



# The development and importance of cooperation at the Hungarian Police

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## Abstract

**Aim:** Studying the openness of the Hungarian police in the context of cooperation.

**Methodology:** Qualitative research, document and content analysis.

**Findings:** The 1989 regime change fundamentally changed the Hungarian Police. The then closed organization became much more open, and today it has achieved the character typical of democratic police forces. This change required efforts not only from the organization but also from its members. In the Author's view, a positive development can be observed in both domestic and international cooperation. However, the changes in society today also increasingly indicate the need for further research, for taking into account the perspective of the public and the police, and not least for incorporating intercultural knowledge into (higher) police education.

**Value:** The value of the study is to draw attention to the cooperation from the organizational nature to one-to-one interaction, to strengthening of the service character of the police and its further development through the introduction of intercultural knowledge.

**Keywords:** cooperation, Hungarian Police, intercultural skills

## Introduction

This article aims to briefly describe the changes in the field of cooperation of the Hungarian Police after the regime change and to identify possible areas for further development in the future.

Until the change of political regime in 1989, the Hungarian Police, as is the case with other European police forces, played a mainly political role in Hungary. In the year of 1990 a reform process was initiated with the support of the Swiss state and the involvement of experts from TC Team Consult, through the implementation of the project '*Reform of the Hungarian Police 1990–1997*', with the aim of reorganising and democratising the Hungarian Police.

According to the research report, the implementation of the project has proved to be successful and has greatly contributed to the Hungarian Police becoming open to citizens and a service provider (Gottlieb, 1998).

The project's aims included promoting openness in the police, creating a new relationship between the public and the police, improving trust, increasing involvement in international cooperation and creating a new type of police officer. This article deals, in a non-exhaustive way, with this process and the results achieved in order to identify possible directions for further development.

## **The development and importance of cooperation**

Based on the available research, the Hungarian Police has since been proactively working to improve its service role, the nature of its service and its cooperation with the public, recognising that '*the success of cooperation strengthens trust between the parties. The presence or absence of trust in the institutions of the state criminal justice system therefore has a major impact on 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.*' (Bezerédi, 2021).

The efforts and achievements of the Hungarian Police in this direction are confirmed by several national studies. '*The Good State Report (Jó Állam Jelentés) measures the processes, outcomes and impact of government capabilities and activities that fall under the remit of security and social trust in five dimensions (...) two indicators reflect the subjective perception of the population (Public perception of safety in public places and in their living environment; Public trust in the police), while three indicators (Number of recorded intentional homicides, assaults, robberies and fraud; Annual government expenditure per thousand inhabitants on public order, civil protection, fire and disaster prevention; Human resources for law enforcement) are based on objective data that are key to the analysis in this area.*' (Jó Állam Jelentés, 2018).

The data in the report is based on the question 'How much do you personally trust the police?' based on the average distribution of the responses to the question (scored on a scale of 0–10), 'public trust in the police: 4.5 points in 2009, 5.3

points in 2013. Among the public institutions surveyed by TÁRKI<sup>1</sup>, the police had the second highest trust index, after the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

*‘According to the 2018 Good State Opinion Survey, Hungarian citizens have more trust in the police (average score 7.02) than in state agencies (6.47), local government (6.63) and the judiciary in general (6.60). The average score of the police has improved compared to the previous year (6.85), within the statistical margin of error.’* (Jó Állam Jelentés, 2018).

*‘The survey »Citizens’ trust in the police and private security providers in Hungary « also shows that citizens’ perception of the police is good. 79.5% of the respondents had a positive impression of the police and 77.5% rated the police’s treatment as positive.’* (Christián, 2016).

The importance of cooperation has been firmly embedded in the organisation of the Hungarian Police, and *‘teamwork, cooperation and trust have become part of the basic competences of the police.’* (Malét-Szabó, Hegyi, Hegedűs, Szeles & Ivaskevics, 2018). In a competency survey carried out within the organisation, in the 11 most important core competencies ranked 5th by participants in the survey were cooperation skills (Malét-Szabó et al., 2018).

According to the results of the research conducted at the Faculty of Law Enforcement of the University of Public Service, students are clearly prepared for cooperation and teamwork (Kovács, Pesti & Tózsér, 2019).

Following the results of the basic competence survey conducted by Malét-Szabó et al. in 2019, the cooperation competences of the third-year police officer students were clearly higher than those of the first-year students (Malét-Szabó, 2019), which also shows that the police officer training at the Faculty of Law Enforcement contributes to the development of cooperation competences.

In the area of cooperation with the public, the Hungarian Police has also taken innovative initiatives, such as the ‘Police Café’ model (Molnár & Uricska, 2018), which is an adapted version of the ‘World Coffee/Coffee with Cops’ method, (URL2) which is used in several countries, e.g. Belgium, Austria, and originated in America, to improve community development and police relations, but there are also examples of developing and improving cooperation with ‘foreigners’.

According to my knowledge, in Komárom-Esztergom county, on the initiative of Gábor Farkas, the chief of county police,<sup>2</sup> there was a training for the mainly professional (uniformed) staff, which dealt with the culture of the Mongolian and South Korean guest workers, who are appearing in the county in larger numbers, and served to disseminate (country) specific knowledge among the staff.

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1 TÁRKI: Social Research Institute in Hungary.

2 Brigadier General Gábor Farkas, Komárom-Esztergom County Police Chief.

In international terms, two main areas can be highlighted in the field of international cooperation of the Hungarian Police. The first is the participation of domestic personnel in foreign (peacekeeping) missions, the second is the organisational and individual, operational cooperation with different national cultures, which can take place both abroad and at national level.

The tradition of this kind of cooperation in both fields goes back several decades in the life of the Hungarian Police. *'The first »modern« law enforcement mission took place in the Balkans between 1903-1909,'* (Boda, 2006) involving a group of Austrian-Hungarian gendarmes, and since then members of the Hungarian Police have participated in several missions abroad (Uri, 2013). During the preparation for missions abroad and the execution of tasks, the Hungarian Police pays special attention to good cooperation and relations not only with local bodies but also with the local population, in order to avoid conflicts (Boda, 2006).

As to the institutionalization process of cooperation, the origins of international police cooperation date back to the early 19th century and can be linked to the expansion of nation states and the political independence of national police institutions, which became professional organizations (Sallai & Borszédi, 2022).

*„The structural changes in national police forces towards institutional autonomy and their independence from national governments led to a real international cooperation on a professional basis, which started in the first few decades of the 20th century. Indeed, the first step towards the establishment of an international police organisation was the first congress of the International Criminal Police Organisation, held in Monaco in 1914, which focused exclusively on law enforcement work.’* (Sallai & Borszédi, 2022).

I would also include the area of legal (law enforcement) cooperation, where the initial *'political police'* cooperation also achieved *'the well-regulated possibility for police officers of one state to exercise certain police powers on the territory of another state, to enter the territory of another state in the course of their duties.'* (Nagy, 2022).

This process has been accelerated by our membership of the EU *'(…) even before our country joined the EU, it was (although rarely) the case that a member of the Hungarian police authority was serving abroad in order to perform a police task, or that a foreign police officer was working in Hungary. However, since we have become a full member of the EU and the Schengen area, and since we have taken on the possibilities offered by the Prüm Decision, such cross-border forms of cooperation have become much more frequent (...)'* (Nyeste, 2022). This process also required a major change not only in the organisation of the police, but also in the staff themselves. *'While for police officers in Western European countries, cooperation with a member of another Member State's authority was*

*already part of daily practice; our country had to undergo significant changes in this area in order to be able to integrate into this system and to participate as an accepted, equal, proactive and active partner in the process of cooperation.*' (Nyeste, 2022).

Thus, changes were needed in the areas of attitudes, legal harmonisation and institutional development, trust, learning and teaching, professionalism, ethics and morals. *'Nowadays, the Hungarian authorities involved in cooperation have gained recognition and appreciation in many fields and have become reliable and professionally high performing not only »participating« but active »partners«.*' (Nyeste, 2022).

Participation in cooperation at the institutional level has increased, with the possibility of professional visits abroad, the secondment and reception of liaison officers, direct and/or indirect participation in the work of international police institutions (CEPOL, EUROPOL, FRONTEX), and the establishment of common contact points. Individual-to-individual interactions have also become increasingly important with the appearance of new types of international cooperation such as direct information exchange, joint investigation teams, cross-border surveillance and pursuit, controlled deliveries, joint patrols.

In solving common tasks, knowledge of the culture of the country in question can also help the collaborators, not only at the executive level but also at the managerial level, because in the international field *'a good leader must have the right knowledge, intelligence and knowledge of cultural differences'* (Boda, 2020).

However, a survey conducted among professional members of the Hungarian Police shows that police officers feel less trust and cooperation from the Hungarian public than they do from the international level. Vári's research was based on an older study (by Krémer-Molnár). The results did not differ much from those of the earlier research. Police officers perceived that citizens' trust in the police was more likely to be disinterested (36%) or dismissive (33%) (Vári, 2017).

This research is significant because the effectiveness of law enforcement – whether the police are working well or badly – is best illustrated by the level of public acceptance and trust in the police, according to police members (Vári, 2017).

Of course, in addition to the statistical approach, the social evaluation and perception of the police is increasingly coming to the fore, which reflects the success of the cooperation with the population in Hungary, and the main measure of which is, on the one hand, the subjective feeling of security, and on the other hand, the trust in the police (Christián, 2018). Research also shows that members of the police are also increasingly demanding feedback from members of society *'more narrowly professional decisions and methodologies, such as riot*

*planning, are the exclusive competence of the profession. However, in many areas there is a pressing need for citizen involvement based on trust-building. It should be realised that law enforcement public policy would benefit greatly from opening up to society. I note that a police officer on duty on the street, or a police leader or commander, would also need this kind of contact with the citizen, a kind of feedback on his work.'* (Christián, 2018).

That is why I consider it important to build trust and feedback not only because of the willingness of citizens to cooperate with the police and the need of police members, but also to avoid the so-called 'Ferguson effect', which is a less researched area in Hungary and a subject of widespread debate among criminologists internationally, due to its link to the crime rate. The 'Ferguson effect' as a concept originated in 2014, in relation to an incident: on 9 August 2014, a white police officer named Darren Wilson shot a young black man, Michael Brown in Ferguson (Deuchar, Fallik, Wyatt, Crichlow & Vaughn, 2019) – and is linked to the hypothesis that fear of civil liability and widespread public media attention have made police officers reluctant to engage in proactive policing and patrol practices, resulting in increased crime rates and violence against police (Wolf, 2015; Nix & Wolf, 2016; MacDonald, 2019). I don't want to decide the criminologists' debate, but this hypothesis is not only related to the issue of cooperation with society, but also closely linked to the issue of prejudice and the emotions experienced by police officers, and suggests that negative attention may lead police officers to withdraw in certain cases (e.g. less number of stops or arrests) in order to avoid being accused of excessive violence or racial discrimination. As a consequence, as police officers become less willing to carry out their daily duties, one of the supposed results is an increase in crime rates. Another result of the Ferguson effect is that negative public opinion also causes a loss of respect for the police, one effect of which is an increase in violence against police officers, and another is that in response, police officers are discouraged from using more force because of the high – negative – attention.

Another phenomenon closely related to the topic of the Hungarian Police and cooperation is that the diversity of Hungarian society is changing as a result of globalization processes, and nowadays police officers no longer need to work in an international field or travel abroad to interact with representatives of other national cultures.

The increase in the migration phenomenon in 2015, the Russian-Ukrainian war conflict, the facilitation of temporary employment from third countries to fill the labour deficit in shortage professions in Hungary, the increase in tourism, all indicate the need for further expansion of the training portfolio of police personnel and the introduction of an intercultural approach in police tasks.

In Europe, the need for intercultural knowledge also became a focus of attention for police forces in the 1990s, as racial conflicts and incidents, sometimes involving police officers, were clearly on the rise in the former European Union, to different degrees in different Member States. The greatest pressure was put on the larger industrial nations – France, Germany and Britain.

The role of the police and the recommendations for police forces were formulated and set out in the Rotterdam Charter in 1996, which was developed and finalised through numerous reports. Robin Oakley, who was actively involved in the drafting of the Charter, wrote and submitted 57 articles and reports between 1990 and 1999 to the Council of Europe ([URL3](#)), of which Hungary has been a member since 6 November 1990. The Charter made recommendations in the areas of recruitment, training, effective policing, public-police relations and attitudes within the police, taking into account the social changes in the member countries at the time and the challenges faced by police forces in the 1990s.

However, this approach has been integrated into the life of the Hungarian Police only in the case of minorities in Hungary, and the teaching of intercultural skills is only a limited part of the Hungarian higher education portfolio. The Faculty of Law Enforcement of University of Public Service provides this type of training as part of the preparation for the effective performance of professional tasks in the central and regional agencies of the authority responsible for asylum and immigration (National Directorate-General of Aliens Policing) ([URL1](#)).

## Conclusion

Since the 1989 regime change of system, the Hungarian Police has been actively working to strengthen its service character. The development of cooperation with the public and the efforts of the Hungarian Police in this direction are confirmed by several studies. In the field of international police cooperation, the role of both institutional cooperation and person-to-person interactions has increased.

In my opinion, there is still scope for further development in this area, e.g. through further research, taking into account the perceptions of the population and police members, and last but not least through intercultural education, which would greatly contribute to the achievements and further development of the Hungarian Police in the areas of cooperation and service character.

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## Online links in the article

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