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Research Report

Privatization and Increasing the Role of the Public as Current Trends in Security Provision

EUSECON Policy Briefing, No. 10

Provided in Cooperation with:
German Institute for Economic Research (DIW Berlin)

Suggested Citation: Krulík, Oldrich; Stejskal, Libor (2011) : Privatization and Increasing the Role of the Public as Current Trends in Security Provision, EUSECON Policy Briefing, No. 10, Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung (DIW), Berlin

This Version is available at:
http://hdl.handle.net/10419/119591

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• What kind of personnel and financial challenges do security forces in Europe face today?
• How do they try to cope with these challenges?
• What models of security privatization and volunteer involvement can be identified?

Summary: At present and in the medium-term perspective, the security systems of most European countries are challenged by a number of social and economic trends: demographic change and the selective withdrawal of state authority from the security sphere. This process has been accelerated by current efforts to reduce public spending. This briefing describes the approaches of several European countries in relation to the aforementioned trends, outlining the potential negative repercussions of these changes within the institutional framework of security.

Introduction

Recent years and decades have given rise to a number of trends that influence the models and instruments of security provision in EU member states. European societies are ageing and becoming more heterogeneous due to interstate migration. These changes in the demographic profile of European populations necessitate the application of different security standards and specifications. The national security systems (including the police, the army, intelligence services, and fire and rescue services) are mostly professionalized. Also, they face a long-term process of staff downsizing and voluntary resignation (especially of army and police members). This contributes to the rivalry between security forces, increasing the competition for the “ideal force member” (recruit), able to meet the high health, educational and performance criteria. The demands for expert qualifications (skills in technology operation and soft skills) are growing.

All the above is taking place at a time when institutions of the security system face a number of new requirements and they need to respond more effectively to previously unknown or insignificant security challenges. Meanwhile, the system is being destabilized by the already implemented or planned cuts within specific budget chapters and sub-chapters.
The finance ministries of EU member states thus directly co-determine the scope of security policy ambitions.

In many countries, employment conditions offered by security system institutions are not competitive with other job and career offers on the labour market. Every economic recovery sends a shock through the security forces, regularly causing a decline in the number of job applicants. The situation is further aggravated by frequent changes of service rules and conditions (salaries, annuities).

As employers, security system institutions are not always competitive with other job or career offers

Many countries’ security sectors show a lack of systematic staffing policy (not only with regard to personnel in active service) and experience a serious decline in the number of middle-aged experts, who play a main role in capability regeneration. The result of the ill-conceived staffing policies is thus a great waste of funds: the professional instruction and on-the-job training of a high-quality specialized administrative worker or security forces member takes a long time and requires substantial investment. If the trained employee subsequently decides to leave the public sector, the sector is losing at least the resources invested. A number of police workers (including top-quality experts) face financial insecurity and uncertain career prospects, which naturally dampens their professional zeal and affects the agenda entrusted to them. The chronic frustration of such people in itself represents a substantial security risk (potential for corruption, and, in the worst case, even for enemy espionage). What is at stake is eventually not just the quality of public administration personnel, but the elementary loyalty of the rank-and-file members of repressive forces, who could e.g. refuse obedience if given orders to maintain law and order against their inner persuasion. Different countries react in different ways to such challenges (and various approaches can be used simultaneously).

“Withdrawal” of the state and the takeover of certain responsibilities by the private sector

At least since 2007, the state security forces of Romania have been “withdrawing” from a number of areas (e.g. the security guarding of government and semi-governmental institutions or of state-owned and partially state-owned companies such as nuclear power stations, embassies or airports; they also no longer provide escorts for overload and oversized transport and the transport of hazardous waste, including burnt nuclear fuel). Private providers have been entrusted even with the transportation of convicts, prison management and witness protection, the protection of court buildings and the maintenance of order in the courtroom.

Army bases and other buildings in Bulgaria are guarded by private security companies rather than soldiers. Also, Bulgaria has perhaps the highest percentage of women in the army among all NATO member states (about 12.7%, of which 1,200 serve in combat troops). The reason is that Bulgarian men show little interest in army service: they consider it low paid or unattractive for other reasons.

The growing role of municipalities and regions

The role of regional and municipal security forces is growing. One current phenomenon is the sponsoring of state security forces from the regional level. Many municipalities in the Czech Republic find it necessary to establish or strengthen their own municipal police forces since the members of the state force are too few to police the streets effectively. There is also an increasing pressure on regions, municipalities and companies to “sponsor” police activities, e.g. by providing premises for police stations (free of charge or for a symbolic rent), or contributing toward the cost of petrol, electricity and police equipment.

The support or initiation of volunteer projects

Among EU countries, volunteer police groups exist in the UK, the Netherlands and Estonia. Outside the EU, similar solutions are used in Norway, some localities in the US (assistants to the sheriff), and Canada.

For instance, in Denmark more than 50,000 persons serve in the “Homeguard” (Hjemmeværnet). Of this number, only several hundred receive wages; the rest are volunteers. In addition to military activities the volunteers also perform tasks that can be classified as
States that accepted long-term trends in advance are ahead of those which adopt the same measures under pressure.
Simple downsizing of state security forces

Many countries have resorted to a downsizing of their security forces without having a well-thought out substitution plan. For instance, in Portugal, the army is planning a rapid reduction of its ranks from 46,000 persons to 30,000.

The police in Latvia no longer provide 24-hour service at divisional police stations and the office rooms are maintained without the permanent presence of staff. Other police services of specific nature (intervention unit, forensic science equipment, etc.) are centralized at the headquarters. Outside office hours, general duties officers (patrol police) do not perform preventive service. On weekends the service regime is the same as outside office hours during the week. Preventive policing is thus solely the responsibility of municipal police – provided that such a force has been established in the given municipal area. The situation outlined above (caused by drastic cost cutting in the Latvian state budget) brings a highly increased demand for security services provided by non-government actors – the municipal police forces and private security services.

Policy recommendations

The current functioning of security systems in EU member states can be described as "finance-controlled security". States that identified and accepted long-term trends in advance are now in a substantially better position than countries that adopt the same measures under pressure of the economic crisis.

It is necessary to realize that the security of any state and its citizens depends to a considerable extent on the loyalty of those responsible for security provision. If these people are nervous and distrustful toward their employer, their work can hardly be of high quality.

Today, the sectors of internal security and defence (its institutional components, the individuals involved) require clearly defined, comprehensive political solutions and concepts of future development, especially with regard to the prospect of further staff changes. If there is to be further downsizing, it is necessary to specify the conditions, time horizon, key principles and target staff levels. If the declarations of such intentions are binding, they must be thoroughly consulted with both the opposition and the relevant trade unions and professional organizations.

An ideal institutional and personnel policy in the security field, applicable at any time, must also define clear boundaries for the outsourcing of the security agenda. After all, the state must keep control of the key activities in the security field. The attempts to cut costs through outsourcing may sometimes not only fail to bring any savings, but actually increase the costs of a particular activity – not to mention the related security risks.

Credits

This EUSECON Policy Briefing was authored by Oldřich Krulík from the Police Academy Prague and Libor Stejskal from Charles University Prague. The views expressed in this briefing are the authors’ alone.

EUSECON, or ‘A New Agenda for European Security Economics’ is a four-year collaborative research project, coordinated by DIW Berlin and funded by the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Commission. EUSECON analyses the causes, dynamics, and long-term effects of both human-induced insecurity threats and European security policies.

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