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## Armenia – Police Reform as a Cooperative Effort

### Lessons Learned from An International Advisory Mission 2014–2017

*Reform, as opposed to revolution, is an iterative process. It is also non-linear. You may not be getting it right the first time. At least not completely right. The authors of this article had the privilege and the pleasure of being invited to advise on the police reform process in the Republic of Armenia from 2014 through 2017 (the introduction of a form of ‘community policing’ had been announced in 2012 but failed to gain traction in the interim). In close cooperation with the then OSCE Office in Yerevan (Oiy) and obviously the Armenian authorities, and at times the EU and U.S. representatives, the authors – after taking inventory of existing policies, laws, directives and regulations, and analysing them in light of internationally recognised good practice – designed and delivered instruction programs for police officers at different levels, including leadership. In parallel, and as part of a ‘two-pronged’ approach, they contributed to structuring and informing an enabling political (parliamentary) process, including civil*

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society organisations, in close cooperation with the then chairman of the Standing Committee on Defence, National Security and Internal Affairs of the National Assembly, Mr Koryun Nahapetyan, though the police force at the time was still kept close to the presidency. The authors feel encouraged by and welcome recent steps taken by the Pashinyan Government to reanimate the police reform process in the RA. It is understood that police reform necessarily is an ongoing process of reflection and implementation on the one hand, structured by focussed phases of more intense political fact-finding and operational structuring on the other. In this article the authors share their observations from the days of their own involvement with added insights on the later evolution of police reform and practice.

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After 11 days of mostly peaceful protests, Armenian Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan resigned in April 2018 – a shocking resignation in the eyes of many commentators, and yet an expression of the will of the people. Sargsyan had 20 years of public service behind him, of which 10 as the President. Now, he had apparently lost the support of the voters and taxpayers. Allegations of corruption – his, and of his entourage – and a growing inequality in Armenian society had led to his downfall. He was, however, not going to leave the political stage for long.

What preceded his resignation was a story not unsurprising in successor states of the Soviet Union. Emulating the ‘Russian model’, in 2015 constitutional change involving transfer of presidential powers to the prime minister allowed Sargsyan to sidestep the two-term limit,<sup>3</sup> and take many of his powers with him. On 16 April Sargsyan’s (ruling) party nominated him for the position of the Prime Minister, causing immediate street protests which became massive on the following day. The police stepped in and started arresting and beating up protesters, while more and more citizens joined the protests.

Sargsyan stepped down, avoiding the bloodbath his predecessor Robert Kocharyan had caused, when 10 demonstrators were killed. The will of the people had prevailed. In the words of a prominent Armenian politician of the time Sargsyan’s resignation was “political, though not democratic”, a tribute to civil society and mass demonstrations organised by his political rival, Nikol Pashinyan.

The new authorities inherited from their predecessors a struggling economy that had led to mass emigration, corruption, problematic relations with most of the neighbours, a political order that is neither fully authoritarian nor fully democratic,<sup>4</sup> with entrenched positions, but also a strong and self-confident civil society free to criticise the machinations of those in power, political and economic.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Stronski (2021): The Shifting Geography of the South Caucasus. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 23 June 2021. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Stronski (2021): op. cit.

‘Strong’ relations with the Kremlin authorities had enabled and facilitated authoritarian rule: in 2013, the Armenian authorities rejected the *Association Agreement* with the European Union and joined the *Eurasian Economic Union* – a step that carried no visible advantages for the average Armenian. This step not only forced Armenia to share many of Russia’s economic challenges, but also kept off transparency and accountability stipulations of the EU Association Agreement.

Sargsyan’s further integration into Kremlin-based structures did little to break up Armenia’s isolation which since the first Karabakh war was to a large extent due to the choice of the ruling party and – arguably – the diplomatic ineptness of its elites. It made Armenia a client state of the Kremlin, and limited its development as an independent state, culture and economy. Nationalism, and anti-turkism were the dominant ideologies.

Sargsyan had to go. And so he went, to come back, now as an organiser of an opposition party. He left to his successor a country with a compromised old elite, a largely unreformed economy, pressing unemployment, and occupied territories whose defence ate up a large percentage of the GDP without being effective and open to current developments – too close to Russia, and too far away from the EU to develop an independent economy and democratic order.

## 1. A time of radical political change

The old political elite of the Republic of Armenia, advised and assisted in many ways by its different diaspora groups, but rarely with advice that would have led to power sharing and transparency, had not been averse to letting civil society blossoms bloom, as long as it was clear who was in charge of the garden. This led to a somewhat hybrid regime that carefully balanced authoritarianism with civil society freedom, and a strong connection to Moscow with cooperation agreements with NATO, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, the EU, the Council of Europe, and the OSCE, whose (OiY) office was closed in 2017 to be replaced with a hesitantly formulated OSCE program, slow in the making. It also allowed for direct cooperation of parliamentary committees with European INGOs such as the Geneva-based DCAF Centre (at the time the Centre for Democratic Control of Armed Forces, in the meantime – under different management – renamed the Centre for Security Sector Governance, the commitment to democratic control discreetly dropped). Such cooperation was not only focused on parliamentary and staff capacity building but also included active involvement in the drafting and discussion of policies and laws in light of international practice, on-the-job capacity building in verification, and, with growing confidence also in police reform towards leadership training, community policing, crowd control and gender-adequacy. The present writers, personally involved in the design and delivery of such programmes, testify to the sincerity and extraordinary professional savviness and political commitment of younger and well-prepared exponents of the ‘old elite’ such as the then Chairman of the Standing Committee on Defence, National Security and Internal Affairs of the National Assembly, Koryun Nahapetyan (2012–2017 – Member of the National Assembly, Chairman of the Standing Committee on Defence, National

Security and Internal Affairs of the National Assembly, Member of the “Republican” [RPA] faction).

Protest leader Nikol Pashinyan became the new head of the Armenian Government following the 8 May 2018 elections. The fight against corruption had been advertised as a top priority and was now going to be implemented. While early actions smacked of the improvised and the partial, once the “first non-fraudulent elections in 20 years” had taken place and secured Pashinyan’s My Step bloc a solid 88 out of the 132 parliamentary seats,<sup>5</sup> Pashinyan’s program called for de-bureaucratisation and reducing state regulation of the economy, and improving tax-collection (*Gov.am*, 8 February 2019). The European Union’s representatives voiced praise for the Pashinyan Government’s anti corruption efforts. New laws along the lines of the UN Convention Against Corruption and adaptations on the Constitution’s provisions for the cumulation of power (*vide* Serzh Sergyanyan’s 2015 adaptations in his own favour) were initiated.

In the foreign policy field, expectations of a new (and better) beginning were frustrated. Established memberships in the CIS, the Eurasian Economic Union, and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (including its so-called peace-keeping force, last active in January 2022 in Kazakhstan, without any UN mandate), were confirmed, with a plan to make membership more efficient. No other strategic-level cooperation was planned (*EDM*, 21 March 2019, on Pashinyan’s unclear vision for Armenian foreign policy). Moscow initially did not quite know what to do with the untamed Pashinyan. Media beholden to the old elite initiated strong pro-Moscow propaganda initiatives, somehow underestimating Pashinyan’s versatility. The trial of Robert Kocharyan (former President, in office from 1998–2008) was used to voice accusations of “selling out Karabakh” and betrayal of Armenian values. The (Moscow) *Komsomolskaya Pravda* – otherwise never loath to assist in criminalising the unwanted political (figures), in a rare move of politicising adjudicated criminal conduct – even called Kocharyan the “first political prisoner in the post-Soviet space” (*KP*, 14 February 2019). Whereas press efforts to undermine Pashinyan’s position excelled in shrillness both in Armenia and the Russian Federation, the latter and his team responded with strategic patience.

## 2. Police Reform I – Finding facts and agreeing on a plan of action

On invitation by the Armenian authorities (the Republic of Armenia being a founding member of the DCAF Foundation and permanently on its Foundation Council since its establishment) and facilitated by the OSCE Office in Yerevan, a DCAF-IPTI senior expert team, in cooperation with the International Police Training Institute, conducted a *Status and Needs Assessments of Police Reforms* in the RA in 2014. This senior expert

<sup>5</sup> Armen Grigoryan: One Year After Armenia’s ‘Velvet Revolution’: The Plans and Challenges Ahead. *Jamestown Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 16, no. 60 (2019).

report, based on both interviews and documents, served as a pivotal repository of essential insights on which a subsequent structured advisory program was based.

## 2.1. *From force to – service? Finding facts*

It soon became clear to the researchers tasked with compiling the report that there was a clear political will to develop and sustain the ongoing programme of police reform, which was further reflected in the conversations held with senior police leaders. Throughout their stay in Armenia experts were impressed by the level of professionalism shown by Armenian police officers of all ranks and the concomitant resolve of senior parliamentary leaders to make police reform happen.

At the time of the status assessment, the OSCE OiY's largest project, i.e. that of building capacity in community policing and enhancing public trust, had been ongoing since 2010. The programme had been started as a pilot project with 16 police officers, when in 2010 it was decided to include community policing into the police reform programme, and to include community policing as part of the national police remit. At the time of the assessment the OSCE was also working on policing in different layers of society, including on police and juveniles and gender, and police relations with local authorities. An important parallel project had been initiated on police educational reform.

One noteworthy aspect at the time of the assessment was a newly formed special regiment of police, the so-called "Angels". These officers were carefully selected, had a higher level of education, a good command of English and were trained in inter-personal skills and first aid. They were intended to provide a highly visible and reassuring presence and to cultivate public trust in the police. Tackling gender inequality issues was at the time of the assessment still a new and "sensitive issue" for the police. There was also an identified need for more work to be carried out on addressing domestic and gender-based violence. At the time of the assessment there was neither domestic violence law, nor a legal definition of domestic violence in any other law. Females in the RA police comprised around 25% of the total workforce. There were no policies or other measures aimed at retaining women police officers in the service, for example, after periods of maternity leave. Vulnerability to corruption was an essential problem, thus traffic police were given higher salaries than, for example, detectives in CID to avoid the former being vulnerable to corruption. The post of Head of Armenian Police was a presidential appointment. The post-holder also reported directly to the State President. (Apparently this system had been introduced as recently as 2006.) An Ombudsman on police complaints and issues was appointed by Parliament. There was no current provision for a police union or staff association for serving police officers.

The assessment team, Drs. Tim Parsons and Nick Ridley, came to the following conclusions:

- *Transition towards Community Policing.* Implementation of community policing was said to be progressing in accordance with the programme. Overall guidance and advice was forthcoming from U.K. police experts. The creation of community

councils, to enhance public–police representation involving ordinary citizens had led to increased linkage and bridging between police and community and increasingly raised local issues and improved crime prevention.

- *Public Perceptions.* A “main concern” from the police side: how are community policing initiatives perceived, how can public awareness as to how these could benefit the community be raised, and how can the popularity of the police be increased and their good intentions be communicated?
- *Conflict of Interest.* Upon the request of the Head of the Legal Department a precise definition of conflict of interests was furnished by Dr Parsons. It was understood that the Armenian Police would benefit from/need an international definition of conflict of interests. The Department of Juvenile Delinquency had recently been expanded to include the issues of domestic violence. Since February 2013 this department has been renamed the Directorate for Protection of Minors and Domestic Violence and has expanded its remit to cover all aspects of domestic violence. Local Community Rehabilitation Centres for victims were built with funds from the U.S. State Department. There were said to be 400 families within which violence occurs on the police register. 62 Police Inspectors had been attached to secondary schools, in co-operation and close liaison with the Armenian Ministry of Education. These initiatives were carried out in conjunction with and with the support of various international NGOs, Medecins Sans Frontieres, UNICEF, Save the Children, Protection of Rights without Borders, World Vision.
- *English Language Training.* Police officers had been given courses in English language which paid dividends in terms of rapport with foreign visitors and tourists.
- *Rule of Law–Transparency–Guidelines.* The publication and public access to legislation and directives – even for the directly concerned – is a notorious problem in emerging democracies, though much less so in the RA. The following guidelines had been formulated and made available:
  - guidelines for police officers engaged in community policing
  - guidelines for police officers on duty and engaged in policing public order events, demonstrations and assemblies
  - guidelines for police officers in the correct use of force, and use of special weapons in policing public order events in addition
  - an executive order had been issued by the Head of Armenian Police regarding carrying out of community policing, specifically for officers on duty at Community Policing Centres – 48 of these Community Policing Centres had been initiated, of which 40 in Yerevan, 8 in the provinces (with 11 actually finished and functioning in city of Yerevan)
- *Female officers.* Female police officers were found to have been deployed at demonstrations and public order events, though in dealing with those of a violent nature, not positioned in the direct front line, though they remain deployed. A special law had been passed regarding regulating and defining police officers’ role and conduct at public order events. Contradictory information was forthcoming as to the retention of female officers after pregnancies.

Whereas internationals held that no such provisions were in place, the Police HR department stated provisions in place for retention of female police officers post maternity, with arrangements in place for keeping post(s) kept open, even promotions/up-grading whilst coming into effect during maternity period are upheld. The fact that internationals working in the country did not seem to know of such provisions did not build confidence that they were universally known and/or applied.

- *Human Trafficking*. In the 2013 U.S. Department of State TIP (Trafficking in Persons) Report Armenia had been promoted from its Tier 2 status to Tier 1 status, stating that Armenia “continued to demonstrate robust trafficking prevention efforts”. Also, on 20 June 2014, the U.S. Embassy in Yerevan stated that “Armenia remains one of the most successful countries in confronting the global scourge of human trafficking”.
- *‘Internal troops’ or public order police*. Specially trained, they were found to have the same uniform as police, and to be under police command and regulation (and subject to civil not military law); however, under a separate sub-command. The Head of Public Order/Internal Troops is a Deputy Head of Armenian police, answerable to the Head of Armenian Police. Generally not armed, held in reserve at mass events and demonstrations, etc. These officers are armed when on static guard duties, such as guarding nuclear installations.
- *Public Order Legislation*. A new Law of Freedom of Assembly, to be implemented in 2016, will guarantee the right to demonstrate, provided, the meeting itself is not proscribed and if the authorities have been informed in advance in the case of participants being in excess of 100. If the subsequent event is peaceful, then police will have no right to intervene. At the time of the fact-finding, police made excessive use of an old Soviet-era Administrative Order, which permitted police at any time during the event, peaceful or violent, to remove demonstrators and take them to police stations, either because their presence could be interpreted as not being conducive to the public good, or on the grounds that the individual had refused to comply with a lawful order by a police officer.
- *The View from Civil Society*. Civil society representatives, among them the NGO *Protection of Rights without Borders*, perceived police reform as a worthwhile project, and to some extent working, especially the “Angels” police unit. But the momentum of this initiative was said to be slowing down, with no subsequent effort made to build upon or enhance the small amount of trust gained. There was said to be a need for further progress and action by engaging public awareness of the purpose of Community Outreach Centres, and their true nature and role. For instance there has been no bridging; facilities for the public to make a first approach, raise certain issues of concern without entering a police station. There was also said to be an urgent need for enhancing this public awareness of how and why the Community Outreach Centres and the whole community policing initiative can benefit the public. At the time of the fact-finding mission, according to a Helsinki Research Committee of Armenia Survey, 90% of Armenian respondents believed the police were still

engaged in beatings and the torture of suspects and/or individuals detained at police stations. A form of civilian participation or observing presence on police discipline boards was admonished. The level of trust between police and civil society organisations at the time of the Status Assessment was said by both sides to be at least ‘challenged’.

- *Police Investigations.* Community policing projects, irrespective of the results, were said to be comparatively superficial compared to the abuses and inefficiency of investigation of crimes. Delays were possible, even premature dropping of investigations, if it is discovered that the perpetrator could possibly wield powerful political influence. Prosecutors were said to become involved in investigations only at the final later stages of the investigation.
- *Police Oversight and Appeal Institutions.* Police were said to still *de facto* investigate themselves in cases of complaint or alleged misconduct or wrongdoing. The Ombudsman for police matters and irregularities was seen to be more of a lobbying and pressure function. On the other hand, there was said to exist an Independent Special Investigation Service to investigate any misconduct of public official(s), including the police. The head of this service was allegedly appointed by and answered directly to the President.
- *Community or Presidential Police?* At the time of the Status Assessment the *President still retained direct control of key figures in police management.* Thus, the Head of Armenian Police was appointed by the President and answerable directly to the President. Internal troops/public order squads were under a separate command. The Head of Public Order/internal troops was the Deputy Head of Armenian police, answerable to the Head of Armenian Police. The Special Investigation Service, an independent agency, investigating any misconduct of any public official(s), including the police, was headed by an individual appointed to and answering directly to the President.
- Thresholds of Fear and Misinformation (in RA Parliament and Police Force).

### 3. Agreeing on needs/opportunities and an action plan

Concerning the *need for enhanced public awareness of benefits of Community Police Centres* there was some convergence between police and NGOs in that both fully supported the concept of Community Police Centres, and both highlighted this shortcoming, i.e. the public were not being made suitably aware of the benefits of their rights to utilise this initiative. In addition to this, following visits by the researchers to two outreach stations in Yerevan City, it became clear that some development work needed to be conducted to effectively embed and operationalise the community policing concept. At the offices, hard-bound incident report books were being used by officers to record and report issues, concerns and minor crimes brought to their attention by visiting members of the public. Surprisingly, there seemed to be an absence of any additional forms or reports such as crime reports, statement forms or accident reports. Officers present explained that reported crimes were referred on to local police stations for follow-up enquiries and investigation. In order to

optimise the benefits accruing from a community policing model, local enquiries and minor crimes should pass the other way from a police station to community police teams for follow-up action. In addition to this anomaly, there appeared to be a lack of any appropriate ambience conducive to contact and rapport-building with the public. Undoubtedly, this was not helped by the rather threatening appearance of the Soviet-era police uniforms issued to local officers.

In order to ensure the long-term success and sustainability of community policing as a preferred police doctrine, community policing must be fully integrated into all police structures, resource allocation and budget decisions. At the time of the Status Assessment community policing in Armenia appeared to be an adjunct to operational policing and largely an ancillary activity. This is not an unusual scenario to come across in a developing programme of structural reform; nevertheless, it is a gap that will at some point need to be closed.

*Protection of Rights without Borders* offered to act in partnership with the police in publicising, promoting and urging the public to increase their use of Community Police Centres. It was understood that the message could be expected to be more trusted and accepted if it originated from Protection of Rights without Borders websites and publicity material etc., as opposed to originating solely from the police.

To create momentum for both the understanding and successful introduction of community policing the interlocutors agreed on a package of capacity-building and enhanced professionalism programs on Advanced Skills Training for Community Police Officers, with special attention given to the police-public interface. Community Police Training was to involve the following steps, also extended to civil society representatives.

The Status and Needs Report was discussed with stakeholders. Discussions led to a number of additional recommendations later worked into the Capacity-Building Action Plan.

An important recommendation to heed in transitional democracies concerns attitudes of both services and general populations concerning reforms. Brought up on the perception of the police as a force whose first and foremost task is to protect the state and its representatives, and not the citizen, taxpayer and voter, both representatives of the services and the general population – even the reform-minded – can be expected to have their difficulties with understanding and accepting alternative ways of organising and delivering police services. This is a statement of fact, not of value – one may see and be interested in the fruits of reform without understanding and accepting the process that may lead to such fruition, as we have seen, in many cases: *per aspera*. Liberal ways of organising a police as a service, doing away with military ranks and uniforms, replacing military-style intelligence and calibres of weapons, training a different style of customer management, may not be in everyone's interest, nor in their capacities. And this entails also the consumer of such services whose expectations need to be re-directed and adapted. Resistance to police reform from within the ranks and file had been observed and vaguely reported on without direct reference to identifiable individuals. It was therefore agreed to meet police officers on their home grounds and signalling interest in their expertise

by initiating a discourse on police professionalism, complete with fact-finding and study missions to such destinations as London Metropolitan University.

Capacity-building programs were going to be organised on aspects of professionalism, management and a series of other identified topics of concern, to be delivered at different levels of seniority, on:

- Negotiation and Communication Skills of Police Officers during Mass Events and the Protection of Public Order
- Negotiation and Communication Skills in Crisis Situations and High Risk Events
- Police Management Method and Practice
- key principles of negotiation and communication in operational settings
- identifying and quantifying risk, collating and interpreting information, record-keeping and decision logs
- briefing, de-briefing, Forward Intelligence, operational planning
- command structure, tactical options, balancing competing rights
- police priorities, identifying and quantifying risks, developing a strategy
- providing an appropriate police response (necessity, legality, proportionality)
- examining practical scenarios (case study examples)
- adapting best practice, developing a new operating procedure, assessing operational effectiveness
- Introduction: Identifying Key Themes in Management and Police Leadership
- Management and Leadership in the Republic of Armenia Police (Challenges, Dilemmas, Solutions)
- Management Structures: hierarchies, delegating authority, empowering subordinates
- Management Responsibilities: junior, middle and senior management responsibilities
- the management and development of staff
- managing police resources
- problem-solving and risk management
- next steps: identifying opportunities for modernisation and reform
- Intelligence Analysis (for intelligence handling and also Intelligence Section of Headquarters)
- Human Rights Training for Public Order Units/Internal Troops (to include the use of force within a legal framework – operating to national and international standards of Human Rights in the control of public disorder and demonstrations)

Capacity-building was to be delivered at the newly opened Centre for Police Education.

#### **4. The two-pronged approach – policing with and for the community**

In parallel, a parliamentary reflection process within the Standing Committee on Defence, National Security and Internal Affairs of the National Assembly was to be

initiated. If a functioning (parliamentary) democracy expresses itself in credible oversight by a dedicated parliamentary committee, then such committees need not only be constituted nominally, but put to work. The quality of such committee work, again, will not depend on what committee members' civilian profession was and is (e.g. military), but on the degree of intellectual penetration of concepts and notions of good practice. It was therefore agreed to invite international experts into parliamentary hearings to report on capacities built, and progress made. In addition, a limited amount of documentation on police practices and laws from recognised reform and 'good practice' states was to be collected, translated and put at the disposal of parliamentary decision-makers.

The approach chosen by the reform partners, RA police leadership, OSCE OiY and the international expert team, was thus 'two-pronged'. Reform cannot be implemented by decree, nor can it be exclusively built 'from the bottom up'. As important as NGOs and civic councils are for capacity-building and 'enculturation' of best practices, and as pleasant as it may be to agree with them on almost everything, reform, to be successful, entails head and all limbs, and in this case also the living habitat. The population needs to understand the new and better practices, demand them from the representatives of the services, and support them in their re-oriented work. As trivial as it may sound, community policing may be designed from above and on behalf of the population, but it simply does not work without interaction with, and support from, the *community*. The program was therefore also going to entail outreach to the mass media – a move welcomed by the RA police, perhaps not so much out of appreciation of the media and the freedom of expression, but on the assumption that police reputation would be greatly improved through such reporting.

## 5. Facts II. Police reform – Revisited and re-launched under Pashinyan in 2020

Armenia's *Law on the Police* was passed by the Armenian National Assembly on 16 April 2001. The day has henceforth been celebrated as the national "Police Day". As one of Armenia's obligations for its accession to the Council of Europe, the Law of the Republic of Armenia *On Service in Police* was subsequently passed in June 2002. In addition, the Law of the Republic of Armenia *On Adopting the Discipline Code of the Police of the Republic of Armenia* was passed on 11 May 2005. The Ministry of the Interior was reorganised into the professional Police of the Republic of Armenia in a process completed by 1 January 2003. The Penitentiary Division of the police was transferred to the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice. The Fire Department was incorporated into the Emergency Management Department.

The first phase on police reform, initiated during the Sargsyan Government, conceived with and advised by the OiY and the DCAF-IPTI expert team, led to a deepened reflection process on professionalism and on the objectives and opportunities of community policing. It led to, and in certain cases, accompanied several structural and procedural reforms. The influence of the international expert

team, though strategically designed and delivered, should not be overestimated, and senior police management certainly was not lacking in sincerity, nor in professionalism. The importance of such adaptations, notably in the field of crowd control and the management of expressions of public dissent, were noted and commented upon by the diplomatic community.

However, the demise of both the Sargsyan Government and the OSCE OiY had led to diminished visibility though not a stalling of the reform process.

In 2020, the Pashinyan Government relaunched the halting police reform program. On 13 April 2020, a cabinet approved *Strategy and an Action Plan* for the RA Police were made public. As explained by Minister of Justice Rustam Badasyan, the documents had been developed by a working group and had undergone comprehensive discussion with the public and international partners. Also funding for the implementation of the program was said to have been secured.

Results of the implementation of the Action Plan and legislative amendments include:

- A ministry for the development and implementation of the sector will be established (NB – previously the RA Police had been answering to the President directly) with the law enforcement agency to be converted into the Ministry of the Interior.
- A Patrol Service and an Operational Management Centre to be established.
- Effectiveness of the preliminary investigation capacities to be reviewed.
- Capacity-building to be designed and delivered on the maintenance of public order: effective tactical solutions to be introduced, capacity-building for negotiation and communication to be carried out and improvement of technical equipment to be considered.
- Community Policing to be re-interpreted and relaunched.
- Issues of preparation, on-going capacity-building and moral-psychological instruction of police personnel, integrity and anti-corruption education of officers were to be seriously reviewed. This was to include a revision of the educational, training and professional preparation programmes of the Police Educational Complex. In parallel, the social ‘guarantees’ for police officers were to be reinforced.
- Increased transparency and accountability to the public along with the promotion of international cooperation are further steps to be undertaken.

Overcoming challenged police–public relations had been one of the main reasons for initiating a first phase of police reform from 2010. In an interview in early 2020 PM Pashinyan underscored the importance of the police reform initiative, confirming it had been on his government’s agenda from the first day on. Aramays Avetisyan, in *Police as Public Servants: A New Armenian Model?* draws our attention to the justification of the strategy. In a specific section the strategy refers to the history of policing since the final days of the Soviet Union and the conditions making change necessary. As Avetisyan points out credibly a self-critical justification section would not only have found excuses for lagging reform but actually have pointed out how the police in Armenia had *contributed to a worsening of public safety*:

“Instead of ensuring public safety, the police in Armenia have a history of being the ones who disrupted the peace. While the Strategy aims to restore the public image of the police, it needs to go beyond mere public relations and address the underlying issues that have allowed police standoffs against their own tax-paying citizens. Such structural changes will inherently result in an improved public image”.

As Avetisyan notes further, the strategy may be in need of further clarification and possibly refinement. Thus one of the proposed structural changes concerns the creation of a Ministry of Internal Affairs – an institution that Armenia had before and did away with.

Article 42 of the current Law on Police stipulates that “the Prime Minister oversees the work of the Police”. Police leadership would thus be to some degree protected from direct interference from above through an additional institutional level. It has, however, not been made sufficiently clear how the nomination process for the Head of Police (not requiring the endorsement by the National Assembly) would be changed accordingly. Also – it would seem to clash with the Pashinyan Government’s otherwise proclaimed intention to streamline state institutions.

In the meantime, police reform capacity-building has been ongoing, present (at the time of writing this article) public order and safety challenges notwithstanding.

## **6. Conclusive remarks and lessons from Armenia’s internationally advised Police Reform 2014–2017**

Putting aside the plight of Armenians in Karabakh, Armenia itself has undergone a period of political turbulence and instability in recent times. In July 2016 a group of 20 armed men loyal to the then imprisoned Armenian ultra-nationalist politician, Jirair Sefilian, took control of a police station in Yerevan shooting dead one police officer in the process. A siege lasting several days finally concluded peacefully when the armed group surrendered to security forces. In May 2018, the increasingly unpopular prime minister Serzh Sargsyan was forced to resign being replaced by the current prime minister Nikol Pashinyan, whose appointment was confirmed by a vote in parliament.

Against this fragile and at times unstable political backdrop, reform of the police and security sector in Armenia has progressed slowly. In the past five years or so (discounting the two years lost to the global pandemic), much effort has been made by intergovernmental organisations (IGO), such as the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), to fund and deliver police reform programmes in the country. This work has at times been hampered and obstructed by the fact that Armenia’s historic enemies and neighbours, Turkey and Azerbaijan, are also members of the OSCE. Nevertheless, training and reform has taken place, with a research report compiled by the Swiss-based NGO the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) in 2014 reviewing and reporting progress. In particular, the researchers found that much work had been undertaken to introduce and implement a model of community policing inspired by policies introduced in the U.K.

## **6.1. Community policing in Armenia: An Introduction**

At the time of the research project the roll-out of community policing in Armenia was generally regarded as having been a success, albeit that much more work was still required to embed the system and maximise effectiveness. Beginning with a small pilot project consisting of just 16 police officers, the roll-out (supported by the OSCE), progressed with community policing being enshrined in the national policing remit in 2010. A particularly successful initiative was the introduction of a so-called “Angels” police regiment. Officers in this unit were taught English and encouraged to provide a visible and approachable presence on the streets of Yerevan to assist tourists and foreign visitors. Women made up 25% of the total strength of this unit. The introduction and implementation of community policing continued with the initial project being focused on Kotayk province and then gradually being extended to Hrazdan, Cherasavan and Yerevan provinces. There was also discussion about forming local community councils as part of the scheme. Over time, 48 community policing centres (or local police posts) were created, with hours of opening set at 09.00–22.00. Officers overseeing the roll-out clearly identified the benefits of community policing with an increase in information about crime being generated from within local communities. It was accepted that much more needed to be done to make the public aware of the change to community policing and old structures and processes clearly impeded progress.

Whilst the OSCE and other IGOs have long recognised the benefits for member states in adopting community policing, defining, describing and articulating clearly what this form of policing is and what it looks like in practice, can present challenges in and of itself. For some theoreticians and practitioners community policing is simply a policing approach that involves a level of consultation or partnership between communities (the public) and the police. Others will argue that it should provide a wide-ranging and complex system for major police reform. Of course, Armenia is not alone in claiming to commit to the principles of community policing and the implementation of community policing methods at the point of service delivery. Many countries have committed themselves to introducing community policing programmes, practices and procedures within the organisational outputs of their particular police organisations. There is now a body of evidence that indicates that the concept and philosophy of community policing has for many years become enshrined in the international policing lexicon. Casey (2010, 65) points to what in effect is an often, rather vague concept, influencing wider debates around police deployments and becoming a form of “ideological cult with more slogans than substance and more followers than leaders”. The near universal adoption of community policing as the preferred policing model can even be detected in countries with tyrannical and despotic governments such as China and Zimbabwe, which also claim to have community policing at the centre of the state policing philosophy.

Adding a further layer of complication is the fact that there is no agreed upon definition of precisely what community policing is and what it involves at an operational level. A plethora of competing definitions can lead to confusion in the minds of practitioner and citizen alike. It is often described as community-based,

community-oriented, or even neighbourhood policing. A lack of clarity in the definitions can produce a wide variety of strategic approaches and varying degrees of success in operational implementation. The OSCE (2008, 5) has defined community policing thus:

“A philosophy and organisational strategy that promotes a partnership-based, collaborative effort between the police and the community to more effectively and efficiently identify, prevent and solve problems of crime, the fear of crime, physical and social disorder, and neighbourhood decay in order to improve the quality of life for everyone.”

Whilst Fielding (2005, 460) describes community policing as: “An iconic style of policing in which the police are close to the public, know their concerns from regular everyday contacts, and act on them in accord with the community’s wishes.”

These definitions are illuminating in describing the philosophical approach to community policing as well as providing a picture of what successful delivery might look like. It is instructive to examine a more in-depth analysis of the key factors necessary for a successful community policing programme. A wide-ranging study of approaches to community policing conducted by Mackenzie and Henry (2009, 5) for the Government of Scotland analysed some 420 articles, books and research reports on the subject drawn from three major databases. The researchers distilled down the data looking both for similarities and differences across recently implemented community policing strategies in a number of different jurisdictions. This piece of research is of course not new, having been conducted more than a decade ago. Nevertheless, the main findings are as relevant today as they were back in 2009. The researchers back then identified five key features common to successful community policing initiatives:

1. Decentralisation – officers on the ground need to be able to respond to public concerns and make things happen at a local level. Centralised command structures slow down decision making with key decisions being made by senior officers remote from the context and location of any emerging problem.
2. Partnership – with other agencies, so police can act as an intermediary or facilitator when the public demand action on issues outside the immediate remit of law enforcement. (This may include local government, schools, youth workers, voluntary sector organisations or local businesses.)
3. Community Engagement – communities need to have a real voice that can be fed into police priorities and practices where appropriate.
4. Proactive and Problem-Solving – community policing marks a shift away from reactive “fire brigade” policing, this connects it with problem-oriented (POP) and intelligence-led (ILP) approaches to policing. This requires action to be initiated and directed by the engagement process, not shaped by existing, unreflective police definitions of local problems. (The problem-oriented model of policing was originally developed by Goldstein [1979] and comprised a system through which police officers develop effective strategies to prevent and reduce crime by a process of in-depth analysis of community crime problems, the crafting of a targeted response, followed by an assessment of the impact of the police intervention on the original problem.)
5. Philosophy – community policing heralds a changed understanding of real police work akin to peace officers embedded in the networks of their communities rather than as reactive law officers, although law enforcement remains important and should not be neglected.

A similar but different review carried out on behalf of the New Zealand Police, Coquilhat (2008, 8) at around the same time (and which also included a review of international literature), reached near identical conclusions. This review identified partnerships, decentralisation and problem-solving as essential requirements in any successful community policing strategy, adding flexibility and accountability as being equally important considerations.

## ***6.2. Oversight and accountability***

Other studies of community policing, particularly those used to inform a wider process of police reorganisation in emerging democracies, have highlighted the requirement for a series of further important requirements if community policing programmes are to survive and provide positive results. Groenewald and Peake (2004, 10) theorised that these include requirements for national and local oversight that include mechanisms with real and not just symbolic power together with the authority to address problems. They go on to argue that there should also be clear roles and a division of responsibilities, with public participation in oversight activities. They further argued that in addition to appropriate oversight structures, a transparent system of police accountability should also be put in place. Accountability structures, if suitably formed, provide a clear system of police accountability to government, parliament and the public.<sup>6</sup> Included in this system should be methods of direct communication with the public, including the introduction of hotlines and anonymous reporting mechanisms for complaints against the police. To be effective, the public must have easy access to any system for recording complaints.

To guarantee a successful implementation of new community policing programmes, or the revision and further development of existing programmes, the role of the public is key. For community policing to work, police organisations need to inform their public of any new strategy, raising awareness and enlisting the participation of the local community to ensure successful implementation.<sup>7</sup> This should include raising community awareness of legal and human rights as well as civic responsibilities. If need be, the police can assist local community groups to organise and mobilise public support.

## ***6.3. Organisational levels of community policing***

Williams (2003), argued that delivering an effective and sustainable community policing strategy required some substantial internal change and reorganisation in the police services themselves. Within central command a serious organisational change programme must be initiated to realign internal departmental structures and resources to effectively support the implementation of a community policing approach at local

<sup>6</sup> Groenewald–Peake (2004): op. cit. 18.

<sup>7</sup> Murray (2005, p.10).

level. Management structures also must be overhauled with decision-making delegated to neighbourhood level; empowering first and second line supervisors to respond quickly to locally identified problems and concerns by developing and implementing solutions using a problem-solving approach. Ingrained and often long-established management approaches based upon military hierarchies have to be changed, with a shift of emphasis away from discipline and compliance and towards leadership and empowerment. Systems for providing reward, recognition and promotion for officers should ideally be aligned to qualitative measures (public satisfaction, letters of appreciation, increased community participation) and not crude quantitative measures of performance such as the numbers of arrests and stops and searches carried out in any given period. Finally, budgeting and finance should also be re-configured to support community policing with control over local policing budgets being devolved down to local commanders circumventing the need for central budget and spending authorisations.

Transforming strategic objectives into tactical successes can pose some major challenges.

In Armenia and elsewhere a fundamental question remains largely unanswered. That question is: if the core components of a successful community policing strategy have been clearly identified, comprehensively described and widely circulated, why does the encounter with community policing in practice so often prove to be elusive? A key point to make here is that successful and recognisable community policing can only occur in a democratic space. To be clear, community policing can only be established and maintained in a constitutional environment inhabited by democratic government. Why is this distinction so important? Simply put, countries with no democracy, no rule of law, no fundamental rights and freedoms, are unable to provide a system of policing that could remotely resemble community policing. It is an observable fact that in countries where autocratic regimes hold power there are, present in the streets and other public spaces large numbers of men and women wearing uniforms with the word police written on them, but in truth these state officials are not engaged in policing. They are there to suppress dissent, to deny people their human rights and to use physical force to protect an undemocratic and unaccountable regime. That is not policing. That is why community policing *can* be successfully introduced and embedded in countries such as Armenia, neighbouring Georgia and Ukraine. But not in countries such as Azerbaijan, Iran or Syria where even a basic level of democracy and respect for human rights, simply does not exist. Democratic policing, which might include a community policing approach to win public trust, cannot occur in a vacuum, indeed it cannot exist at all unless it can be located in a broader constitutional landscape. To be successful and enduring, a community policing programme will rely on a number of vital and complimentary factors being present. These should ideally include, political oversight but not direct control, an independent judiciary, a free and independent press, strong civil society, public scrutiny and accountability, the rule of law and commitments to human rights and an independent body to investigate complaints of police malpractice. It is searingly obvious that none of these vital facets of an open society are likely to be present in a dictatorial or autocratic regime. What is also clear is that many of these essential and contributing factors may be weak, under-developed and fragile in emerging democracies.

## 6.4. *Barriers to progress in implementing Community Policing in Armenia*

In 2014, the DCAF researchers visited key sights and interviewed key stakeholders including members of the police and civil society organisations. A number of issues began to emerge. Firstly, the fact that the changes brought about by the introduction of community policing plus the potential benefits accruing from such changes had simply not been adequately communicated to the public and/or quite possibly members of the police. Problematic issues highlighted by Williams were clearly in evidence. Namely, hierarchical structures based upon the military (a legacy from Soviet times), persisted with members of Armenian NGOs commenting that police officers still rigidly followed instructions given by superiors. The significance of this harks back to the work done by Mackenzie and Henry, and Coquilhat where the importance of delegating decision making to local level as well as down the chain of command was essential to making community policing work. On a visit to one of the community police centres in Yerevan the problems became all too obvious to the DCAF delegation. The centre consisted of a room with a desk and two chairs. On the desk sat a large bound book into which members of the public were meant to come and record particular crime-related issues or concerns. The book appeared to be devoid of entries. Outside stood an Armenian police officer. Dressed in uniform that clearly harked back to the Soviet/Russian times he stood with arms folded presenting a glowering and even rather threatening appearance. For community policing to succeed and for the implementation of community policing to garner public support, some fundamental behavioural changes have to be instigated amongst the officers involved. This can be achieved through training of course, but more importantly must be driven by police leaders, both senior and junior. Officers must be encouraged to adopt a more engaging approach, where they seek out opportunities to speak to local citizens and enter into conversation with them. Uniforms should be changed and updated to signal the reforms taking place in the organisation, specifically a move away from quasi-military practices and structures. On occasion, more radical action is needed. In informal conversations with both OSCE officials and Armenian police officers it became apparent that one of the barriers to reform lays in the presence of senior police officers of long service who simply did not support or see the need for change. In ideal circumstances such individuals could be retired early and paid off with enhanced pensions thereby making space for a younger, dynamic and more reform minded cohort of leaders. However, such a move costs money and requires strong political commitment and direction. Neither of these things were present at the time.

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