



**NATIONAL CONVENTION ON THE EUROPEAN UNION IN THE REPUBLIC OF
NORTH MACEDONIA (WEB: nkeu.mk)**

14th Session of Working Group 4 - Justice, Freedom, and Security

8 July 2024, Skopje Panoramika Hotel, 12:00-16:00

**Topic: THROUGH PROFESSIONALISM AND INTEGRITY TO TRANSPARENCY
AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN POLICING**

Professionalism and integrity are extremely important in policing, particularly within contemporary social circumstances of using information technologies, virtual communication means and transactions, global connectivity, migrations, the rise of terrorism, organized crime and other crowd-based threats. These types of threats have greatly increased the militaristic aspect of policing. On the other hand, many other private agencies, corporations, and other bodies operate in the field of safety and security, going to show that, in addition to the police, there are many other actors involved in this area. However, the way the police operate and their approach is special. The police are part of the institutional system and they possess the authority and the right to use force. Their main task is to enforce laws and protect the fundamental rights of the citizens. When the police fail to do precisely that in an appropriate way, special mechanisms need to be constructed to address situations and prevent abuse of authority.

The new social trends also bring challenges to the way in which the police are set up internally. Police action is constantly adapting to the new needs for detecting, documenting, and prosecuting cases of corruption and organized crime. Success in this area is of great importance for restoring trust in institutions and strengthening their integrity. International instruments (protocols, conventions, and other strategic documents) introduce new terminology, new tools for quality law enforcement, as well as for increasing competences in monitoring and managing cases and in financial investigations, of which especially important for our national circumstances being the management of the risk of corruption and collective action to combat corruption as a whole. The focus is now shifted towards the inclusive involvement of multiple stakeholders, such as the private sector, civil society, and the media. This demonstrates that integrity in policing is a key component of the new approaches towards organizational set-up in the area of safety and security.

The conclusions that the integrity of police officers is of special importance for strengthening democratic processes in societies go along the same lines. The integrity of the police can be read through the level of public support the police enjoy, i.e. through the way the citizens perceive the actions of the police officers. Citizens are significantly sensitive when they encounter inappropriate behaviour by the police, i.e. their use of excessive force, unfair and spectacle-driven apprehensions, display of power, application of selective justice, vindictiveness, personal insults, disparagement, and discrimination. Policing is an important instance in the implementation of laws, which means that strict care must be taken not to violate legitimacy, i.e. that public support must be continuously paid due consideration. In 2024, the trust in the police





among the citizens of our country increased to 28% (in contrast to 21% from the previous year).¹ Although the same survey shows that the ratings for the professionalism of the police are higher than before (31%), citizens still believe that policing in the country is strongly influenced by partisan, government, or business interests (65%).

Integrity in policing is high when there are no complaints from citizens about the actions of police officers and when no indications appear of internal corruption and other abuses of official position. Integrity is affected by several factors. However, how the police officers will behave mainly depends on the methods of managing all police structures, especially of the senior leadership ones. Integrity will be greater if responsibility is clearly defined within the administrative and leadership structures of the police.

When the limit of professionalism and the code of ethics is exceeded, it is necessary to apply and, if none exist, to create intervention mechanisms to preserve the legitimacy of this institution and strengthen the trust in it among the citizens. In efficient police organizational set-ups, the number of police officers is smaller due to the close cooperation between the police and the citizens, thus transferring protection and security to social ownership and handing them over to the citizens themselves. Certain cultural, economic, and other factors intervene in this regard, which can be a matter for discussion of special interest. For example, Finland and other Nordic countries have the lowest number of police officers (150 police officers per 100,000 inhabitants). In the Republic of North Macedonia, the number of police officers increased in 2022, reaching 347.6 per 100,000 inhabitants (330 in 2021), which is higher than the EU average of 335.3/100,000 (Eurostat, 2019-2021)².

However, it has been deemed necessary to develop special systems of supervision of the work of persons with police authority. Here the question arises whether internal control and internal investigations are sufficient to supervise and sanction the misconduct of police officers? Which circumstances render internal control effective, and which lead to it failing?

The European Union is dedicated to creating norms for regulating police misconduct, especially in cases where police officers act with prejudice against minority groups (racial, ethnic). The [Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025](#) addresses these very same issues, emphasizing along the way the role that the [European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, FRA](#) plays in this endeavour.

When it comes to the mechanisms for supervising policing, the question arises of the manner in which the collection, update, management, and processing of complaints by citizens are being carried out. Within the EU, civil supervision is seen as a necessity for upholding democracy in policing and there are various vehicles and bodies established to see this through which have been assigned varying missions according to their mandate and approach to supervision. These experiences are very important for building functional and effective

¹ Research: Citizen Perception on the Work of the Police in the Republic of North Macedonia in 2024, Eurothink 2024

²North Macedonia 2023 Report , p.40, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/28a9322a-3f18-434e-89d2-0890c90b2f96_en?filename=SWD_2023_693%20North%20Macedonia%20report.pdf





approaches. In our national practice, certain external mechanisms have indeed been established to supervise policing, but there is need to carry out a systematic inquiry into the methods and effects in their work.

Police professionalization and integrity building are a continuous process. It starts from the very first stage of police officer recruitment. However, trainings play a paramount role in further professionalization. Here the question arises if appropriate topics are selected for such trainings that would lead to strengthening integrity and if adequate trainers are assigned to that end within our national circumstances. For example, the European Union attaches special importance in this regard to the [European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training CEPOL](#). Moreover, an issue which the European Union finds very topical at this point in time is the European Code of Police Ethics, which the Republic of North Macedonia also applies.

Transparent policing is only one of the elements in building police integrity. It is necessary to have a communication channel which will be used to disseminate information of functional importance for the citizens (by transmitting messages and other useful in an understandable style), but also a channel for reverse feedback from the citizens. In this regard, significant improvements have been recorded in policing throughout the years. The Republic of North Macedonia has built a legislative framework which is aligned with the relevant European and international norms and standards regulating this area (the Law on Internal Affairs and the Law on Police), as well as with the European Code of Police Ethics. However, as research data shows, a multitude of new questions await to be answered on the matter. The ongoing issue with the bottlenecks created in the process of replacing the personal and travel documents of the citizens with ones inscribed with the new constitutional name of the country should serve as a textbook example in learning how to create functional models for response and mobilization by the system to be used for similar situations in the future.

