



LEADING POLICING IN EUROPE: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF POLICE LEADERSHIP ⁽¹⁾



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Abstract: This article summarises the empirical research data obtained by the authors from interviewing more than a hundred strategic police leaders in forces across 22 countries in Europe. The authors have categorised the leaders' confidential comments into a series of insightful analyses of police recruitment, selection, promotion and posting, diversity, attitudes to multilateral cooperation and joint operations, views on contemporary policing problems, including threats from terrorism and transnational organised crime, and incorporates their visions of a future, perhaps dystopian, Europe dominated by cybercrime and public disorder.

EUROPEAN STRATEGIC LEADER RESEARCH

Conducting research across different policing systems inevitably leads to substantial differences and challenges. It is important to acknowledge from the outset that rank equivalence does not properly exist across all police systems in Europe. Rather than specify the rank of those we have interviewed (and the multiple meanings attached to terms like 'Superintendent' or 'Commissioner', which are good examples where the designations can range from describing local, low-level operational control to the highest strategic command), we define a strategic police leader as 'someone having responsibility for the delivery of strategic policing' regardless of nominal or apparently equivalent rank.

In the event, of course, those who deliver strategic policing are at or near the top of their particular policing tree, and they constitute a de facto elite. While we seriously considered using the term 'executive' police officer to describe

the people who deliver strategic policing across Europe, this seemed to us to smack too much of management-speak and, more damagingly, equated policing (a largely public service) too closely with commercial or private industry structures. There are too many loadings and shades of meaning around the generalised word 'chief', especially when used in policing. 'Strategic police leader' is an altogether preferable term for the people we interviewed and, what is more, the phrase has resonance across Europe, whereas 'executive' does not.

This study examines differences in policing structures, given point and context by the selection and appointment of strategic police leaders across Europe, the different ways in which such leaders are developed and promoted, to whom and in what ways they are accountable and their views on that accountability; the different ways in which political and judicial governance of the police are obtained, relationships within policing, within the wider criminal justice systems and within the larger political structure in Europe. Strategic leaders'

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views are elicited on contemporary threats posed by organised crime and terrorism and how they prefer the pragmatism of bilateral cooperation (Guille, 2010b) to the 'supranational' multilateral approach favoured by the European Council (Guille, 2010a; Smith 2013) and embodied in organisations like Europol and Eurojust. The leaders' views on the future of policing, as well as its contemporary challenges, are captured.

European strategic police leaders have hardly been studied at all (Loader, 2002) and there is very little in the way of contemporary 'pan-European' empirical data analysis, such as we offer. The data we have gathered enabled us to search for common factors as well as to highlight important differences; one example is a reluctance on the part of strategic police leaders to countenance joint investigative operations with more than three or four other countries — there is certainly nothing in their comments that embraces the strategic political ideal of 'pan-European' concerted action (Lorincz, 2013). This in turn suggests a gap between the kind of supra-national policing vision promulgated by EU politicians and the pragmatic determination to get the job done at the operational policing level.

METHODOLOGY

Confidential interviews and questionnaires were conducted with 108 strategic leaders, ranging from the very experienced and long in post, to those recently appointed who will influence European policing for the next 10-15 years. The interviewees came from more than 22 European countries spread across seven specific regions ⁽²⁾.

Participants were accessed through 'snowball sampling' techniques, taking advantage of an evolving network of contacts and supporting police organisations. The data were processed by

cross-referencing, and categorised by thematic analysis ⁽³⁾.

The sample size alone does not necessarily reflect the 'quality' of those interviewed: many interviewees are at, or close to, the very top of policing in their respective countries and their views represent an insight into how policing is conducted across Europe and what constraints operate on the autonomy of the strategic leaders. By contrast, some of the strategic police leaders are young in both service and age, especially in the emergent post-Soviet countries, where 'clean skins' are being preferred to the previous apparatchiks who ran the repressive police states. Democratisation of these forces has entailed a necessary sacrifice of 'tainted' experience and length of service to embrace western European policing practices (Pagon, 1996; Marenin & Caparini, 2005; Meško & Dobovšek, 2007).

Numbers of interviewees by region:

Alpine (A)	18
Baltic (Ba)	5
Benelux (B)	11
British Isles (BI)	10
Central Europe (C)	22
Mediterranean (M)	22
Nordic (N)	20
Total	108

RESEARCH FINDINGS

There are a number of observations we can make as a result of the interviews and questionnaires conducted and our analysis of the replies. We emphasise that these are not definitive conclusions but rather indicative findings. Nonetheless, we summarise them here to show that the research has produced 'rich detail' of interest.

⁽²⁾ We guaranteed our interviewees complete anonymity and so we do not identify them either by name or by country, lest they are recognised. Instead, we designate them as coming from one of the following regions of Europe: Baltic covering Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, Benelux: Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg, British Isles: England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Republic of Ireland, Nordic: Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Alpine: Austria, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Slovenia, Germany, Central Europe: Poland, Czech Republic, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, and the Mediterranean covering Portugal, Spain, France, Monaco, Italy, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Malta and the British territory of Gibraltar.

⁽³⁾ A qualitative methodology has been used in this study, dealing with often unsystematic 'rich detail' and so standard sampling techniques familiar in quantitative processing were neither applicable nor effective.



SELECTION FOR HIGH OFFICE

Many strategic police leaders are critical of their selection processes, believing them to be opaque and unstructured, whilst others deplore the lack of development in post and beyond. By contrast, some believe that the selection process has become too managerial and that there are too many 'chiefs' for the task. There are a range of experiences drawn on here and the views of some strategic police leaders are expressed in detail. The role of CEPOL (the European Police College) is of importance here, especially the impact of the 'TOPSPOC' training course for strategic police leaders, while the virtues and drawbacks of a standardised chief police officer curriculum for development and learning were considered, as well as national autonomous or bespoke programmes for advancement of potential leaders.

It seems that patronage still plays a prominent part in strategic police leader selection, and there is strong emerging evidence from the testimony from interviewees that the selection system across Europe continues to rely on potential leaders being spotted early and nurtured by existing strategic police leaders. This raises in turn questions about potential for 'cloning' and whether movement between different national systems will ever be practicable, given the persistence of patronage.

The profile of a 'typical' European strategic police leader is of a conservative, fairly well-educated (often to degree level), middle-aged 'pale male' who has risen through the police ranks. He has both uniformed and detective experience and has been tested in a variety of operational postings. The implications of this profile for diversity within policing, for the representation of women and members of ethnic minority communities in the top strategic posts, and for the message that this sends to society as a whole, is analysed in the context of the considerable body of literature on the subject (Punch et al., 2013).

ACCOUNTABILITY

The empirical data gathered suggest that strategic police leaders are wary of anything on a 'pan-European' scale, and many are sceptical of the operational value of 'supra-state' organisations like Europol or EUROJUST. The different jurisdictions and legal structures

suggest that reconciling differences would be a huge task for not much reward, while 'oversight' appears to have variable meanings in the policing context.

Evidence suggests that there is a distinction between old-established political oversight of the police in western Europe, and the more uneasy relationship between police and politicians in emerging states in the Baltic and central European regions (Marenin & Caparini, 2005). In the former, there is a fairly comfortable equation between policing and policy, whilst in the former Soviet countries there is some continuing mistrust and suspicion of political interference. We note evidence from our interviewees that in some instances this has led strategic police leaders into closer relationships with lawyers and judges at the expense of politicians, with implications for criminal justice and the open oversight of the law.

Some strategic police leaders are highly critical of what they see as politicians' expedient interference with policing to score political points, while others are head-shakingly rueful about the influence of politics on the police — especially at the strategic level and through appointed mayors. This extends to pan-European considerations and the reluctance of police across Europe to embrace both political change in policing strategies and concomitant structural change in how that policing is delivered. A 'defensive default' position is widespread.

GENDER AND REPRESENTATION OF MINORITY GROUPS IN POLICING

The data strongly suggest that women and ethnic minorities are under-represented at strategic levels in policing across Europe, but the picture is slowly changing, particularly in north-western European states. Relationships with peers tend to be less fraught and competitive in the rest of Europe than in the United Kingdom, and key relationships tend to be more between strategic police leaders and public prosecutors than between police peer groups. There is evidence to suggest that leaders prefer to develop less-competitive relationships within the criminal justice system and away from their own peer group, which in turn leads us to ask what influences impact most on their formulation of policing strategies.



CHALLENGES TO POLICING

Strategic police leaders are more or less agreed on the three major challenges facing them: terrorism, organised crime and cybercrime, but differ in the methodologies they should use, as well as differing in the second rank of priorities.

There is considerable unanimity about the threats facing Europe in the future; but there are wide variations in the means that strategic police leaders believe that they need to counter those threats. The internationalism of modern policing, and the impossibility that a European police force can exist in isolation from others, has implications both for British police forces — which may be forced by current political initiatives progressively to disengage from European policing mechanisms — and for the newly-joined states in terms of capability, preparedness and cooperation. That said, there is widespread scepticism about the notion of *corpus juris criminalis*, or a pan-European agreed 'top ten' crimes that all states will prosecute with equal vigour. This clearly remains a chimera.

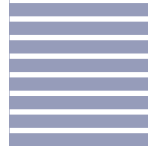
FURTHER RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is important to note that this research was conceived as the preliminary stage of a proposed larger, deeper, longitudinal study under the auspices of CEPOL, which will extend the empirical study in more detail, covering more topics in greater depth, gathering more comprehensive data through collaborative work by academics and police forces in a number of countries. At present, the way in which this can be done and how it may be funded is still being debated.

We recommend that this is both valuable and necessary research: as police budgets tighten across Europe, as threat assessments change, as policing importance in cyberspace is debated and as the threat from transnational organised crime grows (Mallory, 2014), we need to know what our strategic police leaders are thinking and we need to influence their planning. These are matters far too important to leave to politicians alone. We recommend too that greater collaboration should exist between police forces and university research departments across Europe: we have scratched the surface and hope now that future researchers will go deeper and wider. Above all, the aim is to help our police colleagues, not to threaten them.

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