

Executive Director's Prologue

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Executive Director



Dear Readers,



At the time of writing these lines here in our CEPOL headquarter in Budapest one could think that the COVID-19 pandemic is already just history in the capital city of Hungary. People enjoy to go out for lunch or dinner, having drinks and partying as before the pandemic. The airport in Budapest is packed with tourists, all looking forward to a care-free holiday. It is great to see all these people enjoying their freedom and having a good time, just as it should be 'normal'.

However, looking at the facts, the pandemic is all but over by now. Incidence rates are increasing across Europe. Some governmental institutions say that the 4th wave is already in progress. Despite all shared efforts like wearing masks, social distancing and especially vaccinations, the pandemic threat is not eliminated. This means that all law enforcement services across Europe are not relieved from the challenge to police the pandemic. Governments in Europe have begun to re-introduce police checks to travellers and re-enforce night curfews, while police forces are facing resistance from small but vocal groups of protesters, who refuse to accept public health measures like wearing protective masks or COVID-vaccinations. COVID-19 triggered problems have been already a massive challenge to all police services across Europe for almost 19 months and continue to absorb a relevant part of resources. Tribute goes to all colleagues who have worked so hard for the public good during the pandemic.

CEPOL is following this development very closely to best support our communities in Europe. Under the given pandemic circumstances we have constantly adjusted our offer for online based learning and qualification services in the first half of 2021. All these services are highly demanded by our colleagues across Europe. At the same time we are all looking

forward to re-start our on-site activities to enable the so important personal contacts across Europe. We are well aware how important face-to-face meetings are for building trust in cross-border cooperation of law enforcement communities.

During our first online Research and Science Conference held in May 2021, implemented in close cooperation with our excellent partner from the Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania, we provided the platform for practitioners and academics to come together for a first stock taking exercise on lessons learned from the first year of policing this unprecedented pandemic. I am very grateful for all individuals for their high level contributions to the conference. The variety of contributions to this conference have evidenced that this unique challenge caused by the pandemic provided multifold relevant questions for the academic discourse around the future orientation of law enforcement services in our societies. It will be equally important to further analyse how this situation has changed the relations between the citizens and the law enforcement services.

While we consider this online conference in May a success in the interest of our target groups, we are already looking ahead and planning for December 2021 in Vilnius, again in close cooperation with the Mykolas Romeris University, a further edition of our Research and Science Conferences in a hybrid format. We do hope that as many as possible of you will find the opportunity to join us in this event in Lithuania. For those of you who can't attend we are aiming to provide an interactive live streaming solution that you can participate from your office somewhere on the globe.

For obvious reasons we have focused on the major issue of policing the pandemic in the last 18 months. However, we should not forget other very important areas of non-crime policing as future strategic challenges. While some may dispute this, majority of scientists confirm that the impact of the climate change has hit already Europe. Heat waves, flooding's caused by extreme weather phenomena and wildfires have been seen in many European countries this summer with devastating impacts.

As it is very likely that more severe weather phenomena will occur, it is worth to consider seriously the preparedness and resilience of law enforcement services for such conditions, e.g. about necessary training, equipment and communications infrastructures. Law enforcement services obviously need to analyse their models of cooperation with the civil protection services, medical and rescue services and the civil societies across Europe. I think this provides a broad field for research around the interoperability of the different services engaged and about the preparedness across Europe. In a European dimension, it seems to be reasonable to consider options for mutual support across borders of police organisations also in such scenarios.

The geopolitical neighbourhood of Europe requires equally our attention. Around the Mediterranean Sea we observe a growing risk of political instability. In Tunisia there is an on-

going dispute within the Government, where we cannot yet predict the potential outcome. Over the last years Tunisia was considered as the success model of democratic change in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.. Here we should not forget how close Tunisia is to Libya and how difficult the situation is in this country.

Lebanon looks like a country almost in a free fall, following an ongoing economic crisis, the blast in Beirut harbour, just one year ago, and in combination with the pandemic. This had led to a massive crisis situation in the country in a highly sensitive geopolitical location in the Middle East.

Lebanon and Tunisia are without a question very close to Europe. The potential risk-laden developments there can have a significant effect on internal security in Europe. Here it is worth to consider the role of the European Union and how we can contribute to a positive development for strengthening stability in those countries.

Further away from Europe there are even more areas that deserve our attention. Here just to name the development in Afghanistan and Iraq. The international coalition has decided to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan. Beside the military forces deployed there has been a massive investment into building up the civil infrastructure and services in this country. Police services across Europe have been committed to support the re-structuring and re-building of the Afghan police services over many years. It would be a big loss, if we would not take the opportunity to carefully analyse the lessons learned from this engagement in Afghanistan. So many police officers have taken part in this endeavour, we should at least capture as best as possible all experiences gathered and analyse, what worked and what did not work under those very challenging circumstances. Without a question, we shall monitor very carefully, what is going to happen within Afghanistan in the next months to come and how this may impact the international threat landscape. It seems that we will see soon a similar development also for Iraq in case the international troops will withdraw there as well.

In conclusion, beside the still ongoing pandemic situation there are many relevant aspects of concern that we do need to pay attention to. Let's bring our competences together from the side of law enforcement practitioners and academics to best forecast and analyse all these challenges in a comprehensive way. Equally, let's prepare a joint answer of law enforcement services in Europe together. To be successful in the service for our citizens the best answer on some of these challenges will be for certain joining efforts across borders!

Executive Director CEPOL

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