

Policing and Multi Ethnic Societies: Building Trust and Partnership

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The *OSCE Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area* (2003) tasked the Strategic Police Matters Unit (SPMU) to assist participating States in developing programmes and confidence-building measures — such as community policing — to improve the relations between Roma and Sinti people and the police, particularly at the local level, and to produce a compilation of police “best practices” in the OSCE region with respect to policing and Roma and Sinti communities. Another established task was to assist the participating States in developing codes of conduct to prevent racial profiling and improve interethnic relations.¹

Community policing as acknowledged by the Action Plan is a policing concept which facilitates building trust and confidence between the communities and the police. The level of co-operation between the Roma and Sinti community members and the police is not better than any other minority groups.

We know that due to the various reasons (such as negative past experiences, stereotypes, lack of representation in the police agencies, insufficient legal instruments, inadequate police training), the members of ethnic minority groups including Roma and Sinti are not willing to report the crimes and reluctant to co-operate with and assist the police during the investigation.

On the other hand, police agencies are still facing difficulties to introduce special programmes to enhance the communication skills and cultural understanding of their officers. Ethnic minority groups are still subject to arbitrary identity checks. The public involvement in policing in some places is rather limited, if not none.

One should note that ethnic diversity has been a special challenge to the police agencies. Frequently exist and strong mistrust between representatives of ethnic minority communities

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¹ PC.DEC/566, 27 November 2003

and the police creates a great obstruction to the ability of the police to provide an effective service.

Needless to say that such attitude leads to alienation of the police from the population and dramatically reduces its capacity to prevent and detect crime. Re-establishment of this link becomes the first priority in the transition to democratic policing. Police agencies should take the lead and be proactive in facilitating the public involvement in policing.

Having said those, community policing appears to be an effective tool and catalyser in establishing a sound partnership between the communities and the police.

Therefore, introduction of community policing methods and its implementation have been core elements of the OSCE strategy since the beginning of its involvement in police development. Large projects were implemented in Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Croatia. Now the concept of community policing is being introduced in Caucasian and Central Asian States. OSCE-supported activities aimed at building police-public partnerships, establishing mutual trust, creating community action groups and introducing multi-ethnic policing.

At the strategic level, the SPMU in close co-operation with the ODIHR/CPRS and HCNM has been actively supporting the participating States in introducing and implementation of community policing concept. In 2006-2007 the SPMU has organized a series of regional police experts meeting at which the role of police in reaching out all communities, public involvement in policing, proactive measures to build a mutual trust were some of the topics widely discussed by national experts. Extracting good practices and lessons learned have been the key objectives of the meetings which will be marked by an OSCE concept on Community Policing. The OSCE concept will serve as a toolkit for law enforcement agencies that are implementing community policing and provide a framework.

Another important contribution to creating democratic police services was made in 2006 when the SPMU has produced a ***Guidebook on Democratic Policing***. The Guidebook aims at assisting the law enforcement practitioners, policy-makers working on police development and strengthening democratic policing. It articulates the objectives of democratic police services, the importance of their commitment to the rule of law, police ethics and human

rights standards; the essential nature of police accountability to the law and to the society they serve; as well as the need for their co-operation with the communities, recognizing that effective policing requires partnership with the communities being served.

We believe that effective and efficient police service will improve the quality of life of all communities including Roma/Sinti and other traveller communities. No doubt that, there is a lot of room for improvement in policing and police training as well as an active community involvement in policing.

The SPMU will continue to work closely and co-ordinate with the ODIHR/CPRS and HCNM in assisting the participating States in providing a policing service which satisfies the all members of communities. The Unit will remain to be a close partner to ODIHR and HCNM in their every effort.