# Attack Against the HQ of Hungarian State Television – the Realities of the Policemen

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*The study represents the results of the group-representations of the policemen participated in the 18/09/2006 clash. We created two representative-groups from policemen participated in the clashes of 18/09/2006: one group included policemen who took an active role in the protection of the HQ; the other included policemen-reserves on the scene. We used half-structured interview-technics. The texts were analysed according to the sequential-transformative-model. The groups constructed both different and similar components of social representations concerning the events.*

**Keywords:** *riot, social representation, policing*

In 2006, a politically motivated mass demonstration happened with police-troops intervention, whose multiple effects – we can say – can still be detected nowadays. The 18/09/2006 event at the HQ of Hungarian State Television and the 23/10/2006 event in the inner part of Budapest caused a great, imminent interest in the whole of Hungarian society. In this study we are examining *what happened* around the HQ of Hungarian State Television *according to the members of the police involved in the events*. There were several interpretations, explanations of the happenings (e. g. Papp Committee Report 2007, Csepeli et al. 2007 [Gönczöl Committee Report], Gaudi-Nagy, Horváth 2007 [Morvay Report]. These latest studies (reports) and the consequent attitudes follow the logical, paradigmatic form of human thinking based on the relation of cause and effect (Bruner 2001).

Our study on the other hand is based on the analysis of common sense – namely, the interviewed persons spoke of the events in a manner that Bruner called the method of the narrative way of thinking based on story-construction.

In the study we present the *social representations* (e. g. Moscovici 1984) *of the policemen* who participated in the events at the HQ of Hungarian State Television and the representations which are in connection with those events. To do so we will be able to understand their reality – and the quality of their reality – in connection with the sur-

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veyed social phenomenon. One can recognize the different explanations of the realities that some examined groups have by exploring the social representations as outputs that exist among the given groups. When the goal of a study is to identify these social representations, it is regarded irrelevant how these outputs have developed, which kinds of effects and processes (including memory processes) could play roles in the development of the presented issues. Therefore, in a study of social representations like this, the aim of the researcher is not to explore how exactly the subjects can remember the "real events", on the contrary, the goal is to identify *what their realities are* on social level. In other words, what kinds of the realities constitute their worlds.

As the study has applied this unique approaching in this topic, there is no way that the results can be compared to any other ones stemming from earlier studies.

## Method

### The samples

In 2010 we gathered a group of policemen who actually participated in the 18/09/2006 events (Active group; N = 14) and another group from the reserved police members (Inactive group; N = 8). We created these groups according to the 'snowball' method. As lots of them had already known each other, the application of the "more starting points-method" would have been irrelevant. The subjects in the Group Active and the Group Inactive were recruited form the Baranya County public order unit and traffic control officer corps. All of the subjects were young males.

### Data processing

So-called half-structured interview techniques were used. The interview guide was as follows: what and happened and why, the self-reflection of the participants, their reflections on the situations, and their reflections on the other participants.

The body of text obtained from the research[2] were analyzed by the so called sequential-transformative-model (Ehmann 2002). We used the thematic analysis technics. (49. p.) It means that every textual element having a recognizable content can be identified by a code referring to the very meaning. After coding the thematic units in every interview we used the non-frequency-analyzing techniques (Holsti 1969) to calculate the frequency of those variables. Where it was possible, the "part of something" logical relationships were also coded. Therefore many contents could be united in groups of meaning, compiling them in a hierarchy of meanings. In these cases, from the lowest, *basic level of codes,* through the more abstract, wider groups of elements (groups of codes), there are the levels named by *main-codes* – this method represents symbolically the hierarchy between the identified meanings. So the codes on the tops of a *group of codes* represent the whole of a very domain of meaning  and will be named by main-

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2   *The interviews of the Active, Inactive groups were recorded by Szedlák Péter*

codes. As a consequence of this process, it is possible that a given code has significance (it has meaning on social level) on all of those analyzing levels or, on the contrary, has importance on just two levels, or on just one level of them. E. g. a code can be calculated to be important on the code-level, but, at the same time, it is neither a component of a group of codes nor of a main-code. It can also happen that a mass of coded meanings is not the part of any groups of codes but marks directly the borders of a domain of meaning named by a main-code. To discover and analyses as much information as possible from the interviews we tried to find the finest differences between the meanings. This way we defined plenty of separated contents and codes. The method has the risk that when a specified content in the text – and the adopted code, which is basically a 'hypothetic, qualitative data' (Ehmann 2002, 48.) – appears only in the case of a few people (it does not reflect the common opinion in the examined group) then we have to refuse the very hypothesis. In this case the content represents the individual's mental representation and not the commonly owned element of the reality-construct (so it is not an element of a social representation).

By using mathematical-statistical calculations we identified the significances of the codes comparing them both to all codes that pertain to a group and to their own groups of codes.

The mathematical-statistical data processing of the nominal variables at the different levels of analysis is based on the McNemar-test. (The relevant level of significance is $p<0.05$; $<0.01$.)

## Results[3]

Both the elements of the social representations of the Active and Inactive groups of policemen on duty at the HQ of Hungarian State Television and the results comparing the two groups are presented in the following tables. (Comparisons between groups were made by using chi-squared probe and Fisher exact probe.)

*Table 1. Social representations of the Active and Inactive groups of policemen on duty at the HQ of Hungarian State Television, 2006*

| significance (p < ; p =) | Main code/*groups of codes*/codes | Frequencies Group Active % | Frequencies Group Inactive % |
|---|---|---|---|
| – | **Conditions** | 100 | 100 |
| – | *Commander's role* | 100 | 100 |
| – | impotence | 100 | 100 |
| – | bad commander | 86 | 87,5 |
| | good commander | 21 | |

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3    The results presented in the manuscript are only small parts of a larger study that aimed to process the social representations of the clashes in autumn 2006, in the centre of Budapest. The database was only completed by 2012.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| – | *Resources* | 100 | 100 |
| | bad equipment | 100 | |
| | good equipment | | 100 |
| | false information | 100 | |
| | no police reinforcement | | 100 |
| no signif. | few police | 93 | 63 |
| no signif. | lack of information | 86 | 100 |
| | lack of reserves | 57 | |
| | insufficient training | 43 | |
| – | **Aggression** | 100 | 100 |
| | *Aggression of Civilians* | 100 | – |
| – | mob | 100 | 100 |
| **0,01; 0.0096** | injuries | 100 | 50 |
| | | | |
| | against the mass | 100 | |
| | from police toward police | 36 | |
| | **Solidarity** | 100 | – |
| | *Solidarity of policemen* | 100 | |
| | no help by the Police | 86 | |
| | *Help exists* | 100 | |
| | help physically | 64 | |
| | help psychologically | 57 | |
| | | | |
| | civilians' help toward police | 36 | |
| | **Self-reflections** | 100 | 100 |
| | fear | 100 | |
| | surprise | 43 | |
| | *Vocation* | 93 | 100 |
| **0.01; 0.0201** | pride | 50 | 100 |
| | presence of mind | 50 | |
| no signif. | heroism | 43 | 63 |
| | autonomy | 29 | |
| **0.01; 0.01119** | fond of action | 29 | 88 |
| | *Negative attitudes* | | 100 |
| *0.0721* | indifference | 21 | 63 |
| – | injustice | | 75 |

The next figures show in a more informative way how kinds of social representations could be identified pertaining to the groups.
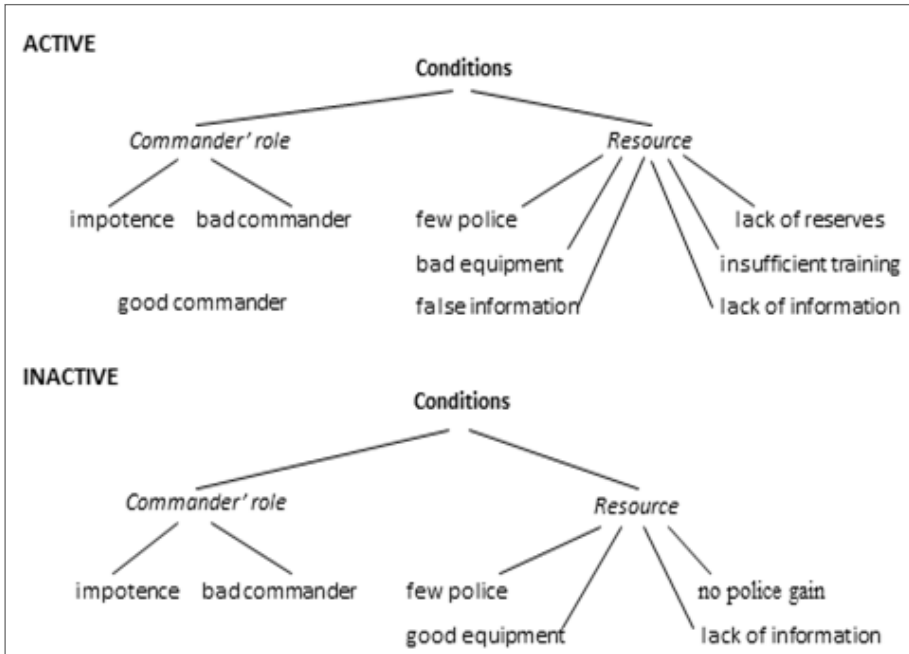


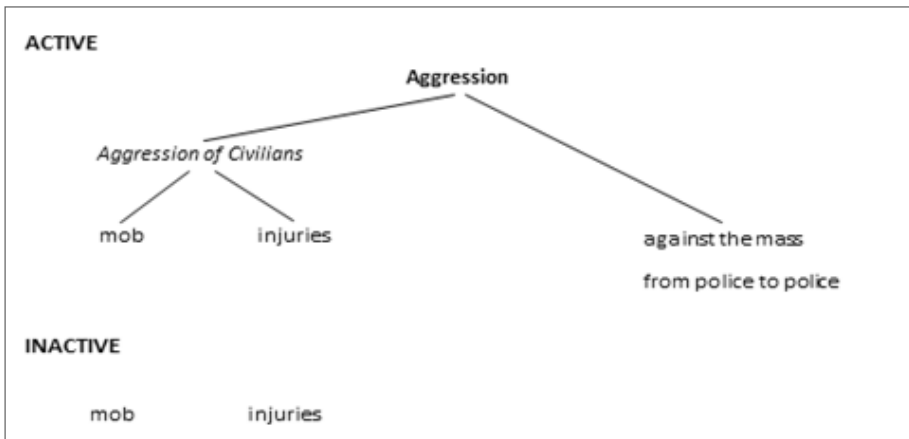Figure 1. Active and Inactive groups' conditions



Figure 2. Active and Inactive groups' elements of social representations on 'Aggression'
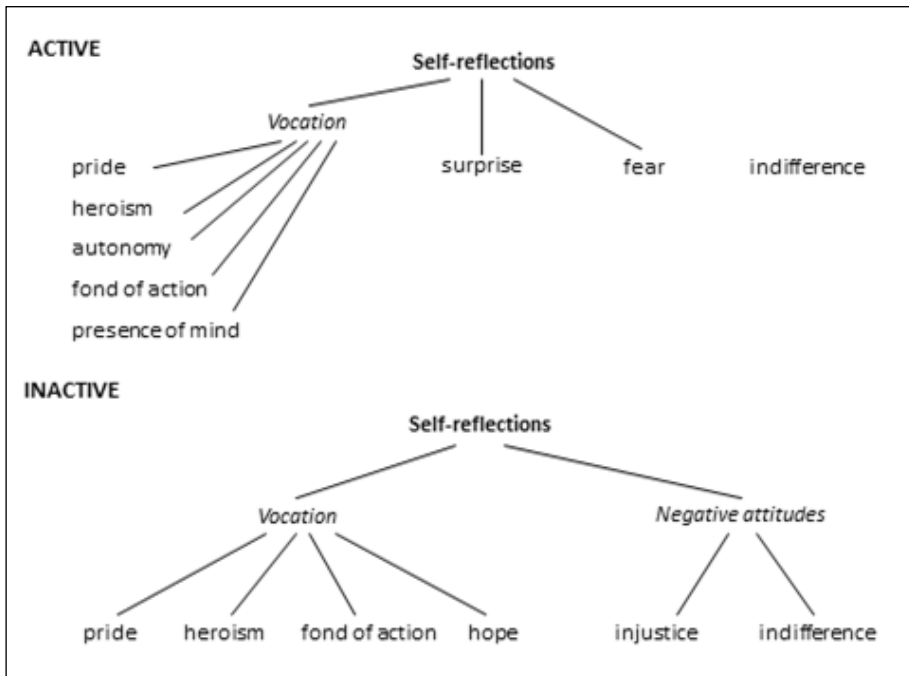
*Figure 3. Active and Inactive groups' elements of social representations on 'Self-reflections'*
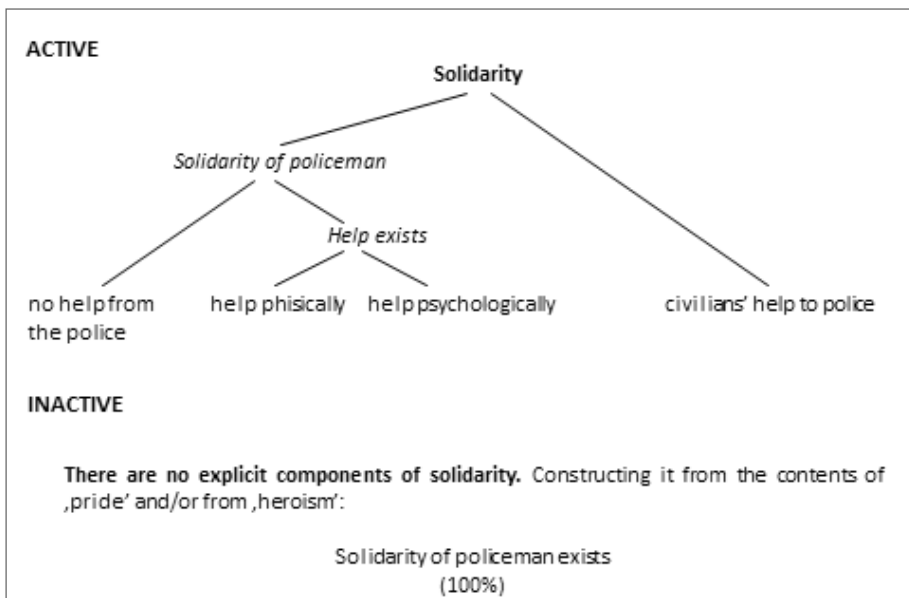


*Figure 4. Active and Inactive groups' elements of social representations on 'Solidarity'*

## Discussion

First of all, it is conspicuous that social representations regarding causality, that is, the contents of the background of the events are missing from the constructs of both experimental groups. Instead, they have constructed social representations that have been built up from the elements of the features of the situation in which they were involved. The participants – probably because of the strong emotional experiences – are supposed not have been able to participate in a common activity of discussion concerning the process of the causes that had led to the events. From the (police) professional point of view the events were analyzed by them alongside the dimensions of stress, its handling, the emotions and the self-reflections. The factors that bear importance to them are the attributes of handling the situation and not the reason of the situation. We think that it is the professional way of thinking of a policeman serving in a unit.

Nevertheless, some common broad scopes of the meanings having been identified and can be found in both groups. Namely: the elements of the social representations on *conditions* (for doing policing at the scene), on *aggressiveness*; on *solidarity* and finally, on *self-reflections*. According to the members of group Active all the conditions to protect the HQ were missing or were inefficient. To the contrary, the Inactive group constructed exclusively positive beliefs about their equipment.

All members of the Active group represent their own aggression toward the civilians who attacked them. Similarly, they all hold a construct about the wounded policemen as a consequence of the fighting. The members of the Inactive group have no representations at all concerning the aggressive behaviour of their mates pertaining to the Active groups.

The theme of solidarity is represented in an ambivalent way among the Active group: on the one hand the members of that group have a shared construction about the supportive attitude and behaviour that was expressed toward each other, on the other hand, sharply contrasting of the earlier one, they think that they were failed by the Police as an institution during the critical event.

It is really important to emphasize that despite hostile circumstances, among the subjects of the Active group not all of the civilians, who took part in the clashes, were regarded as enemies. A significant part of that group has a belief about civilians who helped and supported them, expressing their feeling of solidarity towards the police. This unexpected fact definitely refuses suggestions that policeman around the world would regard all civilians enemy, guilty or at least, possible guilty (Hahn 1974, Klockars 1983, Krémer 1998, Toch 1973).

Both groups have constructed social representations related to vocation. It is interesting to realise how similar meanings are involved in that social construction. However, we can find a significant exception as well: as a component of the representation of their vocation, the Inactive group reflects itself as the depositor of hope to help their colleagues who got in trouble. Unfortunately, they had to remain in their passive, waiting situation throughout the entire action. It could be a likely reason for the members of the Inactive group to have constructed a common representation regarding the happenings as unjust.

Comparing the groups, another important, but at the same time understandable, difference also comes up: as a component of the social representations on self-reflections the feeling of intensive fear can be exclusively found among the members of the Active group.

## Conclusion

As we can see our two groups have constructed some different representations that constitute their interpretations relating to what happened there, how and why around the HQ of Hungarian State Television. Finally, that shared constructs constitute the partly different realities to the members of both groups. The existence of those realities lines out a definitive aspect of the process of social construction, namely, it basically depends on what kind of the social relations the actors are situated in, which in turn, through the perspectives taken, influences the process of giving different meanings and explanations to the events that just seem to be the same (László 1999).

It is quite interesting to realise how this examined event influenced the later practice of the Hungarian policemen and the Police when their task was handling another violent mass demonstration. We intend to present the results in relation with that clash that occurred later, in a further issue of Bulletin.

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## ABSZTRAKT

***Támadás a Magyar Állami Televízió székháza ellen – a rendőrök igazsága***

*FOGARASI Mihály*

*A tanulmány a 2006. szeptember 18-án, az MTV székházánál történt összecsapásokban érintett rendőröknek a történtekről alkotott társas reprezentációit vizsgálja. A bevetett rendőri erők, valamint a tartalék szerepét betöltő állomány tagjaiból állítottuk össze a vizsgálati csoportokat. A félig strukturált interjútechnikát alkalmaztuk. A szövegeket a szekvenciális-transzformatív modell keretén belül elemeztük. A legfontosabb eredmények: az aktív csoport szerint a székház védelméhez szükséges feltételek mindegyike hiányzott vagy elégtelennek bizonyult. Megítélésük szerint a rendőrség cserben hagyta őket. Az inaktív csoport önmagát mint a remény letéteményesét; a megtörténteket igazságtalanságként reprezentálja.*

***Kulcsszavak:*** *zavargás, szociális reprezentáció, rendfenntartás*