

# **Evolving Patterns in the Police Systems of North Rhine-Westphalia, The Netherlands and England & Wales**

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## **1 Introduction**

The previous articles described police systems and reforms implemented in three countries. In this final article, we explore the similarities and differences in the police systems of these three countries, focusing specifically on the organization of the police forces and their governance systems. While we expect all police systems to have multiple levels, they will probably differ in their organization, their relationship with their political and administrative environments, and how they are influenced by polity, tradition and the prevailing political culture.

Section 2 examines what the starting point for police reforms is and how the shifts brought about by successive police reforms can be assessed. In Section 3, we ask if there is a common pattern in the way these four police systems have evolved, or whether it is more appropriate to talk of a hodgepodge of developments. In particular, we are interested in any centralizing or decentralizing tendencies that have occurred and their impact on the governance of the police and the democratic accountability of the police.

Another relevant subject for comparison is the role of innovations in police work. Which police innovations have taken place and to what extent have they had an impact on the police system? Are these innovations common to all three countries? In Section

4, we will look at shifts in policing and in police work and ask whether there is any correlation between the increase in police professionalism and the evolution of police systems.

Section 5 then focuses on the dynamics of police reform. Have police reforms across the four countries followed the same template, and if not, what are the consequences for the police system? Another relevant question is how the balance between continuity and change is determined (Section 5).

We end our paper in Section 6 by discussing our expectations of the future of police systems in the three countries and by raising the question of whether there is sufficient evidence to assume the existence of a common Western European developmental path for police systems.

## **2 The organization of the police**

A common feature of police systems in established democratic countries (including those discussed here) is the existence of checks and balances that spread authority and accountability over multiple arms. Such a system reflects the need for protection against the police. Together with the multiplicity of the police task, it gives the police force a multi-level character involving many political-administrative levels.

Nonetheless, institutional arrangements, the number of organizational levels, and the systems of governance can vary significantly. While police systems are organized predominantly on a national scale in some countries, other countries use more regional and local organizational forms, depending on the system of democratic accountability.

We can locate the three police systems discussed here on a continuum from predominantly local to predominantly national, or from decentralized to centralized. In The Netherlands, regional police forces are spread across 25 police regions and a national police force serves to support the regional forces. While there are no administrative regions, political control is exerted at the local and national levels. The Dutch police system has a democratic deficit in this respect.

Germany organizes its police forces on a state level and the state parliaments are important in steering and controlling the state-level police. The German federal police operate on a na-

tional level, and a number of local police forces have been set up. State parliaments exercise democratic control. Local boards serve as mediators between the police and the council, trying to both control the police and put them in touch with local safety and security concerns. There are a number of provincial police forces in England & Wales. However, national police bodies have also been gradually established and political control is held by the national parliament.

If Belgium and Denmark were included in our ranking exercise, Belgium would have the most locally-oriented police system, followed by the Netherland and England & Wales. The police force in Belgium is integrated on both the local and federal levels, and political control is exerted at both levels.

Of all the countries studied here, Denmark has the most nationally-oriented police system and Germany's is the most state-controlled. In Denmark, the Minister of Justice, not the Minister of the Interior, is in charge of the police and is accountable to the national parliament. Nonetheless, a good degree of democratic control exists at the local level.

Despite these differences, the countries are similar in that they each have a specific mix of national and local power bases that is necessary for balance. Such a mix is important as an exclusively national orientation is thought to lead to an authoritarian, repressive form of police, while local policing is thought to be more sensitive to local needs and wants. Boek (1999) makes a distinction between two kinds of policing: what he calls general policing and local policing. The distinction is interesting because it illuminates the dilemma that police typically face. In the first kind of policing, the police force is the strong arm of power, usually associated with a strong, central, almost autocratic government. In the second kind of policing, the use of force is traded in for persuasion. Officers are active on the ground and see it as their role to protect the rights and freedoms of citizens in the local community.

Both functions have their pro and con's. Being close to people living in the neighbourhood or the village, local police have the ability to prevent or solve problems. However, this close association with the local community is not without risk. With the police act like citizens in uniform, and have close ties with other citizens, it is possible that they will lose their objectivity and begin to accept the unacceptable. In this context, it is difficult for the

local police to protect the rule of law against unreasonable individuals who seek to place themselves outside the realm of the Rechtsstaat.

The general police have the power of force. Such power can easily be wielded or simply threatened when all other means fail. However, the threat of force quickly becomes a threat to the very liberty of citizens. Also, the use of force tends to escalate very quickly. This is especially likely when the police officers lack an understanding of local customs and circumstances. Body Gendrot (2008) makes clear that the French police were literally out of place in the banlieues of Paris. They were ‘canned police’, packed in their cars, without contact with the people in these dreadful neighbourhoods. Strong arm tactics, including the use of violent force became a key part of their professional philosophy. Not surprisingly, the French police became more and more violent and often employed strong-arm technique that solved very little. Problems were enlarged, especially that between the police force and the minister of Home Affairs who paid little attention to societal problems, preferring instead to focus on his image as a strong public leader.

Some police systems are more local, others more national-oriented. There does not appear to be a “one size fits all” model and differences between the practices of each country do not imply differences in quality or effectiveness. History, traditions, and, of course, the political system play an important role in determining the shape of the police system. According to Bayley (1985), democracy is clearly compatible with a variety of control strategies. Praun (2007, p. 72) supports this view by saying that “there is no such thing as a genuine democratic police structure”. Thus, there seems to be room for a diversity of police systems that comply with the demands of a democratic constitutional state.

### **3 Shifts in police governance**

Police reform is often associated with lively debates over ‘good governance’. In most police systems, there is a tug-of-war between local and national control. The centralization and decentralization of police power is a key factor in the debate and is a key issue in many police reforms. Often, actors from outside the

inner circle of the “usual suspects” get involved in debates over the police system. This may be seen as positive from the point of view of democracy and the societal control of the police as it incorporates important checks and balances. However, unending debates over the control of police forces can be symptomatic of decreasing confidence and can erode the legitimacy of the existing police system. This would lead to a more radical agenda for the “institutional redesign” of the police system.

### *Increasing centralization in the authority over the police*

We see in The Netherlands and in England & Wales an increasing centralization of the government's control over the police. This centralization is at the detriment of local influence in policy-making. Such local control is important in areas such as crime-fighting, as it counters efforts to implement more repressive and punitive strategies at the national level. Central steering, in most cases by the national government, has become the dominant trend alongside an increasing role of inspections. In England & Wales, the Home Office has become even more important in recent years. It was the instigator of efforts to increase police performance and to introduce performance management.

In The Netherlands, the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, inspired by the role of the Home Office in England & Wales, has tried to strengthen his grip on (regional) police forces. He has a growing influence in the steering and control, not only of the police, but also of national public safety policy as a whole (compare van Sluis et. al., 2008). In the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia, the Ministry was and still is the central actor. Its steering power seems to have become even greater with recent reforms. This is despite the fact that the police forces are obliged to create local or regional safety and security plans and to evaluate them continually.

### *New vocabulary: New Public Management*

The centralization of the control of police is associated with jargon describing steering instruments, such as “performance management” and the use of “quality systems”. It is not just traditional command and control, but ‘smart’ performance management that is thought to provide a greater degree of accountability and has become a central feature of New Public Management.

Newburn (2003, p 101) speaks of a form of managerialism that has emerged that involves the 'ever closer scrutiny of police performance' (see also Lange/Schenck 2004, p. 243). Performance measurement was an important part of the reforms in England & Wales and in some German states. For example, following the reforms in local government, the police in the state of North Rhine- Westphalia introduced the Neue Steuerungsmodell (New Steering Model) in which daily police operations are linked to a system of performance indicators. Management methods, administration and information processing were all redesigned (Schulte, 2007). This new steering model continues to be a key feature of policing in North Rhine-Westphalia (Lange, 2005).

Despite the differences in national traditions and contexts and although the specific shape and tempo differs, NPM seems to have become dominant in the governance of police forces in Europe (van Sluis et. al, 2008). We see in The Netherlands, England & Wales, as well as in North Rhine-Westphalia, a trend towards a more strategic and facilitative form of steering that focuses on a small number of strategic targets. The police have a lot of leeway with which to hit these targets. This is a reaction to earlier, more ambitious policy-planning efforts that attempted to micro-manage the police that proved ineffectual. An advantage of such an approach is that the minister cannot reasonably be held accountable for everything that goes wrong in police work as decisions are made by police forces themselves.

#### *Not only centralism, but also localism*

The shift toward centralism seems to be counterbalanced by a shift towards more localism. In community and neighbourhood policing, responsabilisation strategies are implemented that engage local communities and strengthen the accountability of and control over the police at the local level.

Localism is strengthened by a general shift from the "government" to the "governance" of crime control at the local level and the creation of local multi-agency security networks (compare Crawford and Lister, 2004). The shift from government to governance implies that the government is not the sole actor that attempts to influence crime and security. Governments rely increasingly upon other actors, sectors and on their own numerous governmental layers. Government interventions become interventions in policy networks, in which power, resource depend-

ency, and strategic behavior are vital elements. Organizations are supposed to self-organize and self-regulate along with organizations in other sectors and levels of government, and producing safety and security is seen as a cooperative action in which citizens play an important role as co-producers. As a result of this, governance-like structures have evolved that deal with crime and insecurity on the local level.

For example in The Netherlands, police policy is increasingly an integral part of the broader safety policy, both locally as well as nationally. The role of the police in local safety programs has evolved from a powerful to a more modest one. The rise of independent local safety plans also gave the police an opportunity to dispose of certain tasks they considered improper.

In Germany, the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia adopted community policing as the leading policing style and created institutions such as crime prevention councils and local public order partnerships to promote an integrated approach to local safety. Frevel (2006: 7) states that: "From the mid-nineties, there has been a 'boom' in the development of the crime prevention councils, local public order partnerships round-tables conferences, security networks and law-and-order partnerships. Each of these has its own unique profile and its influence by specific interests as it participates in the work of ensuring local security".

In England & Wales, localism in policing is now an important issue. In general, the strengthening of local ties and local partnerships can be seen as preventing the further centralization of authority over the police. Local partnerships will also help the police implement community policing. These issues touch the core of many police system reform, and were therefore properly addressed in this issue of German Policy Studies.

Savage (2007) speaks of the 'bifurcation' and the twin-track direction of police reform in England & Wales. In The Netherlands, Das et al. (2007) observe "a deepening split between "unorthodox" state-centered, punitive policy on one hand and multi-agency clusters of public and private crime control on the other". (..) "In The Netherlands, general crime policies are issued at the national level of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Justice, while community and citizen-based policing is decided upon at the local and regional level. To ensure effective crime fighting and counter terrorism efforts, a more "hierarchical model" of command and control has been revived with a focus

on defending national security. Such a model places greater distance between the population and the police”. Centralizing tendencies are heightened by the threat of organized crime and terrorism and the sense of crisis and fear they spread.

### *Democratic deficiencies?*

The overall trend towards community policing and integrated safety policy will eventually call not only for stronger local police ties, but also more local influence on policing. But given the differences between countries, how far can local influences go?

The existence of democratic deficiencies is a matter of perspective. From a Dutch perspective – and probably from a Belgian and British perspective as well – there exists a democratic deficit in both Denmark and Germany at the local level. However, within these countries, the lack of local political ties is actually seen as a strong point. Nonetheless, as a rule, we would say that local democratic control of the police is weaker than national arrangements.

A more general trend that we observe, is the weakening of the political-democratic control of the police. This is due mainly to an increase in police professionalism. As a result, the authority of the police has grown at the expense of the influence of administrators and politicians whose role it is to oversee them. In England & Wales and in The Netherlands, the chiefs of police have become a powerful interest group and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) in the United Kingdom has become an effective policy-making and lobbying body. In their most recent vision document, ‘Politie in Ontwikkeling’ (‘Police in Evolution’), chiefs of the Dutch police forces claimed professional freedom, saying that the Dutch police ‘perform their profession in an expert way and with a level of independence that befits their professionalism’. The police want to act in a way that helps to improve safety within the boundaries defined by the rule of law. With such freedom, the emphasis is no longer on prior directives, but rather on (horizontal) accountability and the demonstrated ability to deliver on promises’ (Politie in Ontwikkeling, p. 14). In this context, politicians are kept at arm’s length. They have to play to the gallery, specifically by engaging the media in order to influence police policy.

It is yet unclear if similar developments have taken place in Germany. Although Germany does not have an association simi-

lar to the ACPO in the United Kingdom, high ranking police officers meet in several circles. Most important and influential is the “Arbeitskreis II: Public safety and security” which advises the Conference of Ministers of the Interior of Federation and States” (see Pütter 2000).

#### **4 Innovations in police work and the quest for balance**

##### *From police to policing*

The police have become active in networks other than the traditional judicial and political-administrative systems. Discussions on important police policy take place in many arenas and stakeholders often struggle over issues such as the division of power, the centralization or decentralization of the police system, targets and performance-indicators. Fundamentally, such discussions constitute a game of power. The concern is clearly not only on professional standards and problems as the stakeholders seek primarily to secure a stronger role in the police system.

At the same time, more and more functions in the field of public safety are now no longer performed by the police, but are contracted out to private safety organizations. In The Netherlands and in Germany, the number of private police officers is now more than half that of the regular police. These forces are often hired by commercial organizations, and conduct surveillance in places such as department stores, industrial zones and in airports. They are often also stationed at the entrances to government buildings, and now and then, even at police stations. In a number of countries, they are active as guards in prisons and act as private investigators for those who can afford their services. In many European municipalities, for example, there are public guards, and local parking police. Local governments have created ‘Ordnungspolizei’, which is their very own urban police force. As such, it can be said that the public police have a private counterpart. These developments make the police less unique than they once were.

The fragmentation of the police systems and the entrance of new private partners in the safety domain have led to important changes in the policing networks. In studying these networks, Terpstra (2005) expressed his amazement at the diversity he found. Local security networks differed in their goals, structure,

participants and their methods of intervention. Some were more focused on participation, while others were more focused on enforcement. Yet others were interested mainly in either preventing or responding to threats. These networks differed also in the way they were organized, their technology and their style of cooperation

Many organizations now scatter the field and in addition to the private security providers, a variety of public organizations are also now active in producing safety. While you may be confronted by local police officers executing particular laws or regulating traffic, you may also encounter private agents associated with commercial organizations or even local citizens who perform similar functions. Alongside the public and private organizations active in the field of law maintenance and safety, there is a third player, namely the citizen volunteers. The phenomenon of citizen volunteers is indeed interesting in an era where 'bowling alone' is the dominant picture. As in the fields of social work and fire fighting, volunteers have become an important part of local police. However, voluntary police continues to be a somewhat awkward phenomenon. One wonders about the motives of private citizens who are so eager to play the part of policemen.

The reason for such varied involvement in policing is that public safety has become an important issue for many societal groups, not just the local and national governments. Shopkeepers and their organizations bring their concerns forward, along with residents and parents. The safety problems faced in certain neighbourhoods and in villages are clearest to their residents, who then form associations under which to tackle them. For example In England & Wales, citizens became so active that they formed neighbourhood watches in which they themselves adopted the role of wardens. In The Netherlands, Moroccan fathers patrol the streets in order to keep crime under control and to ensure the peace and quiet of their neighbourhoods. In the German state of Hessen, a "Voluntary Police Service" is on the road (Groß/Kreuzer 2008). But there is no such organization in North Rhine-Westphalia. With societal groups watching out for the safety of their own environment, the local policing scene is changing substantially and the production of safety has become a very different business.

These are important developments also because they appear to be a reaction to the lowering of the public expectations of police

capability that took place over the 1980s and 1990s. The lack of confidence in the police and the sense that the government is the problem rather than the solution has grown in strength. At the same time, safety became a greater issue on the public agenda over the years and the public reacted by making their own security arrangements. As a result, the act of policing came to be seen as service that can be provided by many parties. In this context, citizens and political representatives had to find new ways of dealing with each other.

### *Convergence of police practices*

A common element in police reforms is the quest for solutions that accommodate the complete spectrum of police work - local, national and international. Given the scale with which police work has to be organized, most countries struggle to find the right balance. The function of the police has become very plural, and law enforcement, surveillance and crime investigation departments each look for different professional qualifications and demand different organizational forms. A police system has to house all these different tasks.

Despite the significant differences among the police systems of Western democratic countries, there is a trend towards the convergence of police practices and standards for good police work. In these attempts, the police in Europe are supported by the European Police College (CEPOL) and also the OSCE who provided advice through the "Guidebook on Democratic Policing". For a large part, the challenges for the police are the same. These include the changing nature and size of crimes, the coming into being of the risk (Beck) and network society (Castells), and the increasingly multicultural and aged nature of society. These forces render traditional police strategies less valid.

### *The pursuit of professionalism*

Innovations in work, management and philosophy can be seen as responses to the above threats and challenges, as well as efforts to regain lost confidence in the police due to underperformance. The police have replied to these changes and to the associated threat of loss of societal support with an intensified pursuit of professionalism.

Across many countries, police professionalism has accelerated in the last decade, and many innovations were introduced and implemented in a relatively short span of time. The traditional model did not work any more. According to Braga and Weisburd (2006), the police of the 80's, 90's and 2000's went through fundamental, paradigmatic changes driven by high levels of community dissatisfaction with police services and a growing recognition that citizens had other concerns that required police action, such as the fear of crime (p. 14).

The increase in police professionalism is apparent from the rise in specialization, especially within the field of crime investigations. It is also apparent from the renewed focus on crime investigation as being the core task of the police. For example, the Dutch police have done their utmost to improve the quality of criminal investigations. A program titled "Strengthening Investigation and Prosecution" was run for several years in order to stimulate professionalism, generate standards for professional investigations and enhance efficiency.

More and more officers became specialists in specific domains such as crimes involving drugs or sexual offenses, youth-related crimes or domestic violence, alcohol related crimes and laws dealing with the concerns of women. Internally the police became more diverse (see: Van Steden, 2007). In particular, the progress of knowledge and hence of specialization has been enormous in the field of crime control. Because of the higher standards that are being applied to these activities, the prosecution and investigation functions have been more and more centralized. Investigation has become more and more of a specialized function requiring specific training courses, support, laboratory space and other resources. Crime control has become more and more technical, and has increasingly become the work of specialists.

Tilley (in: Newman, 2003, ch. 13) outlines three new models of policing that have surfaced: community policing, problem-oriented policing and intelligence-led policing.

### *Community policing*

Community policing is an innovation common to all the police systems covered in our research. Community policing is at the heart of the policing philosophy of many countries and is sometimes even referred to in the Police Act. Tilley (2003) sees com-

munity policing as policing with and for the community, instead of policing of the community. In order to be able to realize these high-minded ideals, the police organization had to be decentralized, police officers have to have a level of discretion, and there has to be direct communication between the police and the community. In this model, success is associated with smooth and contented community functioning achieved through the involvement of community members and community institutions (Tilley, 2003).

Community policing has been revitalized in recent years, especially in England & Wales. This is partly as a result of a reaction against the dominant trend of centralization. According to Savage (2007: 203): “British policing, as well as being pushed ‘upwards’ by centrally driven forces towards greater standardization and consistency of purpose, was also being pulled ‘downwards’ to become more responsive to local needs and priorities, more accountable to local communities, and more engaged with those communities”.

The Dutch police also adopted community policing in the 1980s. Although its form has changed several times, community policing has continued to be an important feature of Dutch policing ever since. The community officer was first introduced in the nineties as a reaction against the increase in the scale of crime that occurred in 1993. In that year, municipal police forces were merged with the State Police to create regional police forces which had limited connections with the local communities (see Cachet, 2008).

In Belgium, community policing has a legal anchor in the Police Act. It is also the leading philosophy of the Denmark police force. In the early nineties the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia adopted community policing (Bürgernahe Polizeiarbeit) as the leading police philosophy in an attempt to strengthen public confidence.

### *Problem-oriented policing*

Problem-oriented policing is meant to prevent and control conduct that threatens life and property. Aid is given to victims of crimes and people in danger of physical harm are protected. In particular, people that are not able to care for themselves are assisted. The police try to resolve the more serious conflicts between individuals, between groups and between citizens and their

government before violent conflict erupts. Much effort is put in creating and maintaining a feeling of security in the community and greater levels of attention are paid to hotspots of violence, well-known offenders, and vulnerable groups. Success is measured in this model by the ability of the police to prevent crimes and related community problems.

### *Intelligence Led Policing*

Information Technology has contributed a great deal to the development of ‘smart policing’ and has made new methods of policing possible. Under this model, the police focus on informational aspects of crime management and the police organization uses advanced information management and analysis techniques to its advantage. In this new age, the police pay great attention to the relationship between local, regional, national and international patterns of behavior. Offenders are targeted, hotspots are managed, offences are investigated, and preventative measures are taken. In doing so, the police reduce the ability of criminals to operate (Ringeling, 2009) using critical means of enforcement and disruption. The local operations of the police are not irrelevant to this effort, but they do play a much less important role. The organization of the police is far more nationally oriented and success is measured by the conviction of serious offenders, especially the more prolific ones in order to protect other potential victims.

### *Contradictory influences on the police system*

These new models of policing influence developments in police systems, because the way in which the police perform their job and the way they are organized are strongly interrelated. Community policing on the one hand and crime control on the other hand carry their own specific demands from the police system. Community policing and the local orientation of the police call for a decentralized police system.

The focus on crime control and the recent surfacing of specializations and professionalism in crime control and of process management in crime control (the functional orientation) on the other hand, call for more uniformity and for more concentration, scale enlargement and unifying tendencies in the police system at the national level, as does the logic of New Public Management

in the external and internal governance of the police. Therefore, we see a tendency among all the police systems we studied to reorganize the police on a national scale, whereas community policing demands a decentralized organization.

All countries struggle to find a right balance between central a decentralized forms of organization, to house all types of police work. Contradictory centralizing and decentralizing tendencies are at work simultaneously, reflecting the diversity of police work. Different orientations in police work (local versus functional) bring about different organizational logics. Intelligence-led policing and the nodal orientation of the police can be seen as efforts to link modern crime investigation and community policing.

The way we organize the police, has very real consequences for the way they function. Furthermore, the organization of a police force is not a value-neutral affair. It is seldom just a matter of optimizing efficiency, or of adopting the most effective management concept. Different stake holders have different ways of determining what problems are and what factors are less relevant. Each party thus has different priorities and different standards of success. Changing the organization means changing the politics of the police.

## **5 The dynamics of police reform**

### *Continuity instead of change*

A first observation would be that continuity is more characteristic for police systems than change, because of their highly path-dependent nature. They are very stubborn and tough. Changing historically-developed paths involve high conversion costs. Besides, the arrangements fore power and authority over the police are linked with the existing politico-administrative structures and are rooted in more fundamental arrangements in the polity.

This institutional embedding limits the margins for change. To that end, Bayley commented that “Traditions of police control have enormous inertial weight. Characteristic forms of accountability persist in countries despite major political and social upheavals” (1985, p. 176).

### *Underperformance*

Policing in many countries was in need of significant improvement in the 70s and 80s. The growing awareness of the lack of public safety, both objective and perceived, and the inability of the police to cope with these problems caused fissures in police legitimacy. These fissures were sharpened by rising public expectations and new performance related demands. Citizens typically demanded solutions to crime and public safety concerns that tend to exceed the capabilities of government agencies and the police.

Serious crises open the doors to more radical reform. Such reform is often triggered by underperformance, especially in the area of crime control that leads to a loss of public confidence. The level of police reform may vary, but dissatisfaction with police performance and a subsequent loss of legitimacy are key prerequisites (compare Kempa, 2007).

### *New Managerialism and New Public Management*

Police forces were re-engineered in many countries to be more business-like and 'to get more out of less' as is the trend in many public sector domains. The drive to better performance was accompanied by the drive to innovate, reduce costs, and increase accountability.

Wood and Shearing (2007) speak of a neo-liberal wave in policing. In many countries, the police system (like other parts of the public sector) went through managerial reforms inspired by New Public Management (NPM), which has become dominant in the internal and external governance of the police in many countries. But NPM is often rejected by men and women who make up the local police forces, as it is often seen as a mere "presentational strategy" that is used to restore the perceived loss of police legitimacy (Terpstra and Trommel, 2009). This presents a serious obstacle to the success of the reforms (Lange and Schenck 2004, p. 283).

### *Police and the public sector*

Police reforms seldom come alone and are often part of broader changes in the public sector. In The Netherlands, changes in the regional police forces were meant to be a test-bed for other pioneering efforts in the regional administration. In England &

Wales, police reform was part of effort to increase the performance of the whole public sector and the reforms were meant to run in parallel with other citizen-based programs. In North Rhine-Westphalia, police reforms were linked to the removal of middle administration. In Denmark, the whole public sector went through a time of scale enlargement. These findings serve as an illustration for the close links between the police system and the political and administrative surroundings.

### *Long history and long-term changes*

As a rule, police reforms do not take place over night, but have a long history. A common feature of police reforms is that they come in waves and take many years. As a rule, they have a long history, sometimes spanning twenty to thirty years. For example, it took about forty years to reform the police system in The Netherlands (Cachet and Sey, 2008). According to Brodeur (2005), it took the police in Canada eighteen years to implement reforms. Fleming and Rhodes (2005) speak of the thirty years it took to fully realize reform ambitions in the Australian and British police system.

According to Rhodes (2005) and Brodeur (2005), reform processes leave in their wake deposits that continue to influence the way policing takes place long after they are an explicit focus. Reforms thus tend to have unintended effects that call for new reforms. "The constant nature of reform has its roots in the tensions that arise as new reform agendas are layered onto older ones. This renders all reforms contingent."

### *Success and failure*

Many reforms in our research are very recent and so their impact is still difficult to assess. Each country has its own mix of successes and failures. In The Netherlands, the regional police system, though moderately successful, is under pressure and it is still unclear if a national police force would be able to do a better job. In Belgium, the new police system ended the deep confidence crisis in the relationship between the police and the citizens and new reforms are not currently on the agenda. In North Rhine-Westphalia, there are doubts about the new Direktionsmodell. In England & Wales, the latest attempt to merge police forces into super forces failed, but the problems that gave

rise to this still exist and new reforms are on the cards. In Denmark, the new structure is still in discussion.

*“Windows of opportunity” for change*

Despite systems' inherent resistance to change, there are factors that sometimes enable sudden change to occur. These factors provide ‘windows of opportunity’ and often take the form of scandals and other unsavory incidents. Sometimes scandals, like the affaire Dutroux in Belgium, the Brixton riots and the Stephen Lawrence murder in England, triggered a major rethinking of the existing police system. In other countries like Denmark and Germany, police reform is more incremental and occurs largely out of the public eye.

Significant fissures are an exception and tend to occur in combination with political and societal crises. When the existing political order is disputed, there is a sense of urgency for change. Any such change is accompanied by uncertainty which makes police systems resistant to sudden and drastic changes.

*The impact of political events*

Police reform seems heavily dependent upon the political cycle. Sometimes police reform is triggered by events such as the results of elections and new political coalitions with different views taking power. The results of elections and the composition of new coalitions have a significant impact on police reform. In The Netherlands, the decision of the Dutch cabinet Balkenende III to organize the Dutch police nationally was altered during the formation of Balkende IV because of the entrance of the Social Democrats. In England & Wales, police reform under the regime of the Conservatives was aimed at centralizing policing. When New Labor took over, Blair added the ‘law abiding citizen’ and a focus on the local dimension of policing to these reforms. In Belgium, party policy does not seem to play a significant role. Most political parties supported the Octopus Agreements that were the basis for the police reform after the Dutroux Affair, because they wanted to depoliticize the matter as much as possible in order to regain public confidence. In North Rhine-Westphalia, the outcome of the elections in 2005 meant that the recommendations for scale enlargement made by the Scheu Commission were not

acted upon, because the CDU (Christian Democrats) was not in favor of them.

## **6 Unity or variety; the future of Western European police systems**

There are differences between police reforms across countries, primarily because developments have different starting positions, there are differences in the political and societal dynamics of each country, and key players take divergent paths and make use of divergent institutions. No one path is required for a police system to meet the demands of a democratic constitutional state. The institutional and political tradition of the nation, its societal context, its political dynamics and the results of previous reform efforts all impact change and the possibilities for further development.

An important lesson that can be gleaned from the contributions to the current issue of German Policy Studies is that police systems are not only influenced by problems; they are influenced also by the incapacity of existing police systems to deal adequately with these problems. Crises in performance trigger doubts about the existing system and provoke questions on the legitimacy of the police. These questions motivate attempts to reform. In other cases, the development of the police system evolves more gradually out of the unexpected problematic effects of foregoing reforms.

But the political, administrative and legal structure in a country, its culture and the relations between its political-administrative actors all impact the outcome of any reform effort and can make change difficult. To state it another way, the reform of police systems does not take place in a vacuum and forms an intrinsic part of the politico-administrative structure. Sometimes, political events such as the results of elections and the entrance of new coalitions with different views are important triggers. Merely following new trends like New Public Management can be an important driver of change, as is mimicking policy lessons in other organizations. At other times, proposals for the reform of the police system serve only symbolic purposes.

Whatever their motivation, reforms tend to vary tremendously. Scandals like the Dutroux Affaire in Belgium or the Brixton Ri-

ots and the Stephan Lawrence murder in England tend to trigger a rethinking of the existing police system. In Denmark and Germany, police reform has been more incremental and has occurred largely out of the public eye. Crisis or no crisis, across all countries, dissatisfaction with police performance and a subsequent loss of legitimacy are prerequisites for reform and serious crises open the doors for more radical efforts at overhauling the system.

However, changing directions from one path to another usually involves high levels of friction and transaction costs. Changing an existing police system will unavoidably have unforeseen and unintended effects that demand new reforms. In this regard, changes within the system tend to cost less than a systemic redesign. Changing the police system would only be the solution when other means of adapting to new circumstances have come to an end. No police system is meant forever and there will always be changes.

It would be an illusion to think that a multi-functional and often contested police force can be unproblematically organized, steered and controlled in a stable or simple fashion. The functions of the police have become manifold. Law enforcement, surveillance and crime investigation demand different professional qualification and different ways of organizing and an effective police system has to house all these different tasks. Despite significant differences, the development of the profession appears to converge across the three countries studied in this analysis

The production of safety is a common concern for many organizations, both in the public sector and in public and private organizations. Safety can only be assured with the cooperation of many societal participants. The police must have connections with the local communities, the neighbourhoods and the villages. At the same time it must have a national and, or even better, an international orientation. Within the more centralized systems of steering and control, policing tends to be co-produced in (local) networks.

The relative proportion of central versus local control varies both in the organization and governance of the police. However, certain trends can be observed across all three countries, as the studies in this issue have shown.

There are no ideal solutions. Each police system is a compromise and will have its strong and weak points. Tension will in-

evitably exist between the values of centralization and decentralization of organization in terms of power, steering and accountability.

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