

Preventing violent extremism and strengthening democracy — civic education in law enforcement and policing in Germany

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Abstract

Europe is currently threatened by extremism and terrorism. That is why there is a need for a response by well-trained law enforcement officers — among others in the field of preventing violent extremism. Facing this challenge law enforcement training tries to professionalize the officers by providing civic education and knowledge about extremist threats and prevention strategies. As it is shown by the example of the Lower Saxon Political Crime Prevention Unit such efforts are inspired by various European law enforcement authorities, e.g. by the Danish SSP-approach. The article in terms of a research note describes recent strategies and capabilities of civic education in order to prevent violent extremism and strengthening democracy.

Keywords: Extremism, Prevention, Civic Education.

Background

Civic education has more than 100 years of tradition in Germany. 'More than other subjects, it is influenced by the political and social system' and 'burdened with high demands.' (Händle, 2002). It is an important issue in different societal systems, but especially within the internal security system in which political and legal logics cross each other against the background of democracy (Lange, 2000). This has also an impact on law enforcement organizations (LEOs) which represent the executive power monopoly. Following the assumption that no community could solely be based on external coercion and compulsion (Gintzel, 1987), it seems obvious that state protection tasks need civic education for their (societal) legitimation. There are only a few studies about the relevance of the subject for LEOs and their training practices. As this 'promisingly field of

research' (Pudlat, 2014) still needs to be explored and spread further, the section 'Ethics, civic education and historical learning' as part of the research project 'Uses of the Past by Police Organizations in Europe' (UPPE) (1) is dedicated to those issues from different perspectives. Among other questions, the section intends to explain how recent trends in Germany (bottom up *and* top down), with regard to strengthen civic education within LEOs, can be identified. It will also present current strategies and capabilities of civic education within German LE authorities in order to prevent violent extremism and to strengthen democracy. The present paper, in terms of a research note, is an outcome of the first phase of research. Referring to political didactics, historical didactics, and police sciences empirical data, such as documents (e.g. the police training curriculum

(1) For further information and first results see Schütte-Bestek and Pudlat (2015).

of Lower Saxony Police) and interviews with experts and police officers as well as knowledge gained by ethnography, will be analysed. The aim is to present findings and assumptions depicted from an explorative and inductive overview over the collected empirical data and deduce some preliminary conclusions and critical thoughts.

Development of civic education in German LEOs

It seems obviously that civic education is a valuable part of LE training. The etymology of the word 'police' shows a range of senses encompassing (public) policy, state, public order, administration, government, citizenship, civil polity, and so on. That means LE refers to the civil society, which is considered by the LEOs.

Since the 1920s, the subject is part of LE training plans in Germany. Firstly, it was called 'Staatsbürgerkunde'. After World War II, the Allied Forces pushed the subject due to the striving for democratization. Progressive police leaders did the same for citizen- and consumer-oriented LEOs. Civic education was taught in a subject which has had different names since then. It was partly combined with constitutional law courses. The subject intended a continuous teaching of formal democratic basis knowledge. It should thereby support an internal and external legitimization of LEOs. Unfortunately, the Allied Forces implemented the 'political re-education' differently and democracy was taught in a heteronomous way. The Germans and their LE officers should become democrats by order. Curricula and teaching materials, that focussed on knowledge about institutions, election procedures, historical as well as political facts and the comparison of different political systems indicate that (Schulte, 2003).

In the 1970s, social sciences and psychology were implemented in German police schools. This was an opportunity to enhance reflective and emancipatory elements of civic education and to support them in developing their own ways of teaching democracy. Unfortunately, there was a selective and instrumental reception of sociological contents since 1975 (Schulte, 2003).

At the beginning of the 1990s, xenophobia was a serious problem in Germany. There was an increasing number of right-wing violence since the 1980s and in

1991 massive attacks on accommodations for refugees challenged the police authorities in whole Germany⁽²⁾. That is why the curricula of civic education was enhanced in order to enable LE officers to fulfil their missions and to prevent and fight extremism. Since the new millennium, there has been a conceptional lack of civic education. Only the objective of the subject is determined: It should contribute to a critical and rational reflection of the political and occupational reality and deliver orientation in order to fulfil the missions in the daily law enforcement routine and frame the democratization of police authorities based on the constitution (Schulte, 2003).

Even today civic education in Germany is taught as a subject with different names. Due to the German history and recent developments, the subject and its teachers are confronted with high demands. Unfortunately, members of staff at LE universities are not always qualified in the field of civic education. Either they are LE officers without the necessary theoretical background or they are 'normal' teachers without the necessary knowledge of LE practices. This means that they are partly not aware of specific needs and interests of ongoing LE officers (Pudlat, 2014).

Chances of preventing extremism by civic education

In 2011 a right-wing terrorist group, the so-called NSU, was uncovered after a series of 14 bank robberies. 10 persons, 9 immigrants, and one female police officer were killed by at least two criminals. While the main suspects died by suicide, the trial to their associates is on its way since May 2013. Regarding to the specific German history and the fact that an extremist group could exist undiscovered since the 1990s, led to different committees of inquiry at the political level. One result was the demand for more civic education in LE training. The existing courses should be enhanced and become better at avoiding prejudices and discrimination in police practice. Politicians said that there is a need for courses about human rights and intercultural competences even in the training for the non-commissioned ranks (Deutscher Bundestag, 2013). It was also stated that more historians and political scientists should be recruited (Sächsischer Landtag, 2014). Ac-

⁽²⁾ A study by Hans-Gerd Jaschke (1994) showed that German LEOs were burdened and overwhelmed in fighting right-wing extremism.

cording to this it can be seen that preventing violent extremism and strengthening democracy has become an internal topic of LE in Germany. It seems that police is still a part of the problem itself in this point of view.

As a result of those claims, the LEOs offered *employment* opportunities, e.g. professorships for civic education. They also provided room for a more research-based police training. In October 2016, the project 'Politische Bildung und Polizei' (civic education and police) started as a cooperation of the German Police University, the Public Administration University of Applied Sciences North Rhine-Westphalia and the Federal Agency for Civic Education in Germany. It aims to analyse the existing external and internal structures, proposals and programs as well as teaching plans in the whole country. It is also going to uncover the special needs within different LE bodies. Thereafter, specific teaching programs and materials will be developed (Frevel, 2016).

Actually, the efforts were underlined bottom up by some members of staff, interested in history. The Austrian expert in historical and political didactics, Christoph Kühberger, stated, that it is impossible to think the political without the historical and vice versa (Kühberger, 2009). Hence, it is no surprise that a part of civic education is addressed by another current trend: Dealing with law enforcement history.

'Over the last few years, scientific works and discourses about organizational uses of history have increased. Most of them refer to private sector organizations and their benefits from using their past. Making use of an organization's history has already been widely acknowledged as important means for a company's identity formation and its image. Regarding the company's internal relations, an organizational identity based on this form of history management holds potential for recognition, the implementation of values and a strengthened loyalty of employees. Concerning the external relations, a well-structured history management can result in recognizable and distinguishable image formation, leading to advantages in the competition for resources with other companies and stake out claims. For the stakeholders, it provides a stable point of orientation among the enormous number of apparently identical organizations' (Schütte-Bestek and Pudlat, 2015: 51).

In a kind of sustainable communication, police forces try to constitute their development as a directed, 'lin-

ear process' from past to contemporary time, 'based on tradition, experience and innovation' (Ackermann, 2012: 70). With regard to the German history, National-socialism is still an important topic in Germany. One example is the project 'Die Polizei im NS-Staat' (2008-2011) under the leadership of Wolfgang Schulte (German Police University) and Detlef Graf von Schwerin (formerly Brandenburg State Police Academy), that led to an exhibition presented by the German Historical Museum in 2011 ⁽²⁾. Additionally teaching materials were developed in cooperation with the Federal Agency for Civic Education (Kaiser and Köhler and Gryglewski, 2012).

In order to underline the democratization of the POs and their members after World War II, the period between 1933 and 1945 is often a part of exhibitions in police museums (e.g. in Berlin and Hamburg) as well as of image brochures. As one illustrative example for this, the police of Lower Saxony stated that it was important to re-implement people and their dignity as a measuring size for policing after the 'inhuman system of national socialism'. The result is the successful model of a 'Bürgerpolizei' (citizen police) (Polizeiakademie Niedersachsen, 2009a: 17). That PR statement is underlined by the objectives within the curriculum for police training. The students are expected to be familiar with the historical development of the executive power monopoly and the field of police activity, the principles of the democratic state governed by the rule of law, and the structures of society from a political scientific perspective. They should accept human and fundamental rights as a frame for policing and gain knowledge in constitutional and European law as well as in international cooperation (Polizeiakademie Niedersachsen, 2009b). Responsible for teaching are social and legal scientists. Other modules are dedicated to the investigation of political crimes. The students learn about drug policy, right and left-wing extremist ideologies, and terrorism.

These aspects of police training point to internal issues. The LE is addressed to the public welfare and it deals with crime prevention and crime fighting. That is why another trend has to be mentioned. Due to the recent threats and the UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, German authorities intensified their efforts in extremism prevention as it is shown by the example of the Lower Saxon Political Crime Prevention Unit that was founded in 2014. The unit tries to undeceive vari-

⁽²⁾ For further information and exhibition catalogue see Deutsche Hochschule der Polizei (2011).

ous groups about the threats, the aims, symbols, and actions of different extremist groups. It legitimizes their presentations and courses with terrorist attacks since 9/11. Target groups are police trainees and officers, prison staff, administration officers, members of the social services, an undefined general public, and — inspired by the Danish SSP-approach ⁽⁴⁾ — teachers. In the early 1970s, youth crime in Denmark increased. That is why the so called SSP-system was established in 1975 in order to develop more efficient methods of crime prevention. Schools, social services, and the police are working together to prevent and reduce crime and related risk behaviour among young people.

So what the Institute for History at Hildesheim University did in cooperation with the Political Crime Prevention Unit was to establish prevention courses in the regular teachers education in order to professionalize the teachers, by providing civic education and knowledge about extremist threats and prevention strategies. Explaining the negative way in the extremists thinking in religion and politics means to underline the values of a democratic society and to strengthen democracy. In the sense of lifelong learning this courses were opened for senior teachers. However, students were more interested. Due to the different responsibilities and liabilities, teachers that already practice their profession, cannot be motivated in the same manner as students. Content-related the project considers all kinds of extremism in order to avoid conjectural focusses and instead to gain sustainability. The success of prevention is not measurable, but the feedback is promising. Students are writing their exams about this topic on a voluntary basis and teachers ask for more information and project presentations at their schools. Thereby civic education provided by the police finds its way into society.

historical education and it is framed by the political system. Recent strategies and capabilities within LEOs point to their changing and learning efforts related to the prevention of violent extremism and strengthening democracy — within the LEO itself as well as in the whole society. Regarding to National Socialism, the right-wing terrorism of the NSU and extremist threats in Germany civic education is instilled *ex negativo* and has the character of heteronomous democratization. Lastly, it is more or less a topic for the leadership of LEOs, not of the LE officers themselves. That is why civic education holds potential in more than one sense and is still a challenge — for police practice as well as police research.

Preliminary conclusions

Civic education is already an integral part of LE training and holds potential for external and internal legitimization. The subject is able to transfer democratic values, to strengthen employees' loyalty as well as to provide mission-related knowledge for police officers. Civic education is highly connected with history and

⁽⁴⁾ SSP stands for School, Social Services and Police. In order to prevent crime the Danish police forces cooperates with schools and social workers. They try to fight causes of juvenile crime as early as possible.

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