PROJECT REPORT

Project COREPOL: Conflict Resolution, Mediation and Restorative Justice and the Policing of Ethnic Minorities in Germany, Austria and Hungary

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In quite a number of member states of the European Union the policing of minority population is an increasing source of political and ethical controversies. Since the beginning of the 1990s, this also pertains to refugees and discriminated ethnic minorities in Western Europe. In the meantime, the migration flow has extended over the entire European continent. Accordingly, the related problems need to be addressed with a common European perspective. Across European member states minority-police problems appear to be widespread and persistent.

It is not the job of police to compensate for the inequalities, injustices and practices of discrimination in society. However a theory of fair and just policing would assume that policing of poor or minority people will not increase “the vast structural inequalities and differences in life experiences that sustain such inequalities... Do the police contribute singularly and collectively contribute to the sense of justice?”

Accusations of police abuse of power and ethnic/racial profiling have been validated in recent EU surveys. It is also stated that the associated area of police science is dramatically under researched and in immediate need of substantial empirical groundwork. This is, in a nutshell, the problem area to be addressed by COREPOL, where the project strives to fill a gap. On a wider scale, COREPOL will enhance the understanding of police-minority conflict in the field of European police science, criminology, and sociology through publications and EU-wide international conferences, and also in the media and general public

through media publications. The project duration is 36 months and has received funding from the European Union Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013) under grant agreement n°285166 (COREPOL).

The police-minority research will focus on different minority populations in each participating country: Germany, Hungary, and Austria. The German partner will focus the investigation on the largest migrant community: individuals and their families with a Turkish background, mostly urban, and predominantly working class. The Austrian research will look at residents with an African background. Again, this is a population mostly residing in the bigger cities, while in Hungary Roma communities are generally located in the rural parts of the country.

The main objective of COREPOL is to increase the scope and the efficaciousness of informal conflict resolution mechanisms between police and minority communities based on the principles of Restorative Justice. Restorative Justice is anything but a narrowly defined set of instruments. More often than not it is integrated into the Criminal Justice System, in particular in the case of victim-offender mediation programs. It is meant to solve conflict between the “stakeholders” (offender, victim, peers, and community) more effectively than the formal criminal justice response to crime. The underlying assumption of the research is that Restorative Justice may offer more effective avenues to conflict resolution and enhance social cohesion and the communities’ capacity to build up resilience against crime/victimisation.

The project’s approach is that law enforcement officials need to take steps towards increasing the confidence of hate crime victims, so that they in turn feel safe enough to report such crimes to the police. A further specific objective of COREPOL is to create awareness for innovative forms of conflict resolution based on Restorative Justice in the area of police training, police education and senior police management.

The first set of scientific empirical inquiries will address the existence of Restorative Justice programms or initiatives in Germany, Austria and Hungary. This will be carried out by interviews with university...
criminology departments, research institutes in the field of criminal justice, crime experts and NGOs. Parallel to these steps media documents and research literature will be reviewed. Existing programs will be contacted, their organizers will be interviewed, and Restorative Justice meetings will be visited as part of field studies.

The second phase will investigate the situation of the specific minorities in Germany, Austria and Hungary. Again, this will contain analyses of available literature and expert interviews with university researchers and minority organization activists, and it will contrast this with interviews carried out with police and security experts. The specific objective of the research will lie in the question of whether police are involved in the organization and/or practices of Restorative Justice conferencing, circles or other activities in the field of minority crime and delinquency problems.

On the basis of the findings of project phase 2 and project phase 3 the final research phase will attempt to initiate Restorative Justice meetings between police and minority representatives and organizations in the three participating EU countries.

In conclusion, the outcomes of COREPOL will provide a broader (practitioner-friendly) understanding of the scope and limitations of Restorative Justice in the framework of continental (Civil Law) societies. The project will come up with data on best-practice programs of Restorative Justice in the field of police-minority conflict. The primary outlet for our findings will be police tertiary education B.A. and M.A. curricula and in-service training courses for top management policemen and policewomen on a national and on a European level (e.g. CEPOL).

The research will answer the question of how better police - minority relations can be achieved in the context of European democratic policing. It will determine the extent to which Restorative Justice is presently used and how it can be made suitable to improve police minority communication and interaction. The research will additionally address the open questions of gender, age and cultural compatibility of Restorative Justice in the field of policing minority problems.