



EUROPEAN
CONFEDERATION OF
POLICE

Voice of the Police in Europe

Violence against Police Officers

is

Violence against Society

**CONCLUSION OF THE PROJECT ON VIOLENCE AGAINST POLICE
OFFICERS**

September 2003

Violence against police officers cannot be treated as an isolated problem. It is linked to the state of a society in general.

The prevention of violence does not start with the criminal code – it does not even start with the organisation of the police service. The prevention of violence has to be actively pursued on all levels of society. It has to be an integral part of all aspects of everyday social life.

Introduction

Violence against the police exists in countless manifestations. The police trade unions and staff organisations that are joined together in the European Confederation of Police (EuroCOP), have organized four special conferences from 2001 to 2003 in order to examine the most important manifestations from a policing point of view in detail.

Police experts as well as scientists of different faculties, judges and politicians were involved at these special conferences. Personal experiences of police officers as victims of violence were also included in order to highlight the individual sorrow and the fear that they have experienced.

Society has an obligation to protect those that protect its institutions and the rights of citizens. The present declaration, adopted at the first Ordinary Congress of the European Confederation of Police in September 2003 contains the views of police officers on what should be done, in order to make their work safer. The police offer a vital service to a democratic society – anyone who decides to become a police officer, should be able to do this without having to ask whether might be a irresponsible decision with regard to his health and her family.

Heinz Kiefer,
EuroCOP President

EuroCOP concerned at frightening trend

The police trade unions and staff organisations joined together as the European Confederation of Police (EuroCOP) express its growing concern about a frightening trend.

General increase in Violent Crime

Violent Crimes are on the increase throughout Europe:

- From 1996 – 2000 violent assaults rose by 14% in the EU average.
- A number of countries have experienced a rise of up to 38% in violent assaults.

Police officers left alone to deal with violence in their job

Police officers are too often not sufficiently supported in dealing with violence in their jobs by the public or legal process. It should not be seen as an automatic consequence of policing that you can be violently attacked. Being a police officer does not prevent attack. In fact:

Police officers frequently victims

- police officers are prime targets of terrorists;
- police officers are blamed for political dissatisfaction and attacked at demonstrations;
- police officers regularly face violence from people who enjoy violence as a pastime.

Insufficient public reaction

While pictures of beaten up and severely injured police officers sometimes make it into the daily news, the reaction of politicians and the general public is – apart from single positive attempts – completely insufficient. In the event of a severe attack there might be shock and sympathy, only one day later all is forgotten. A simple though important insight is not considered:

Attack against police officer also attack against society

Violence against police officers is violence against civil society as a whole. An attack against a police officer is an attack against the officer's personal integrity and against the state in one act.

Extent of Violence against Police Officers

The extent of violence against police officers as a phenomenon has reached can be demonstrated by the following examples from several European Countries.¹

Statistical data from various EU countries

- Switzerland has experienced an increase of 51% in threats and attacks against police officers in 2002
- In Germany 13 police officers were killed by criminals between 1997 and 2001.
- In Spain 27 police officers were killed by criminal offenders, between 1997 and 2001. 11 of them fell victim to terrorist attacks.
- Statistically every police officer in England and Wales was injured more than once between 1992 and 2002.
- In Denmark every 6th police officer was injured in the same period of time.
- After the EU Summit in Gothenburg in 2001 25% of the officers deployed on the ground reported injuries.

Police offer vital service to democracy

The legitimacy of the modern democratic state is morally and ethically dependent on open deliberation between different views. True democracy assures this exchange in a violence free context.

The police is a body restricted by law and justice and operating under democratic control. While police officers have the right and duty to exert force, they do not act as free and independent citizens. The police represent state authority. In the end the police officer serves the people.

Responsibility of state and society

This creates a moral responsibility on the side of the state and society as a whole to assure that police officers receive proper protection, trust and confidence.

According to the European Code of Police Ethics, Art.32 and the Art.3 of the European Social Charter, police officers are specifically entitled to :

- A system of Health and Safety Regulations and
- a well maintained social security system

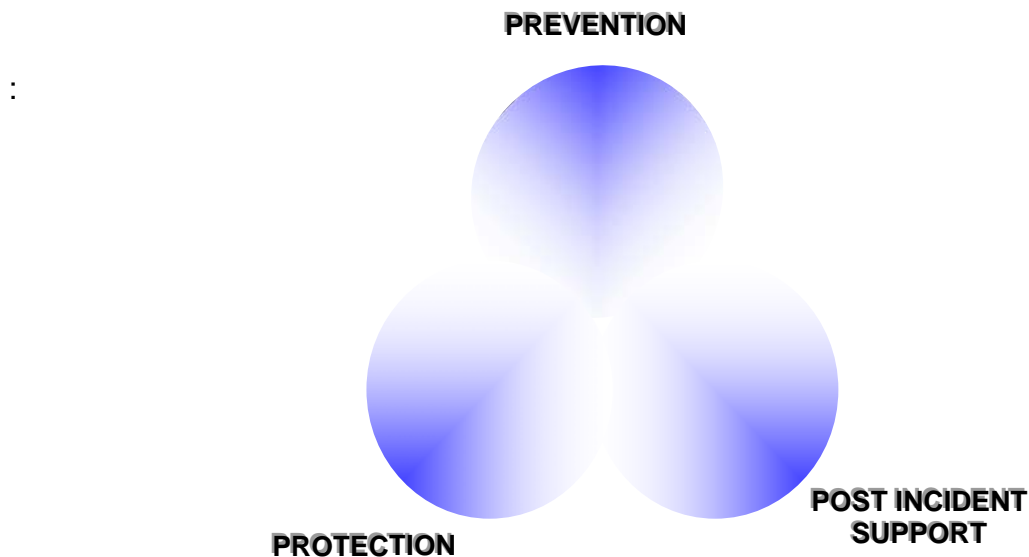
that acknowledges the risks and dangers inherent in the daily work of police officers as well as the unpredictability of the tasks they face in this work.

¹ Sources: Official Criminal and Police Statistics

Based on the insights gained in four special conferences, EuroCOP and the affiliated professional organisations and police trade unions, direct the following demands to

- national governments and police authorities
- the European Commission
- the Council of Justice and Home Affairs Ministers
- the European Parliament
- the Council of Europe

Violence no job risk	Violence is not a job risk, police officers have to accept. It is a deliberate violation of their personal integrity that cannot be tolerated.
Implications of an attack upon society	Violence against police officers is more than an attack against the concerned person, at the same time it is an attack against society. The implications for society as a whole should be acknowledged by an adequate public and political concern.
No more patchwork approaches	The protection of police officers is too important to be assured through patchwork and occasional activities only. A coherent approach is needed to protect the people who provide a vital service to any democratic society.
Three levels of intervention	Society has to ensure intervention at three levels as outlined below in order to make the work of police officers safer



PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE

- National governments and the EU should intensify their efforts to tackle the problem of violence in general. The message that has to come across is that violent behaviour is neither a generally acceptable means of solving conflicts nor an acceptable leisure activity.
- Weapons are dangerous items and should be governed by restrictive laws. A harmonisation of legislation in Europe is desirable
- Attacks against police officers have to be recorded regularly and analyzed scientifically irrespective of their resulting in bodily harm or not. The results have to be integrated into police training and further education. International experiences should be integrated into this process.
- As the EU moves to harmonize police equipment and education it becomes important that this process does not exclusively rely on purely national insights. Harmonization is bound to fail when it is not based upon a sound and common empirical basis that serves as the backbone of new norms.
- There is a lack of statistics about violence against police officers already at national level, quite apart from a Europe-wide or rather international statistics, that are able to provide further details on the current dimension of violence against police officers.
- This is an unacceptable state affairs that should be rectified by charging the European Police Academy, CEPOL, with developing the necessary skills and gathering the necessary data.

PROTECTION OF POLICE OFFICERS AT WORK

- Police Officers are entitled to protective equipment that suits their needs and assures a maximum protection against attacks
- Self protection has to be upgraded as an element of education and training. Particular regard should be given to an attitude of risk awareness.
- Providing police officers with adequate and up to date equipment is the sole responsibility of the political and operational leadership.
- The objective of achieving savings in the police service must not lead to an increased risk for the individual officer on the ground.
- Solitary work should be the exception for police officers working on the street. It should only be permitted based on a clear risk assessment and with appropriate measures in place to control the risk for the individual officer.
- Too often complicated organisational structures, bad communication between responsible agencies, bad preparation of operations and institutional rivalry result in the injury of officers deployed on the ground. National Governments and the EU should strengthen their efforts to create the appropriate conditions for a safe and efficient management for police operations.

POST INCIDENT SUPPORT

- The courts play a crucial role in dealing with violence against police officers. It is their responsibility to deliver a clear message that insulting behaviour, threats and physical violence against police officers are unacceptable in a democratic society.
- Financially compensating a victimized police officer and her or his family ought to be a responsibility of the state. It is not acceptable if the officer has to file a civil law claim against the perpetrator in order to be financially compensated for injuries suffered while performing a public service.
- Police authorities have to ensure, that victimized police officers receive help to deal with the practical effects of violence on their lives and that of their families. An attack and its consequences have severe emotional and psychological effects. Many police authorities still try to play this down because it is perceived to contradict the concept of a 'strong police force'.
- Social decline as a consequence of an injury has to be prevented in any case. The legal regulations governing unfitness to work and care have to be improved accordingly. They should also include the bereaved.
- Attacking a police officer is neither a minor offence nor an acceptable act of political protest in a democracy. The legislator has to ensure the adequate legal protection of police officers through
 - adequate legal responses to violence against police officers
 - protection of witnesses
 - protection of victims
- The minimum sentence delivered for a serious assault on a police officer should be a prison sentence. An attack against a police officer is a crime that demonstrates the offender's lack of consideration for the personal integrity of the attacked officer and the fundamental structures of any democratic society. This crime should never be consumed by another crime committed with the same act.

Background Information

Four Conferences	Violence against police officers exists in different manifestations. The police trade unions and staff organisations that are joined together in the European Confederation of Police (EuroCOP), have organized four special conferences in the last two years in order to examine the most important manifestations from a policing point of view in detail.
December 2001 Windhagen / Germany	Violence in everyday police work Use of violence in order to secure advantages, to prevent discovery, detention or judicial measures.
June 2002 Vitoria-Gasteiz (Basque region/Spain)	Terrorist violence Violence against police officers as a symbol of a state or a legal system that should be overcome or to achieve maximum public attention.
October 2002 Roskilde / Denmark	Violence as a threat and undue influence Use of violence against police officers and their relatives to influence, or to prevent at all criminal prosecution or investigations by the police.
March 2003 Bratislava / Slovakia	Violence at big events Unmotivated use of violence out of pure desire at violence and destruction and violence as a means to raise media attention.
Participants	Police experts as well as scientists of different faculties, judges and politicians were involved at these special conferences. Personal experiences of police officers as victims of violence were also included in order to highlight the individual sorrow and the fear that they have experienced.
Results	<p>The conferences were able to provide important contributions to the respective focal themes and also clarify the phenomenon of violence against police officers. However, one aspect came forward again and again in all conferences:</p> <p>Up to the present only one international analysis on violence against police officers has been carried out. In 1977, 26 years ago, it was Interpol that carried out a world-wide inquiry. About 20 countries were involved in the study. The results of this study are no longer valid in the present situation as political and social circumstances have changed significantly.</p> <p>A new analysis of the phenomenon is necessary; at least at a Europe-wide level. What is needed in order to do this is a unified catalogue of criteria in order to enable qualified statements upon the issue.</p>

Main conclusions of the four regional conferences:

- There is a clear wish to receive more support from politically responsible persons, superiors and from legal authorities.
- The self evident insight that inside a police uniform there is a human being seems – apart from occasional exceptions – to be ignored frequently, especially by the media. Deliberate infliction of bodily harm cannot be approved or even accepted – irrespective of the victim being a police officer or not.
- A comparison with work related risks of accidents resulting in injury or death is inadequate.
- There is an important difference between the quality of an attack and an accident from the victim's point of view as well as from a social perspective: An attack is not an accident and consequently cannot be seen as part of an occupational hazard to bear. Contrary to attacks, accidents are not breaches of the social contract to abstain from violence and other basic values of a democratic civil society.
- Against this background it is incomprehensible that it is easier to find out how many construction workers were injured by working with steel girders than to record the number of attacks against police officers.
- A common definition of violent crime throughout Europe does not exist. Consequently it is not possible to say whether a correlation exists between a general rise in violent crime that is perceived in some European countries and an increase of violent attacks against police officers.
- An all encompassing statistic on attacks against police officers does not exist in any country. However, in order to improve the security of police officers, it is indispensable to record especially cases of successful defence.
- If at all, statistics include cases that lead to injuries or even death.
- There is no uniform definition of an injury.
- There is no statistical evidence as to whether the constant equipment of police officers with firearms or the renunciation of firearms has an influence on the risk of being attacked.
- An important characteristic of most attacks against police officers is that the attacks are not foreseeable for the victim. This is true for terrorist attacks as well as for bomb traps or for attacks developing from standard situations such as identification, vehicle inspection or detention. Because of this the chances of the officers for an effective defence are considerably low. Therefore it is of utmost importance to develop an attitude of danger awareness and to include this into the education and training of police officers.
- Any serious approach towards violence against police officers must also consider cases where violence is directed against their relatives.
- A lot of police officers have difficulties in reconciling self protection measures with the concept of a citizen friendly police service.
- The success of especially large police operations depends heavily on good preparation and efficient management of the operation. Lack of communication between different authorities concerned with a police operation and shortcomings in the communication structure during the operation are often result in injured or even killed police officers. This is unacceptable.
- Feelings of exclusion from political dialogue and society in general play an important role in the creation of violence against the police who are seen as a symbol of the state. Any successful initiative to minimize the problem of violence especially at mass gathering has to take this into account.

[LOGO]

European Confederation of Police, EuroCOP

617, rue de Neudorf, L-2220 Luxembourg

www.eurocop-police.org

+352 434 9611 / +352 435182 (fax)

contact@eurocop-police.org