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Managing the democratic transition at the police academy

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The future of policing lies in training. If change has to come, training will have to be first. This is perhaps why so many police reforms seem to take off only after new training programmes have been conceived and implemented. Bosnia and Herzegovina is no exception to this formula. While the initial training modules in the early days of the CIVPOL mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina were conducted directly by the International Police Task Force, the police academy of Sarajevo (Vraca) was soon – in 1998 - created to take over the formidable task of training and retraining all police officers of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. To respond adequately to the challenge and the high expectations put in the prospected benefits of a modern and democratic training, the Minister of Interior of the Federation called from their duty two personalities whom he trusted most to lead the newly created police academy towards excellencies. He nominated as academy director Taib Spahic, a progressive police chief with many years of experience in management and author of books on community policing, and, as his deputy, Vinko Pravdic, a career professor with a strong knowledge of policing issues.

A primary axis of reform led by the new direction of the police academy has been the introduction of classes adapted to the international best practices in policing. As said, there were high expectations towards the police academy to bring visible changes in the police behaviour at the field level. The police academy had to be ahead of all others from the start. This, of course, implied a vision, a capacity to look at years in front, at a horizon where, for the majority of us, things are very small and almost imperceptible. The academy direction was up to the task. It quickly detected and identified the necessary changes. Of course, the direction benefited from the support of CIVPOL and other police professionals who assisted them in setting up the new courses. To sustain the vision of the police academy, the experiences of others were critical.

Indeed, the police academy direction gained a vast experience from travels abroad, visits of advanced training centres, discussions with their colleagues and heads of police academies in Western Europe. A meticulous comparative analysis of these experiences was undertaken systematically and each confrontation with new ideas in training was the occasion of rethinking training at home with the goal to extract the most robust practices feasible in the context of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Importing, yes, but not without taking into account the local “system of production” (Pierre Bourdieu) and the local realities of Bosnia and Herzegovina. These efforts are crowned today by the publication of this book, authored by Taib Spahic, which is a remarkable attempt to synthesize various training approaches in different European countries and to identify the main lessons for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The advances of the police academy in Sarajevo, under the leadership of Taib Spahic and Vinko Pravdic, prompted the comment from the High Representative that the police academy of Sarajevo had reached the European standards. The comment is proudly exhibited on the main hall of the academy. I believe the reality is not over-evaluated. At the Dies Academicus

that have been organized since 2001 jointly between the police academy of Vraca and the police academy of Banja Luka, visiting delegations from the South Eastern Europe region constantly expressed their appraisal in recognition to the efforts made at the academy. It was also certainly a high point in the short life of the police academy in Sarajevo and another moment of glory when the federal government in Sarajevo was approached in 2004 by the UN mission in Georgia for a possible training of Georgian officers at the academy. Once the recipient of international assistance, the academy had grown strong enough and attracted so much international recognition that it could now reverse the roles. The police academy is today an experienced and credible provider of services for police schools in transition countries.

The second radical change that was brought at the police academy was in the pedagogical field. In the past, police training was not conceptualized as a specific professional area needing original pedagogical tools. Classes were traditionally centred on the teacher who delivered theoretical knowledge to the cadets. The link between the theory and the practice was not considered problematic before and it was expected that the cadet would acquire somehow mysteriously the skills to apply automatically on the terrain the large amount of theoretical knowledge acquired by heart during the school. Building on the examples of the police academy in Baden-Württemberg or the Learning Centre (LSOP) in the Netherlands for instance, the police academy decided to reverse the pedagogical paradigm after considerable research, thoughts, and large coffee cans emptied in the office of the police academy director.

Considering that policing at the police station level is a profession dominated by practical skills and situations, a profession where the practical knowledge is essential, the direction of the academy invited its teachers to start revisit their classes around the notion of scenarios. During the academy, cadets need to learn how to deal practically with situations with a high level of occurrence in police operations. This initiated a process where the classes became completely remodelled, the teacher's role was redefined and the entire curriculum, eventually, was heavily recomposed and rewritten.

Not content with reformatting the classes, the police academy initiated another reform in 2004 intending to revamp profoundly the 3 months practical training in the police stations. Scenarios, in some way, are "stiff" and freeze behaviour around a number of automated tasks and activities. What is needed, according to Taib Spahic, is creativity. Cadets need to learn more dynamically how to apprehend *new* situations everyday. Problem-based-learning – a tool adopted by the Harvard School of Medicine - was first evaluated and, after initial positive reactions, introduced as the main approach during the field training in the Fall of 2004. The new practical training program included also a "tool" well developed in Belgium, namely the mentoring. It was not an easy task. The reform needed to have everybody on board, flexibility and courage from the teachers to deal with something really new. Part of the reform needed also the active participation of the cantons where the practical training was going to take place physically. The direction of the academy passed this hurdle with success knowing very well how to win the heart and mind of their professional teachers and the cantons with a combination of humour, intellectual strength, managerial leadership, and excellent food at the academy cantina.

The third axis of the reform has been indeed the management. Management can not just rely on personal skills of the managers, but managers need also the support of analytical tools and concepts. The direction introduced a new philosophy and a new spirit at the academy. One important aspect of a result-oriented training is that the students' motivation is strong.

Student's satisfaction as well as marks in exams became two criteria of performance of the academy. What is of critical importance too is certainly the quality and motivation of the teachers. Again, measures were introduced or proposed to the Minister of Interior how to increase these two aspects of the teachers. Human resources management, in the view of the direction of the academy, needs to be strongly developed in order to reach the targets envisioned by the direction. Without entering into all the details of the new management tools introduced by the academy direction, I should mention that their model is the so-called "police academy scorecard", derived by TC Team Consult from the work of the Harvard Business School, which comprises a measurable number of indicator of performance for which data is collected regularly. This scorecard functions like a steering board and helps the management to master the evolution of the academy, control progress, and disclose in a transparent and scientific way its achievements.

Leading change to democratic policing training necessitated determination, vision, an enormous amount of energy and work, courage also. This book is the product and a tribute to all this. The book is also an attempt to consolidate – *scripta manent* – the work accomplished and to provide a resource for other police academies in the region. Last but not least, it is a piece of research that should pave the way for more researches in the future, an activity that both Taib Spahic and Vinko Pravdic would like to see growing at the police academy of Sarajevo.

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