

Executive Director's Prologue

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Dear Readers,



2020 – What a challenge! A single word is not enough to describe it.

On the 19th edition of the Bulletin, I had already pointed out some of the most relevant impacts of COVID-19 for Europe and the law enforcement communities. In the meanwhile, the pandemic and the reactions of the governments and societies in Europe have further evolved.

Before I elaborate on the most critical aspects affecting us in 2020, I would like to take this opportunity to express my great satisfaction on the release of the 20th edition of our CEPOL Bulletin. CEPOL has been bringing this publication to its audience for 11 years now. Besides many other international publications on law enforcement matters and related topics, our Bulletin has managed to find its place within the European law enforcement communities and the academic circles. I am very grateful for the high-quality contributions submitted over all these years by our authors. I am equally grateful for all those engaged in the editorial work. You, all together, made possible the well-earned good international reputation that this publication enjoys today.

Returning to the global pandemic, realising that our hopes for better circumstances by the end of the year have not materialised is somehow disheartening. The situation has worsened in the last weeks across Europe. While we see the light at the end of the tunnel, with the vaccine coming to the market very soon and quick tests being available, we still see cases reach record highs and the pressure on our health system growing.

Already in June, CEPOL, in cooperation with the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, held a high-level online conference on the impact of COVID-19 on law enforcement communities in Europe and about the first lessons learned. It was engaging to listen to the experiences from different countries throughout the first wave of the pandemic. At that time, Italy and Spain had been the worst hit countries. Unfortunately, several other EU Member States have undergone a similar drastic experience as them.

The law enforcement communities are going through an extremely challenging period that requires agile adjustments of the services and learning curves on high speed. One key question is, how can we make officials and organisations more resilient in such a pandemic? For obvious reasons, officials are concerned about their health situation and the potential risks for their families. EU Member States have tried to adjust their procedures, made personal-protection-equipment available, and invested in regular and frequent testing. However, the risks remain, and officials died this year from COVID-19 after exposure to the virus while on duty.

Many areas of administration and industry have moved into an online mode. This shift is, for law enforcement, in no small degree impracticable. How to do an arrest or a house search while sitting in the home office?

New challenges for law enforcement have been emerging as the pandemic was developing further. Some crime areas decreased; others enormously increased. The decision to close bars and restaurants had a direct impact on street or night crime for good. However, other areas of crime and insecurity have experienced spikes during the pandemic: Some countries reported a substantial increase in domestic violence. In several countries, we have seen clashes between protesters against COVID-19 related restrictions and police forces. Law enforcement officials have fought against substandard PPE equipment and fake medicine. In parallel, the law enforcement services had to build up not only new controls at the external borders of countries, but to enforce local, regional or night curfews.

Additionally, home-office and home-schooling have brought a massive dependency on online services and infrastructure. In many cases, organisations and individuals have not been sufficiently prepared for such a fast and dynamic switch into an online environment. Essential security aspects have been often neglected towards the advantage of a fast change. As a result of the new scenario, we have observed across the globe a high increase in cybersecurity and cybercrime cases as we have seen cybercriminals successfully exploiting the weaknesses of IT systems. At this point, when economies of states are strongly dependant on a secure cyber environment, this becomes a vital issue for our societies.

In the current lockdown situation in our countries, we entirely depend, within our daily social life, including schooling and studying, on secure online environments. This is a pressing issue on the level of the individuals.

With all the above said, and to complete the picture, we should not forget that the usual crime and security challenges are not gone at all! The virus has not diminished serious and organised crime groups in any shape. Organised crime remains as a relevant security threat in Europe.

As a matter of fact, and based on the research of EMCDDA, illicit drugs are a very relevant issue that deserves our full attention. Additionally, we are operating in a complex geopolitical environment. Crises in countries such as Syria, Libya, Ukraine, Iraq or Belarus, may have a massive impact on our internal security. And what can be said about BREXIT? The tangible impact of a potential no-deal is still not clear.

Equally, all law enforcement communities and academics in Europe are strongly invited in the next months and years to pay attention to the critical question of potential racism in law enforcement services. The Black Lives Matters movement in the US in 2020 has raised relevant questions in this direction, also in Europe. All in all, this year was seriously tough and demanding for all officers and services in Europe - and this is set to remain for quite a while!

However, we should not be afraid of all these challenges. During 2020, the law enforcement services have proven their high capability again to adjust very quickly, and we have seen numerous examples of excellent cross border cooperation across Europe despite the COVID-19 restrictions.

I am confident that with our proven outstanding commitment, our joint professional competences, our readiness for solidarity and our strength as communities across borders, we will ensure the security of our citizens despite this pandemic!

Police and law enforcement can never shy away from challenges –and we are currently in the middle of a historical one. Let us get through this and stay strong – and healthy. Together.

Executive Director CEPOL

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