of regime marked a turning point in this respect. A number of independent studies have concluded that the subjective quality of life of the population deteriorated significantly during this period, with more and more people dissatisfied with their living conditions and perceiving their situation as hopeless. The primary reason for this was the breakdown of macro-social integration: recapitalisation broke down the compulsory full employment and redistributive state social policies. At the same time, the research done at the level of individuals have found that the self-protective interconnectedness of social groups and layers had also decreased, and the flow of resources through networks of connections, which at the time also served as a defence against power, had declined.²

During the period of regime change, the Hungarian police force found themselves in favourable conditions for a reform-oriented renewal of their integration into the organisation of the constitutional state, but the organisation did not undergo a complete transformation. Nevertheless, its efficiency

II. Trust, the present situation

Assessments of crime, security and criminal justice policy, the willingness to report crime and the existence or absence of trust in the criminal justice system are social components of attitudinal management of crime. The personal component is considered to be the assessment of victimisation, personal vulnerability, fear of crime and the consequent avoidance effect of the individual.³ The initial timeline of trust is the present. We associate trust with existing institutions (courts, administration, taxation), with the government in power, or with the current business environment. „Do you trust institution X?” However, the question is also implicitly future-oriented, since trust also encodes the question „What can I expect from someone/something?”. In our interpretation, expectation is a psychological attribute of public trust, a positive or negative image of the future. Everything that is real in the past and in the present, and thus all the results of governance, create confidence if they can generate positive expectations for the future.⁴

The UN's Rule of Law Indicators takes an institutional approach, examining the state of the police, judiciary and prisons. Its data sources are as follows: administrative data; expert surveys; public opinion polls; document reviews. The three institutions comprise the 135 indicators, namely police (41 in-

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² ÚTASI, Ágnes: „A bizalom hálója – Mikrotársadalmi kapcsolatok, szolidaritás” [The Web of Trust – Micro-Social Relations, Solidarity] (Budapest: Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, 2002.) 74.

³ KULCSÁR, Gabriella: „Punitiveness and fear of crime in Hungary in the past 30 years, Yearbook of 2012.” ed.: BALOGH, Zs. Gy. (Pécs: Essays of Faculty of Law University of Pécs, 2012) 159.

⁴ KIS, Norbert: „A bizalom szerepe és hatása az állam működésére és fenntartatóságára” [The Role and Impact of Trust on the Functioning and Sustainability of the State], *Pénzügyi Szemle/Public Finance Quarterly* LXIII. 300.

dicators), judiciary (51 indicators) and prisons (43 indicators).⁵ According to these indicators, the operation of the police is closely correlated with satisfaction with the policies of the society concerned, on the basis of an internationally established procedure. If the police are less effective, this has a negative impact on the trust that members of a society have in the organisation.

But in what way can the effectiveness of the police be measured? The answer is not as simple as it first seems. We may think in this context of detection indicators, investigative effectiveness, arrests, detentions and other statistical indicators. But the police alone cannot create public safety. The evaluation dimensions of the police's work in organising public safety are the followings: objective and subjective public safety. Objective public safety is usually characterised by statistical indicators. Objective measures can be the number of crimes and offences committed, the number of victims, the value of the offence or even the development of asset recovery. The figures that characterize the police are suitable for examining the performance of the organisation. Two qualitative expressions of performance are efficiency and effectiveness, and we need to draw a sharp line between them. The notion of effectiveness is not considered a qualitative indicator in the real sense, because it merely expresses that the police have done something that can be expressed in terms of the number of actions. When measuring subjective perceptions of public safety, however, five police functions should be identified basically, namely 1) community work, 2) accessibility, 3) intervention, 4) local investigations, 5) maintenance of public order...⁶ To put it bluntly, effectiveness can therefore be presented as a dimension of objective public safety that can be verified by objective indicators and statistically presentable values. However, behind the subjective sense of security achieved by the real values provided by service providers lies the effectiveness of the members of the system, including the police. Social embeddedness and central structure are somewhat contradictory concepts, which make statistical measurement of effectiveness almost indispensable, even if we know that these data have nothing to do with actual performance.⁷

Social surveys on trust in the police have a recorded history in Hungary since 2013. On an

11-point scale measuring trust in institutions, a score of 0 meant "I do not trust at all" and a score of 10 meant "I trust completely." Trust in institutions can be described generally as of weak medium level.⁸ According to a survey of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, confidence in the police has risen slightly over the past seven years, from 5.7 to 6.1 points.

In contrast to the improving trend in Hungary, the US police confidence index has been steadily declining. A federal survey found that 53% of the Americans had "a great deal" or "a fair amount" of trust in the police in 2019. In its introduction, the study outlines the main federal strategic ideas that would contribute to increasing public trust in police forces. These include: federal funding to strengthen law enforcement's community relations, enhancing data collection on police violence, body camera wear, funding for Community Oriented Policing Service (COPS), and congressional authority to advocate for criminal justice policy.⁹

The fact that the sense of trust in the Hungarian police has been higher than the sense of trust in the political system and even the legal system over the past seven years leads to the conclusion that the police have improved their efficiency and thus their service delivery in the recent period. I agree with Vince Vári's statement that "*the effectiveness and social function of the police cannot be reduced to statistical or 'direct' satisfaction indicators, or to the results of surveys showing an increase in the trust index. The reduction to this is a hypocritical, disingenuous attempt to satisfy, by means of tangible, exact means, an abstract need for effectiveness which, according to criminological research, can least be influenced by concrete law enforcement data or by propagating the image of its social impact.*"¹⁰ It would therefore be inappropriate to rely solely on trust indices when measuring police effectiveness, which would require the development of a complex survey that would include the processing, in addition to the instruments discussed above, of other subjects and feedback (e.g. complaints against police actions, the nature of reports, thank-you letters).

However, for the purposes of this study, I do not share Caspar Wiebrens' view that the police are not a political organisation, so it is not necessary for them to decide what to do and what not to do on the basis of opinion polls. It is solely the task and right of a political system consisting of appointed

⁵ Kis, Norbert: „Biztonság, bizalom és a jó kormányzás” [Security, Trust and Good Governance], *Allamtudományi Műhelytanulmányok* 2016. No. 23. 7.

⁶ Kis, Norbert – SZENES, Zoltán – VAJDA, András – TÁLAS, Péter – WEICKHARDT, Gotthilf – FEJES, Zsuzsanna – KLOTZ, Péter – CSÓKA, Gabriella: „Biztonság és bizalom a kormányzatban. A jó állam mérhetősége” [Security and Trust in the Government. Measuring Good Government], (Budapest: University of Public Service, 2014) 28.

⁷ FINSZTER, Géza: „A rendőrképzés és a rendészettudomány” [Police Training and Law Enforcement], *Tiszteletkövet Sárkány István 65. születésnapjára* [Tribute Booklet for István Sárkány's 65th Birthday], ed. NÉMETHI, Zsolt (Budapest: Rendőrtisztviselői Főiskola [Police College], 2010) 67.

⁸ Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2.2.4.5. *Statistikai tábla – Bizalom* [Statistical Table – Trust], Downloaded: 06.08.2021 https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xstadat/xstadat_eves/i_zaa012.html.

⁹ Congressional Research Service: „Public Trust and Law Enforcement – A Discussion for Policymakers”. (Washington: 13 July 2020) 2.

¹⁰ VÁRI, Vince: „A bűnüldözés relatív hatékonysága és a rendőrség”. PhD-értekezés [The Relative Effectiveness of Law Enforcement and the Police. PhD thesis]. (Miskolc: University of Miskolc, 2016) 279–280.

and elected officials to determine this.¹¹ However, I agree with István Szikinger, who quotes Wiebrens, that public opinion is an important additional source of information for making power decisions.¹² It has to be the basis of a modern democratic police force that the leaders of the organisation have an independent strategic vision for the effectiveness of the organisation, in addition to the directives of the authorities, and it is therefore important for them to monitor feedback of this type.

III. Innovative tools for law enforcement

At the beginning of the new millennium, the British and Welsh police created a set of requirements for reassurance policing. The model is based on the development of law enforcement activities required by society, and the dispelling of fear of crime. The main priority was to increase the acceptance of public safety activities by the population, thereby improving detection efficiency.¹³ Attempts have also been made to introduce foreign models in Hungary. In the case of the most recent project, the development of the district commissioner service into a community policing model was initiated. The pilot scheme, supported by the so-called “Swiss Fund”, was implemented in four cities: Miskolc, Nyíregyháza, Szeged and Zalaegerszeg. “Thanks to the Swiss-Hungarian Cooperation Programme, a total of HUF 476 million in Swiss funding, complemented by Hungarian funding totalling HUF 560 million, made it possible to test the community policing model at application level in Miskolc, Nyíregyháza, Szeged and Zalaegerszeg between 2012 and 2016. The aim of the project, which was implemented with the participation of the Ministry of Interior, the National Police Headquarters and the county police headquarters concerned, was to enable the police to identify public safety problems together with members of local communities and to involve the public more in the development and implementation of solutions to resolve them. The philosophy of community law enforcement can be a way for police stations to use their resources more efficiently, to meet the needs of the community. In the year following the training of the staff involved in the project, an analysis was made of the extent to which the tools of community law enforcement –

which have been used for several decades in Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, among others – can complement the traditional Hungarian police model and procedures. The designated staff of the police stations contributed to the development of a more direct contact with citizens and to the strengthening of trust between the police and citizens by holding, among other things, office hours and crime prevention lectures. Participants in the final event of the project presented and evaluated the experiences and results achieved.”¹⁴ In the frame of the pilot, 40 district police officers received training in community policing on the basis of voluntary applications, but the project was not well communicated to the staff concerned. Colleagues told us that they had been reluctant to participate, mainly because of uncertainties. They feared that the pilot would lead to further distraction from their core tasks and were also afraid of additional workload. In the districts created in the settlements involved in the pilot, there was one community policeman for every 15 000 inhabitants. Experts with experience in public policing expressed concern about this and predicted that the effectiveness of community law enforcement would be limited in such a large population.¹⁵ Community policing is a model of policing introduced in Anglo-Saxon countries, which by its very nature does not involve the principles of a centrally operating police force. The district commissioners involved in the programme mentioned earlier were independent of other tasks, but I am convinced that in the reactive approach system socialised in the Hungarian police, with its statistical approach, it would have been impossible to make the transition in the long term. This was made more difficult by the surge in illegal migration in 2015, ongoing distractions such as territorial or national-level security tasks, actions or even the obligations arising from the EU White Paper on improving the traffic police management situation.

In addition to the dichotomy of state police and market-based private security firms, a third way is called community policing, which replaces the highly hierarchical and disconnected police with an emphasis on cooperation with the public.¹⁶ Another issue is funding, whereby smaller municipalities would start with less funding to create public

¹⁴ Közösségi Rendészeti Projekt, [Community Policing Project] Downloaded: 26.07.2021. <http://www.police.hu/hu/a-rendorsegrol/europai-tamogatások/egyeb-forrasok/kozossegi-rendeszeti-projekt>.

¹⁵ CHRISTIÁN, László: „Egy feledésbe merülő közösségi rendészeti modellkísérlet margójára”, *Gondolatok a Rendészettudományról. Írások a magyar rendészettudományi társaság megalapításának tizenötödik évfordulójára alkalmából*. [On the Margins of a Forgotten Community Policing Model Experiment, Reflections on Law Enforcement. Writings on the Occasion of the Fifteenth Anniversary of the Founding of the Hungarian Society for Police Science] (Budapest, 2019) 84.

¹⁶ CHRISTIÁN, László: „Az önkormányzati rendőrség és a közösségi rendészeti összefüggéseiről”. *20 évesek az önkormányzatok* [On the Connections between Municipal Police and Community Policing? 20 Years of Municipalities] ed.: KÁKAI, László (Pécs: Publikon Kiadó, 2010) 423–426.

¹¹ SZIKINGER, István: „A rendőrség és a közvélemény”. *Kriminológiai közlemények* [The Police and Public Opinion. Criminological Bulletins]. No. 54 (Budapest: Magyar Kriminológiai Társaság [Hungarian Society of Criminology], 1996) 30.

¹² SZIKINGER, István: „A rendőrség és a közvélemény”, 42.

¹³ ANDREW, Millie – HERRINGTON, Victoria: „Bridging The Gap: Understanding Reassurance Policing”, *The Howard Journal*, 2005/44, 41–56.

safety as a product, and the next issue is the representation of local political interests by a local law enforcement agency of local character. Although the Fundamental Law separated law enforcement tasks from national defence issues, thus placing them closer to the sphere of public administration, and the European Convention on the European Charter of Local Self-Government proclaimed on 15 October 1985 (in Hungary, enacted in Act XV of 1997) stipulates that “public tasks should generally be performed primarily by the public administration closest to the citizens”,¹⁷ they have not been met by the new Local Government Act.

IV. Service, cooperation

Just as the market changes, so must businesses. One of the main tasks of management companies during these changes is to help the business through the obstacles that come their way, to renew it and to make it dynamic. As new products emerge, so too, must the business be put on a new and more efficient path, and then profits will be made. The indispensable condition for development is that the business wants change, cooperates with the management company, follows its recommendations, discusses the various possibilities, and is open to innovation. This was recognised by the “Antall-Government” with being Balázs Horváth its Minister of Interior, which, by inviting the Dutch-based organisational consultancy TC Team Consult to carry out a review of the Hungarian Police, validated its intention to modernise the police force. Bernhard Prestel, one of the managers of Team Consult, which was screening the Hungarian police, summarised his experience as follows: The teachings of modern organisation science are only for the police, which itself wants to modernise.¹⁸ In the last quarter of the previous century, foreign police forces of a Western European continental nature had by then carried out social science surveys at several places, mainly based on sociological doctrines, using the Anglo-Saxon model. However, the Hungarian police, like the offices of other socialist governments, operated in such a way that its main virtue was conservatism and immutability, because communist legal certainty allows for long-term regularity, on which the office builds immutability. It is also characteristic of the system’s office that it does not build on its environment, but expects the environment

¹⁷ Article 4 (3) of Act XV of 1997 on the publication of the European Treaty Series-No. 122 European Charter of Local Self-Government of 15 October 1985, signed in Strasbourg. Downloaded: 22.07.2021 http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi?docid=99700015.TV

¹⁸ FINSZTER, Géza: „A rendőrség joga” [The Right of the Police] (Budapest: Duna Mix Kft, 2012) 195.

to adapt to it. There is no fear of bankruptcy, there is no sensitivity to performance, because that is not what was expected of the office and therefore of the police, but any kind of effectiveness provided on the ground of legality.

Society’s mechanism for maintaining independent public security was weakened, the product was expected from the service provider according to market rules, and therefore the rise in crime became an inevitable consequence. And as a barrier to the protection against the rise in crime, the law enforcement constraints, the police insecurity that caused it /and one of the reasons for it/ were legislative deficiencies.

As István Bibó predicted earlier; “*In order for public administration to be effective, it is not the executive power that must be strengthened, but it is the political influence on professional administration that must be reduced.*”¹⁹ In contrast, “in Hungary, since 1949, a centralised state police model has been in operation, based on military principles and separate from the civil administration.”²⁰

But the advantage of a modern democratic police is also the reduction of latency,²¹ which is associated with a negative statistical upturn in the first place. “*The quantitative increase and qualitative transformation of crime, the decrease in the subjective sense of security of the population is an extremely serious challenge for the Police of the Republic of Hungary.*”²² Says Péter Orbán in 1999, when the country was past the peak of its history in terms of crime generated, but the rate was still much higher than in the years before the regime change. This indicator was accompanied by underworld events, oil-related cases and blasts, which had a serious impact on the subjective sense of security.

“*The centralised organisation shrouds all its actions in a cloak of suspicion and secrecy, suspecting society according to the logic of law enforcement, instead of cooperating with it.*”²³ A police officer is trained by another police officer ... A police officer is trained to suspect everything and everyone in order to succeed in his job. This attitude of the police has a particular impact on the police, and negative attitudes expressed by some members of the community can increase the disconnect between the police and the community. “*When designing and changing the structure of an organisa-*

¹⁹ BIBÓ, István: „Válogatott tanulmányok. I–II. kötet” [Selected Studies. Volumes I–II.] (Budapest: Magvető Könyvkiadó, 1986) 275.

²⁰ FINSZTER, Géza: „Rendészettelmélet” [Law Enforcement Theory] (Budapest: University of Public Service, Faculty of Law Enforcement, 2014) 58.

²¹ „The high crime latency clearly indicates that people do not trust the police, they do not report crime.” In: NÉMETH, Zsolt, „Bűnüldözés – Bűnmegelőzés válsághelyzetben”, [Law Enforcement – Crime Prevention in a Crisis], *Főiskolai Figyelő*, 1999/2. No.108.

²² ORBÁN, Péter: „A magyar rendőrség modernizációs kísérletei,” [Attempts to Modernise the Hungarian Police] *Kriminológiai Közlemények* No. 57. (Budapest: Magyar Kriminológiai Társaság, 1999) 223.

²³ FINSZTER, Géza: „A rendőrség joga” [The Right of the Police] (Budapest: Duna Mix Kft, 2012) 248.

tion, it is important to take into account that the formal, visible organisation has a so-called informal, invisible structure, with its own customary law, structure and leadership. While in the one, rationality and organisational expectations are reflected, in the other the needs of the subjects who make up the organisation are reflected.”²⁴ Research shows that police officers have personality traits distinct from other professions. The combination of power and danger as intrinsic elements of the police profession can isolate the police from the community. This isolation triggers the stereotype in police officers of „us brothers together, the rest against us.”²⁵

The salaries of police officers, their technical equipment, the number of police officers, etc... show little correlation with the effectiveness of detection (Sung, 2006). Among the procedures and tactics used, there are of course more or less effective ones (Telep – Weisburd, 2012). But effectiveness also depends to a large extent on the interaction with citizens and their willingness to cooperate. Are people willing to report if they see something suspicious? Are they willing to give information to the authorities? Are they willing to testify? All these are more likely to happen if the police and their work are perceived as legitimate and have confidence in them – but this requires that police work is carried out in accordance with the principles of procedural fairness (Telep – Weisburd, 2012).²⁶ *“The role of law enforcement in society must be defined in such a way that law enforcement can ensure the cooperation of social diversity by minimising the potential for conflict. To transform organisational and hierarchical relationships, the organisation must be made open and flexible, and power within the organisation must be made functional. To transform the organisational culture, we need to create an atmosphere of cooperation based on peer-to-peer collaboration, autonomy, creativity, critical spirit and performance-based evaluation. Changes are needed in the area of legislation that are based on a model of law enforcement based on cooperation with the community, i.e. a service provider law enforcement model.”*²⁷

As Krémer et al. report in their research, one of the foundations of the service provider attitude is cooperation. However, the inducement of cooperation is a complex issue. Studying the cooperation

of individuals and organisations such as the police and self-governments, Tyler examined it in a series of empirical studies. His results show that cooperation in different situations and in different contexts has the same motivational basis.

Tyler’s social motivations:

– *Attitudes, emotions: positive attitudes and feelings towards given persons or institutions. E.g. fondness of the community, the pleasure of being with others, or pride or pleasure in one’s role in society (e.g. one’s job).*

– *Identity. Identifying with social groups or roles and acting accordingly.*

– *Values. Commitment to certain moral values or standards of right action. For example, following religious values or basic moral principles (e.g. keeping promises, sense of duty, etc.). He also mentions legitimacy as a subtype of this: acceptance of authority because of its substantive (pursuing the interests of the community) and procedural moral characteristics.*

– *Credibility-based trust and procedural justice. People are willing to follow leaders who are credible to them, especially if the leader also respects the principles of procedural fairness.*²⁸

If the Tyler model is applied to police cooperation, it absolutely holds its own in both the criminal and law enforcement fields. The attitude that links the levels of cooperation is the preservation and restoration of order and respect for public safety, which stems from the legal and social role of the individual based on moral values. Cooperation with individual organisations widens the scope for the possibility of contact with members of the public. Everyone has a different spectrum of trust, which includes different levels of people and organisations. The presence or absence of trust in the institutions of state criminal justice, as Beccaria reported,²⁹ greatly affects the effectiveness of the organisation. It is quite clear that the likelihood of active or passive cooperation with the police is higher when citizens trust the police. If they fear that their reports will not be taken seriously; if the police are slow to respond; if they respond at all to the call; if they do not trust that their personal data will be handled properly or that they themselves will be protected from criminals (e.g. in the case of testifying); if the police work is tainted by corruption and bias, then cooperation is unlikely to be realized.³⁰

²⁴ KALMÁR, Tamás: „Rendőri feladatok – szervezeti struktúra.” [Police Tasks – Organisational Structure]. *Belügyi szemle*. 2002/9. 58.

²⁵ MALAIS, Mary Grace T.: „Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree Master of Science in Criminology” (Mindanao: University of Mindanao Davao City 2011) 2.

²⁶ BODA, Zsolt: „Legitimitás, bizalom, együttműködés. Kollektív cselekvés a politikában” [Legitimacy, Trust, Cooperation. Collective Action in Politics], (Budapest: MTA Társadalomtudományi Kutatóközpont Politikatudományi Intézet [Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Section of Economics and Law] 2013) 93.

²⁷ KRÉMER, Ferenc – MOLNÁR, Katalin – SZAKÁCS Gábor – VALICSÁK, Imre: „Rendészeti kulturális stratégia.” [Law Enforcement Cultural Strategy] Downloaded: 03.08.2021 <http://www.nyelvelektorlas.hu/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Rend%C3%A9szeti-kultur%C3%A1lis-strat%C3%A9gia.pdf>.

²⁸ BODA, Zsolt: „Legitimitás, bizalom, együttműködés. Kollektív cselekvés a politikában.” [Legitimacy, Trust, Cooperation. Collective Action in Politics] 45.

²⁹ “Subsequent research confirmed Beccaria’s theoretical thesis: the presence or absence of public trust in the institutions of state criminal justice can significantly shape the willingness to comply with the law”. In: BORBÍRÓ, Andrea, „A kriminálpolitika és a társadalmi bűnmegelőzés kézikönyve – I.” [Handbook on Crime Policy and Social Crime Prevention – I], ed. KERESZSI, Klára, (Budapest: Igazságügyi és Rendészeti Minisztérium [Ministry of Justice and Law Enforcement], 2009) 118.

³⁰ BODA, Zsolt: „Legitimitás, bizalom, együttműködés. Kollektív cselekvés a politikában.” [Legitimacy, Trust, Cooperation. Collective Action in Politics.] 94.

V. Conclusions

The reform of the police has not taken place in the absence of a law enforcement strategy, but over the past thirty years the organisation has evolved to such an extent that its tasks have changed and developed on many fronts. There is a divided perception of the performance of the organisation in the context of government cycles and the changing expectations and criminal policy variables that go along with them. These subjective factors are influenced by the organisation itself, its changing human policies, but more importantly by its traditional sub-culture, the press, the social communities or the task itself.

So trust is of crucial importance. For the police to be effective and efficient, i.e. successful, it is essential to involve itself or have itself involved in so-

cial actions that do not seem to be directly related to its tasks. Monitoring the postman when he delivers pensions, or even joint service with the police in some of their tasks, is not just a form of service. Service is only an indicator of the assistance in which the organisation provides to the outside world.

“The situation is easier for a business organisation, whose profitability can be measured in an exact way, so the need to improve, together with increased efficiency, guarantees growth. On the other hand, the efficiency of public administration cannot be measured by quantitative indicators in the absence of exact figures, and if an attempt is made to do so, the consequences will be to mask low efficiency and discredit the statistics.”³¹

³¹ FINSZTER, Géza: „Vízziók a rendőrségről” [Visions about the Police], *Belügyi Szemle*, 2008/1. 14.