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Security Issues in the Western Balkans

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Executive Summary

The hiring and promotion procedures in the Western Balkan police services are not competitive and there is great turn-over and weak retention of most experienced officers with integrity. This is due to the lack of standard procedures for human resources management and weak professional capacity of human resources (HR) departments, as well as high political interference in day to day human resources decisions. Such practices affect police effectiveness and public perception of its professionalism and integrity. Most of law enforcement agencies in the Western Balkan region have undertaken steps in last few years to establish professional human resources management systems (HRM) that will introduce transparent and merit-based recruitment, career development, promotion and dismissals. This system is a precondition for fostering talent and professional leadership in these important public services.

*The biggest obstacle to the introduction of a functioning merit-based HR in law enforcement is **deep politicisation of human resources management**. Formal introduction of merit-based system of HR management in professional police service is hampered by informal influence of ruling parties on employment, promotion and demotion of professionals at the key posts. This is indicative of state capture or legal interference in how police organisation is run for the sake of protection of private group interests e.g. who is going to be investigated and who is going to be exempted from police action. Moreover, politicisation of the HR has facilitated opening of police services to the people with links to crime or even to those who have committed crimes. Politicisation of HR management has also led to losing talent of experienced law enforcement officers with integrity through transfers, and demotions without clear criteria or retirements at the earliest point in time.*

Therefore, the core to developing professionalism and nurturing talent in security and law enforcement institutions is limiting political interference in recruitment, selection, development and promotions of professional staff, introduction of merit-based and equal opportunities HR management practices and strengthening of internal affairs and external oversight over both political and professional leadership of law enforcement institutions.

Introduction

The **human resources management is the least developed and most sensitive part of organisational governance in security and law enforcement institutions** in the Western Balkans. This is because the decisions on employment, promotions, dismissals are effective channels for influencing behaviour of law enforcement professionals¹. If there is not adequate system of checks and balances in place to ensure that the capable police professionals with integrity have secure jobs and the prospects for career advancement even when they confront interests of political parties or powerful criminal syndicates, they would not be able to effectively perform core police tasks, such as preventing and suppressing crime or non-discriminatory protecting all citizens. This is why there is a strong focus by Western Balkan civil society² on systematic monitoring of reforms in police at the national and regional levels, as well as the emerging attention on the reforms of police organisation within the EU accession process, especially in the Chapter 24 (*Freedom, Security and Justice*). A professional, reliable and efficient police organisation is of paramount importance for effective fight against corruption, organised crime, terrorism and trust of citizens in state, and this is why reforms of police organisation and the human resources management in the police should support the goal of police services are operationally independent from political interests and shielded from criminal influence.

Most of law enforcement agencies in the region have undertaken in last few years steps to establish professional human resources (HR) management systems that will introduce transparent and merit-based recruitment and career development. This system is a precondition for fostering talent and professional leadership in these important public services. The major challenges in current HR practices are similar across the region: over-burdened police structure with overlapping functions and too many management levels without clear lines of accountability, a lack of standard procedures for human resources management and weak capacity of HR departments. As a consequence, the hiring and promotion procedures are not competitive and are often justified on the ground of “urgent needs” and there is great turn-over and weak retention of most experienced officers with integrity. Such practices affect police effectiveness and public perception of its professionalism and integrity.

¹ There is little publically available information on human resources systems in the customs and even less in intelligence services in the region as they continue to nurture clandestine way of attracting, selecting, training and developing staff. For more details see: DCAF (2012) *Case Studies of Intelligence Governance in the Western Balkans*, available at: <https://www.dcaf.ch/case-studies-intelligence-governance-western-balkans>, de Graaff, B. and James M. Nzce with Chelsea Locke, (2016) *Handbook of European Intelligence Cultures* (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield).

² The most active is the Pointpulse Network <http://pointpulse.net> gathering seven civil society organisations: [Belgrade Centre for Security Policy \(BCSP\)](#), [Balkan Investigative Reporting Network \(BIRN\)](#), [Centre for Security Studies \(CSS\)](#), [Institute Alternative \(IA\)](#), [Kosovo Centre for Security Studies \(KCSS\)](#), [Institute for Democracy and Mediation \(IDM\)](#), [Analytica](#). Besides Pointpulse, a number of investigative journalist organisations gathered in the [Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project \(OCCPR\)](#) explore links between organised crime and corruption in the Western Balkan countries and with other global networks.

While WB6 police services have different organisational design of HR function and the level of establishment of new merit-based processes, they all face the same challenges to the effective implementation of the career development: **deep politicisation of human resources management**. Formal introduction of merit-based system of HR management in professional police service is hampered by informal influence of ruling parties on employment, promotion and dismissal of professionals at the key posts. This is evident from a number of investigative stories, as well in the public³ and police perception surveys⁴ as documented further in the text.

Table 1: **Number of police officers in the Western Balkans⁵**

WB 6	Number of police officers	Number of police officers per 100 000 citizens (211 is an EU average)	Number of police officers in border police
Albania	9 867	257	1 653
BiH	16 000	453	2,646 (out of 21.3 % are vacant)
Kosovo	8 742	440	1300
Macedonia		209	1 624
Montenegro	3 940	633	200 posts are vacant
Serbia	42 426	601	3 500

Assessment of different phases of career cycle in police

In the next part, we will briefly present a review of introduction of professional human resources management system in the six Western Balkan police services of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia and highlight key challenges ahead. The analysis provided looks at different phases of career cycle from recruitment to promotion.

Most of police services have jobs systematization act in place listing the number of the necessary personnel in typical workplace positions, the minimal level of educational qualifications and years of service for most typical posts. The existing systematization lacks detailed **job descriptions** specifying concrete knowledge, skills and capabilities for a specific job posts. This hampers adequate recruitment, career development and promotion.

³ <http://pointpulse.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/COM-Survey-2017-ENG.pdf>

⁴ Saša Đorđević, (2013) 'Found in Translation: Citizens and Police Officers on Police Corruption' in BCSP and BCHR (2013): *Collection of Policy Papers on Police Reform in Serbia* (Vol.8), (Belgrade: BCSP and BCHR), pp. 56-81. Dyrmishi, Arjan (ed.) (2016), *Police Integrity and Corruption in Albania 2.0* (Tirana: IDM); Dyrmishi, Arjan (ed.) (2014), *Police Integrity and Corruption in Albania* (Tirana: IDM);

⁵ EC Country Reports for 2018 available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/countries/package_en

Most of the progress in HR reforms have taken place in setting transparent procedures and practices for open **recruitment** for entry-level posts in uniform police. However, the ministers of interior are still directly involved in the recruitment processes which leaves room for politicization. Because of lack of training provided to the managers involved in selection interviews and the lack of monitoring of selection practices and bias, there is great discretionary power during the interviews for managers who degrade or upgrade certain candidates without clear criteria of assessment.

The examples of minister of interior's involvement in recruitment

The minister of interior in Serbia is involved in recruitment of all employees selected through public competition⁶ by: a) making decision on the need in each individual case for opening the call for recruitment, b) appointment of members of Selection Committee, c) selection of candidate based on the proposal from the Selection Committee and d) signing employment decision for each new employee. In the case of internal competition⁷, the minister is in charge of a) deciding on the way for conducting internal competition, b) appointment of members of Selection Committee for filling mid- and senior-level posts and c) signing employment for each individual promotion or transfer based on internal competition. This is indicative of centralization of decision-making and great discretion for political leader's interference in day-to-day human resources decisions.

In Montenegro, the Minister of Interior can exceptionally decide not to select the first-ranked candidate for the job or promotion⁸. Based on the data collected by Institute Alternativa,⁹ out of 56 cases involving more than one candidate for a single job position in 2015, the minister decided not to select the top ranked candidate in 12.5% of the cases.

⁶ Uredba o sprovođenju javnog konkursa u MUP, „Službeni glasnik RS, broj 72 of 24. avgusta 2016. [Directive on conduct of public competition in the Ministry of Interior, Official Gazette RS, No. 72 of 24 August 2016.

⁷ Pravilnik o sprovođenju internog konkursa među zaposlenima u MUP, Službeni glasnik RS, broj 73 of 31. avgusta 2016. [Rulebook on internal competition among staff of MoI, Official Gazette RS, No. 73 of 31 August 2016.

⁸ Muk, Stevo (2016) *Assessment of Police Integrity in Montenegro*, (Podgorica: Institute Alternativa) p.37.

⁹ Ibid: 38

There is still a significant public perception that patronage through friends and relatives, as well as the political connections is key for getting a job in the police in all Western Balkan societies. The citizens in Albania and Kosovo mostly trust public competitions, while the citizens of Macedonia have least trust in competitive nature of employment.

Table 2: **Public Opinion in the region on the selection and employment in the police** ¹⁰

	Year	Average	Serbia	Montenegro	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Macedonia	Albania	Kosovo
Public competition	2016	39	41	40	31	12	56	54
	2017	43	40	43	34	13	66	63
Friends and relations	2016	42	52	51	49	20	36	41
	2017	40	45	51	53	17	31	44
Political connections	2016	39	46	44	45	41	35	24
	2017	40	40	45	47	43	30	36
Bribe	2016	14	18	11	27	4	12	12
	2017	13	16	11	27	3	12	7

Due to the secure jobs that police services provide and modernised campaigns and more transparent recruitments for Basic Police Training, the police services have been successful in attracting significant numbers of candidates but mostly men with only high-school degree. All services face challenges in attracting and retaining members of ethnic minorities and women in operational police jobs. Many of police services lack the approach to recruiting the candidates with higher educational qualifications, in accordance with the need to fill **specialist posts within the police force** in line with the requirements of EU accession process (e.g. accounting specialists for financial investigations, experts with IT background for cyber-crime, forensics etc.). This is evident in European Commission assessments of situation¹¹ where staffing of specialised police units was recognised as a major challenge to effective fight against complex crimes such as organised crime and terrorism. Research by PoitnPulse Network also shows that the WB6 police services have problem with retention of police IT specialists and public procurement experts due to low salaries in comparison to business sector and lack of other opportunities for development within the organisation.

¹⁰ Sofija Mandić, (2017) *The Citizens Opinion on the Police - Comparative Analysis of the Results of Public Opinion Surveys Conducted in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo*, (Belgrade: BCSP), p: 16 Available at: <http://pointpulse.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/COM-Survey-2017-ENG.pdf>

¹¹ Country Report for Serbia (p. 32), Country Report for Montenegro (p. 31)

Unique challenges of Kosovo Police: lack of health and life insurance and old police staff¹²

Limited resources and inadequate planning have faced Kosovo Police with unique challenge in the region and that it is that KP officers do not have health insurance. While the right to social and economic rights, including social security and health benefits is guaranteed to all police personnel by Law on Police, the Government has not allocated resources for this purpose. Also, a unique problem of Kosovo Police is that average age of police officer is above 40 years and that service cannot afford rejuvenation unless certain number of officers older than 55 is sent to early retirement. According to the data collected by Kosovar Centre for Security Studies¹³, 4,000 police officers in Kosovo are above 40 years old, 2,091 are above 46 years, while about 1,000 are of 55 years old. This leaves less than 10% of police force younger than 40 years old. The current police law does not guarantee benefits for officers seeking early retirement after the age of 55, and does not even guarantee the basic pension of EUR 90 until police officers reach the age of 65.¹⁴

Career Development

When it comes to training of police officers, there are ongoing training programmers in all of the countries from the region. The bulk of the **in-service and advanced training was organized on *ad hoc* basis**, dependent on the interest and funding of international donors. This practice does not allow for sustainability and long-term planning for capacity building and management. So far the program of mandatory **professional development has not been connected to the requirements of a respective position or to the promotion system**. In most countries, there is no centralized collection of statistics on training and personal development of employees. The records exist only for specialized training and professional development conducted by internal police educational units and these records have rarely be used to monitor whether professional development is provided in line with equal opportunities to men and women alike. There are no consolidated and systematized records about other forms of education, which may negatively impact new jobs or managerial positions in the future system of career advancement. Furthermore, the experiences of police services in Western countries show that, even when the career development system is in place, special programs should be put in place for empowering and preparing women for taking advantage of the opportunities for discharging specialist functions in the police or taking up executive roles. While there have been such donor-driven endeavours in Albania, Kosovo and Serbia to encourage women to apply for management posts, many of them failed to institutionalize change through revision of procedures for retention and promotion of women to operational police jobs and setting up sustainable programs for professional support to women to apply to those operational roles and specialised positions in the units in which women are under-represented.

¹² This is based on Plator Avdiu (2016) *Police Integrity in Kosovo 2016* (Pristina: KCSS), p.16.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Plator Avdiu (forthcoming) *Police Integrity in Kosovo 2017* (Pristina: KCSS).

Performance appraisals/evaluations

The traditional system of assessing personal performance at the annual level in most police services resulted in an annual score that didn't have a major impact on the employee's chances of getting promoted (a positive score was sufficient). The main flaws of the old performance appraisal system were **unclear evaluation criteria** leaving too much room for interpretation and arbitrariness by the appraiser (direct supervisor), **inconsistent appraisal practice** across police organisation and the lack of incentives and preparation of the police managers to use the performance appraisal as an instrument of guiding the employees towards the realization of organizational goals and fulfilment of their professional potential. The lack of clear criteria and monitoring of evaluation practices is more susceptible to subjectivity and/or politicization.

For instance, the evaluation criteria in Montenegro are not adequate to evaluate the police work as the same criteria apply to all civil servants in the public sector¹⁵. However, even when the criteria for promotion are clearly defined like in the case of Serbia¹⁶, risks of politicization have also been identified. This especially applies for mid- and senior-level positions where the Minister is directly involved in the process. In addition, there are certain risks during the process potentially obstructing merit-based promotions: in Macedonia, when an employee of the Ministry of Interior applies upon an internal call, they need to obtain a recommendation from their supervisor.¹⁷ This is not a good solution as the supervisor might submit a negative opinion for various reasons and prevent the career advancement of their subordinates. Promotion systems seem to be most susceptible to political interference as in all countries, except Kosovo, the minister of interior plays the key role in the promotion process to medium and senior-rank managers. This is the key mechanism for state capture or legal interference in how police organisation is run for the sake of protection of private group interests e.g. who is going to be investigated and who is going to be exempted from police action.

For change to happen, the promotion systems must be seen by the employees as fair and objective, in order to encourage the less represented categories of employees, including women, to take the opportunities presented to them and apply for internal competitions. Stojanović Gajić study on women in Serbian Police¹⁸ found out in the survey and the focus group discussions with police officers that, once the internal competitions start being implemented as a part of promotion system, the men

¹⁵ Aleksandra Vavić and Ana Đurnić (forthcoming) *Police Integrity in Montenegro 2017* (Podgorica: Institute Alternativa).

¹⁶ Saša Đorđević (forthcoming), *Police Integrity in Serbia 2017* (Belgrade: BCSP).

¹⁷ Lembovska, M. and Stojkovski, F. (2016), *Assessment of Police Integrity in Macedonia*, (Skopje: Analytica Think Tank).

¹⁸ Stojanović Gajić, Sonja and Đan, Aurelija (forthcoming), *Mogućnosti za unapređenje položaja žena u operativnom sastavu Srbije* (MUP RS and Policija Švedske) [*The Possibilities for Improving the Position of Sworn Policewomen in Serbian Police*].

and women employed in MoI will have a different view of this opportunity¹⁹. This indicates the need to remove the formal and informal barriers preventing women to make the most of promotion opportunities and to provide them an additional incentive to take their chances.

Retention of Talent

There is still a **high turnover of the police personnel** during the changes of the Minister of the Interior, especially in senior and mid-management professional positions. The effectiveness of the professional development provided is hampered by the high transfer rates of police officers within the police structures.

In Montenegro, demotion of police staff also proved to be problematic as demotions happen without proper explanations and frequently the decisions on transfer in another unit were taken retroactively after placement²⁰. Given that the consent of employees for reassignment to different job positions is not required, there is a high risk of abusing this institute. Similar situation is in Serbia where some of most seasoned investigators that have personally led most sensitive investigations such as the assassination of the first democratic PM Đinđić or Šarić Clan, have been demoted or sent to retirement as soon as they fulfilled the minimum conditions for retirement. Another practice used to condition loyalty of professionals to politicians is not giving tenure to senior managers, but as evident from Serbian and Kosovar practice²¹, to cover various positions with Acting Officers (AOs). In Albania high turnover rates are highlighted in the EC report of 2016 that weaken police operational capacity. Another indicator of politicization of the police is the high rate of staff turnover, which was especially evident in Albania after changes of government. Most prominent case was misuse of rationalization process for laying off 1,696 employees under the new legislation limiting the number of employees within the public sector. Prior to losing job, these people were allocated to the newly established job post of 'risk assessor' that was then pronounced surplus. This was done without clear criteria and the people on the list included police officers sentenced for crime, as well as some most senior police investigators that have led most sensitive investigations of organized crime, political assassinations, as well as specialized financial investigators. This process was cancelled after numerous appeals by those affected²².

19 Total of 20% of women do not believe that they will have equal opportunities to be promoted as their male colleagues. The proportion of policewomen (14%) who believe they will enjoy equal opportunities to be promoted as men is twice as low as that of policemen sharing the same view (31%). Such findings indicate that women perceive more the unequal opportunities for promotion, which may be a deterrent in taking advantage of the opportunities introduced by the new system of internal competition.

20 Muk, Stevo (2016) *Assessment of Police Integrity in Montenegro*, (Podgorica: Institute Alternativa) pp. 38-39.

21 Plator Avdiu (forthcoming) *Police Integrity in Kosovo 2017* (Pristina: KCSS)

22 Sađa Đorđević, Drama u plavom (Vreme, br. 1307, 21. januar 2016). Available at: <http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1358431>

Criminal links with the police

The political interference in HR practices have facilitated the opening of police services to the people with **links to the crime or even to those who have committed crime**. For example, although security vetting during employment in police is obligatory in all services, there have been media reports in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia that not all employed officers have been employed without vetting. Just in the Police of Sarajevo Canton, more than 300 police officers have not passed security vetting²³ and the same media report claims that there are still police officers with links to the crime working in Sarajevo Canton. Serbian media documented cases of police officers working as close protection for known criminals²⁴, as well as the links between the police officer in specialised police unit Gendarmerie regularly socialising with sentenced football hooligan²⁵.

Crime infiltration requires re-evaluation of integrity of police

Based on lessons learned in security and integrity vetting of all employees in State Police of Albania, similar practices could be tried in other countries of the region. In Albania, due to perception of its links with organised crime and drug traffickers²⁶, and the EU conditioning, the special law was adopted to allow for re-evaluation of 13 000 employees of Albanian State Police, Republican Guard and the Service on Internal Affairs and Complaints.²⁷ The purpose of this extraordinary vetting is to filter those incriminated in crime and corruption, dishonest or incapable police officers through testing of integrity, personal wealth, and professionalism. Different categories of staff will be evaluated by different commissions made of internal and external experts, including Interpol and Europol that may assist in individual cases. The safeguards must be in place not to allow for the misuse of anti-corruption measures, such as integrity and security vetting of the police staff for selection of only party-loyalists.

Conclusion

This analysis showed that the biggest obstacle to introducing functioning merit-based HR in law enforcement is **deep politicisation of human resources management**. Therefore, further support for **professionalization of police services and building organisational and individual integrity** of law enforcement needs to be supported through independent monitoring by the WB6 civil society and the European Commission and regional exchanges among police services. The outcome of strengthening professionalization and integrity in the law enforcement should be that police services are operationally independent from political interests and shielded from criminal influence.

²³ <http://www.nap.ba/new/vijest.php?id=30283>

²⁴ <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/hronika/danju-policajci-nocu-kriminalci/h46x4eb>

²⁵ https://www.cins.rs/english/research_stories/article/prosecutors-office-did-not-investigate-connection-between-nenad-vukovi-and-demolishing-of-cafe-belonging-to-aleksandar-vavi

²⁶ <http://pointpulse.net/magazine/strain-albanian-police-caused-drug-markets/> and <http://pointpulse.net/magazine/vetting-process-as-a-dead-letter-in-albania/>

²⁷ <http://pointpulse.net/magazine/vetting-deliver-police-integrity/>

The core to developing professionalism and nurturing talent in security and law enforcement institutions is limiting political interference in recruitment, selection, development and promotions of professional staff, introduction of merit-based and equal opportunities HR management practices and strengthening of internal affairs and external oversight over both political and professional leadership of law enforcement institutions. **Integrity of police services** should be significantly improved through strengthening of internal affairs and external oversight mechanisms resulting into inquiries looking at the infiltration of crime in the police or political interest meddling into operational investigations. In order to make professionalization and building integrity initiatives in the WB6 law enforcement sustainable, **regional networks of competent civil society organisations focussing on police reform should be supported to continue independent monitoring** of national police reforms and regional commitments within the Berlin Process.

List of Abbreviations:

AO – Acting Officers

EU – European Union

HR – human resources

HRM – human resources management

IT – information technology

WB – the Western Balkans or Western Balkan