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Cooperation in policing in Europe — current trends and future challenges

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Introduction — some points to bear in mind

This is but one view — a UK view — although it is grounded in research and professional input from others across policing. Some of the issues touched upon are not predictions and forecasts, but they are based on scenario thinking and serious analysis of future trends which may be important and relevant for all police organisations across Europe. They are put forward to stimulate discussion and debate, not to seek to direct policy.

The only thing that we can be certain of in the policing environment in which we work today is uncertainty, unpredictability and challenge. They are the constants that we all face.

Within this context, the areas the following areas will be addressed:

- Challenges for European policing
- Cooperation in policing — what to do
- Other areas of potential EU cooperation
- Policing — the direction in England & Wales
- Areas where the police research community may be able to help
- The relevance of evidence-based policing

Challenges that may face policing agencies and organisations across Europe in the next decade

First, organised criminals continue to operate faster, more flexibly and on a truly global scale. This has important consequences for cooperation and collaboration between policing organisations, particularly in the areas of drugs, fraud, illegal immigration, and money laundering — internationally inclined crimes. These kinds of crime types will be driven increasingly by changes in world population and through the continuing integration of the global economy.

Illegal migration in particular is likely to grow and become an ever-increasing problem. The principle destinations for these markets, both in illegal migration and drugs, are likely to remain in the developed world, including Europe. Organised crime will show its ever present ingenuity and flexibility to identify new markets and readily fill any vacuum or opportunity that exists. The inventiveness of criminals to find ways to exploit situations and to create ill-gotten gain for themselves is astonishing. One need only look at the way in the UK there has been a massive rise in the production of cannabis through hydroponic factories in ordinary domestic homes. These are now a major source of drug production in the UK. It has a global dimension too, evident by the fact that many of these cannabis factories are operated by Vietnamese illegal immigrants. This is a good example how cross-cutting dynamics and trends in crime are challenging us all in policing.

Many traditional forms of organised crime will continue though, although new ways of committing them and new ways of exploiting them will emerge, particularly through the use of technology. It is also conceivable that new crimes will arise and new markets will emerge, sometimes through the consequences of new legislation or enforcement. For instance, competition around resources, land, water and food create new criminal opportunities. Efforts by governments to tackle global warming create opportunities through trading of emission schemes and the opportunity for fraud. And variations between enforcement and approaches to tackling these problems generate the opportunity for criminals to exploit them. There are new opportunities for exploitation around man-made and natural crises. The potential around illegal migration and fraud (through false insurance claims) in post-disaster situations is something that we should particularly be aware of.

Evidence exists too of organised criminal tactics by mixing several markets at the same time, often illegal and legal together. The merging of logistical and financial systems together can cover and obfuscate the illegal side of operations.

Law enforcement officers need to be careful about building and sustaining silo operations, be it in drugs, people trafficking or fraud. These are entirely artificial constructs in the criminal world and sometimes — perhaps in more instances than we may care to acknowledge — simply cause barriers to the way that police organisations operate to combat international crime. This is one area where the research community can perhaps play a part — to look at the increasing merging and general metamorphosis of criminal operations, and see how international and national police structures match against that in terms of effectiveness.

Suggestions on how to better cooperate and better tackle the problems of international crime

The need to share and collect intelligence together on new crime trends and new types of crime that are developing across Europe and beyond is particularly crucial. This is a way of stopping new crimes at an early stage of their evolution and to frustrate new enterprises by criminals. We also need to think about how we can better work with other partners across Europe, particularly with organisations that are not police related. The financial sector is crucial here; we should be working together to frustrate the ability of criminals to use legitimate mechanisms to further their own criminal activities. There is still more that can be done on improving our understanding of how legitimate businesses are at risk to being unwittingly merged and intertwined with criminal activities.

There are things that we can do to protect legitimate businesses from being infiltrated by criminals. In the UK this is referred to as 'target hardening' and in one sense it is really no different to the approach that one might take to protecting a domestic house against burglary. There are opportunities to do this across Europe — to make vulnerable legitimate businesses less of a target to criminals.

There is also scope for cooperation in preventing criminals from assuming legitimate business positions, for example as company directors. Government and police organisations are pushing hard on seizing the assets of convicted criminals and one of the more lateral ways of doing this is to use the taxation system as a weapon against criminals. The UK is exploring ways in which this can be used to frustrate and penalise those who are engaged in serious and organised criminal activity.

Enforcement agencies can link together to look at disaster situations and to stop them from being vulnerable to criminal exploitation. It would be interesting to take that kind of issue away and look at what happens in certain disaster situations — to see how criminals exploit them, either by fraud, siphoning off aid or using other innovative ways of illegal exploitation.

And of course, a perennial plea on cooperation is to continue to look for ways to bring new legislation and operational procedures together in Europe to tackle these kinds of problems.

Challenges for European policing

The market in drugs, illegal immigration and money laundering — what is sometimes referred to as 'old crimes' — will probably continue to grow but become more complex because of the use of technology. Such

criminal activity will also be aided (inadvertently) by the general phenomenon of globalisation.

The use of the internet and electronic communications will grow and be exploited by criminals and criminal networks. The fact that ever-increasing amounts of *public* data are stored by government bodies and police agencies also creates new opportunities for criminal exploitation. Safeguarding these huge sensitive databases presents enormous problems for the police and other public bodies in terms security and preventing criminal attack.

In the UK there have been serious problems with regard to data leakages and information security lapses. Some instances occur simply through accidental exposure, but whatever the circumstances they cause immense public insecurity and concern. This is perhaps another area where the research community could bring its expertise to bear — to look at the issues surrounding information security and how to protect sensitive data in a complex world.

Other challenges include social networking sites and online 'worlds' which grow apace. There are clearly opportunities here for criminals to exploit this area both in terms of finding new victims of crime, but also to meet, plan and execute their crimes.

One other challenge exists here and it is perhaps one which we are not yet giving sufficient thought to at the moment. It is internal to our organisations and it revolves around having the right people with the right skills to tackle the new trends in international crime. Changes and developments to the banking, finance and information technology sectors will create demands on police organisations in terms of securing the employment of people with the necessary expertise to assist police officers/investigators in tackling these kinds of crimes. Recruiting and retaining such staff in a very competitive employment market will require much attention.

Cooperation in policing — what to do

The desire for real-time, cross-border intelligence and enforcement operations remains as high as ever and there are still things that we can do better, perhaps smarter, in that area. It is not without its difficulties of course, but some of the infrastructure is in place now and we should be able to operate much more effectively with regards to intelligence now some of those building blocks are in place.

Aligning legislation and laws, criminal investigative procedures and interoperability generally is still very much at the top of the agenda for European police cooperation. It certainly is of very high importance in the UK. This is a difficult and sensitive area, but the more we can do, the more likely we are successful in tackling organised and serious crime across Europe.

More information sharing and joint analysis of intelligence in criminal trends is unquestionably also still required. We have some things in place; the Swedish initiative is just about to take off with the sharing of intelligence between Member States. Schengen, of course, offers the opportunity to better tackle crime as do some aspects the Prüm Treaty. But more still needs to done and one way to do that is to look at how we exploit new technology in policing. There may be potential to share costs for both development and procurement. Experience in the UK has shown our own ability to integrate systems of intelligence and criminality information remains highly problematic and we still have work to do to achieve a fully joined-up system. To do it across Europe is even more complex and challenging, but it is certainly something we should look to for the future.

Other areas of potential EU cooperation

Joint investigation teams have much potential and there is legislation in place now that provides for these to operate. However, there appear to be some issues around that are impacting upon their effectiveness. Perhaps if we are looking for areas within policing research that could help European police practitioners, then joint investigation teams may be a good one to examine.

On police training and exchanges, there is still more that could be done. Suggestions have been made of increasing the number of exchanges between police officers particularly in areas where there are high numbers of tourists. This could help in terms of dealing with instances of crime and problems between short-term visitors to a particular location in Europe. The

European Police College (CEPOL) continues to provide a number of training and networking opportunities for police officers across Europe. We believe that CEPOL could look to broaden and expand its training opportunities through involving police officers and police staff at other levels.

As mentioned, the Swedish initiative is clearly an important step in information exchange between EU countries at the law-enforcement level. It will be interesting to see how it embeds itself in terms of exchanges of intelligence between Member States.

In relation to police equipment and communications, there are some interesting areas that could be examined around the joint development of equipment, be it technical or otherwise between police forces across Europe. There is a feeling in the UK that if we could get greater standardisation of the use of equipment between our own existing individual police forces, it would be a strong and powerful enabler towards the goal of interoperability. More generally, it would also facilitate much closer and frequent joint-operations between police forces.

Although it may appear to be a less important area of development, we should not overlook the way the standardising equipment — particularly communications and other critical operational tools used by police officers in their day-to-day work — may in itself draw police agencies and organisations much closer together. This approach can sometimes actually work faster and be more effective than working on large, set piece, cross-European policing protocols.

Policing — the direction in England and Wales

The UK government recently published a consultation document on the future of policing in England and Wales. The title itself gives you a clue as to where things are going in England and Wales — 'From the Neighbourhood to the National: Policing our Communities together'. There is a strong emphasis in this consultation document on linking crime at a very local level, right up to the national problems of counter-terrorism and major and serious and organised crime. There is a very conscious effort in the UK to see where

areas of criminality link together and to match policing resources and capability to deal with these challenges. Strong emphasis is also placed on meeting public expectations around tackling crime. A whole section of these proposed reforms deals with improving the connection between the police and the public, for example the introduction of a new 'policing pledge' to the public about minimum services to be expected by police in a number of key areas.

There is also a desire to professionalise and free-up the police from unnecessary bureaucracy, streamlining national police processes, and allowing police officers and police staff who support them to be able to get on and do the job they need to do.

Mobile technology and mobile data is a prominent area in our police reform and modernisation efforts. Hand-held mobile devices have been introduced recently to allow police officers to have better information and *instant* access to data and intelligence. We wish also to develop our workforce further; to pluralise it. By this I mean we intend to continue to challenge the long-held notion that the police officer (only) should hold such a wide range of operational roles, and instead to look at how police staff can fulfil *some* of these, thus allowing police officers to concentrate upon the areas in which they are most effective and for which they have been specially trained.

There are also significant changes to the performance management of the police in England and Wales. In particular the government have swept away many of the targets that were set for police forces and are now concentrating on just one indicator of the success of the police — public confidence in them to tackle crime and disorder. Public confidence will be the only performance target that the government will look at in terms of the success or otherwise of the police. It will be interesting to see how that affects the way in which policing operates in England and Wales.

Finally, there is an interesting debate going on in Britain about risk in policing. There is a feeling in the UK that the police service became, over time, preoccupied with risk and risk aversion; that our general approach became predominated by risk in a negative way. This culminated in an ever-growing amount of bureaucracy and proliferation of processes around policing operations

and activity. But now there is a possibility that we might challenge this approach and put in its place a more sensible response to risk which is, after all, an inevitable part of policing. This is another area which is most fertile for researchers to examine. Risk is a complex phenomenon and one which has very interesting consequences on decision-making in policing. It is one we are keen on exploring further in the UK.

The relevance of research and evidence-based policing

The goal for all of us is for there to be greater levels of cooperation and integration between social researchers and policing practitioners.

Despite the fact that there continues to be a certain amount of indifference, sometimes even resistance, by some police officers to evidence-based research, there is unquestionably a need for the research community to continue to be assertive and prevail in the aim of getting good, relevant, research findings firmly into the domain of operational policing.

No area of policing policy — be it tackling crime (minor right through to the most serious) or bearing down on public disorder and antisocial behaviour — should be without a strong body of supporting evidence-based research to underpin it. There is a school of thought in policing in the UK now which is growing all the time, that research should have the same place in policing as it has in its sister public sectors of medicine and education. This is very difficult to achieve, but the idea of bringing a discipline and rigour to policing, that one would, for example, find in medicine, is very important and is gaining greater recognition in the UK all the time. The term evidence-based policing is now not an unfamiliar one in police circles.

Police training and education though still needs to be more scientifically orientated. UK initial police training remains quite dominated by legal and procedural input, with some behavioural teaching also included. There is little opportunity in police training to explore proper social research although it is growing and evidence-based policing is a much more familiar term amongst practitioners. Research, though, does still need to be based in the real world of policing and it needs to recognise too how fast moving policing is nowadays.

As much as one requires it to be thorough and methodologically sound, what social researchers in the policing arena must also recognise is that for their work to be truly valued by policing practitioners (as opposed to being just appreciated for its scholarly achievement), their work needs to deliver something of value quickly within a dynamic operational environment. Too often police colleagues dismiss good research because the problem has either gone away or developed into something else. This does create challenges for social researchers but somehow we must bridge the gap. Research and analysis needs to be timely if they are to get the kind of credence and 'connection' to policing that so many of us desire.

But most important of all, research should become a natural part of police education and day-to-day police activity — at the centre and not on the periphery. The underpinning of approaches to supporting improvement in policing in England and Wales is increasingly based upon good, evidence-based research, tested by practitioners and peer reviewed. The input of the police researcher is an increasingly valued one and can only help in all our efforts to tackle crime in Europe.