The relationship between community policing and human rights in Albania's police reform

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Community policing is considered by the leadership of the Albanian police as central to delivering democratic policing in the country. It has been enshrined in the national and local police strategies that call for a close cooperation between police, local authorities and non-governmental organisations in identifying and addressing local policing needs. The implementation of such initiative is an attempt to refocus police reform in Albania towards guaranteeing respect for human rights, which, in turn, influences the relationship between police and the citizens as a cornerstone of democracy. However, there is a gap between the planned reforms and their implementation on the ground. It is also not clear to what extent community policing programmes in Albania tally with local conditions. The experience so far indicates that community policing reform initiatives in Albania, often conceptualised and overseen by Western experts, have been more about exporting an ideology than a change of practice. Whilst the concept can be seen as a useful vehicle to improve police–public relations and encourage police's adherence to human rights, community policing in Albania has been shown to have had little effect on reducing crime rates.

Keywords: community policing; human rights; police reform; crime; legitimacy; Albania

Introduction

Since the collapse of communism, some 20 years ago, Albania's police reform has been an arduous and often controversial journey. The transformation of the police from a tool of totalitarian social control to a law enforcement agency and eventually towards a democratic public service is still ongoing and the tribulations of its reform process reflect the wider social and political changes of the country at large.[1] Albania's post-communist governments have been aware of the need and significance of reforming the police, but their efforts have produced mixed results. These have often been attributed to consecutive governments' unwillingness to depoliticise policing and a tendency towards authoritarian and nepotistic styles of leadership.[2]

At the heart of Albania's efforts to democratise its police force lies an ambitious programme of introducing community policing. Its seven-year strategic plan of reform (2007–2013) proudly states that community policing constitutes the country's policing model with the express aim of transforming Albania's police from a purely law enforcement

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agency into a public service.[3] This article argues that in spite of these lofty ambitions, the results have been piecemeal at best.

Community policing is a relatively new concept in Albania. It was introduced during the past decade by European and American experts intending to improve the public accountability of Albanian police and increasing its crime-fighting capabilities. A specific focus of this article is to evaluate to what extent this aim was achieved. In doing so, we ask whether community policing can be a miracle cure in fighting crime and advancing human rights through its application. Much of the research in the field suggests that community policing is more about police legitimacy, human rights and social cohesion than crime control.[4] By exploring these suggestions for the case of Albania we argue that the introduction of community policing driven by Western experts has resulted in practice in implanting an ideology rather than introducing a new policing model.

This article draws on qualitative data from interviews with a number of police officers, local government officials and policing experts in Albania conducted during field research in May 2012.[5] It provides a summary of the main arguments regarding the benefits and shortcomings of community policing as a reform model. It also examines the relationship between community policing and human rights especially in the context of policing changes in transitional countries. We aim to define community policing as both a concept and a practice as well as to identify who its main proponents, stakeholders and beneficiaries are. Several studies suggest that, although community policing has little effect on reducing crime levels, it tends to produce positive result on police's adherence to human rights.[6] This relationship, the article argues, constitutes a significant aspect of police work as it attempts to balance the 'coercive' with the 'soft' aspects of policing. 'Coercive' policing, in Weberian terms, presents police as the main actor of enforcing the state monopoly of force in society. In contrast, the 'soft' aspect caters to the need of police for legitimacy through building public trust and providing a public service. Community policing, arguably, falls into the latter category. We argue that in a democratic society, police adherence to human rights must underpin its 'coercive' aspect, while community policing cannot be relied on to provide the necessary safeguards for protecting such rights alone. In the second part of the article we look at police reform in Albania as consistent with three main stages of post-communist reform.

The first stage lasted from the immediate post-communist experience in 1991 until 1997. In common with other former communist countries in Europe, this period was characterised by a tendency to move police away from being a totalitarian force of control towards becoming a professional law enforcement agency with a particular focus on safeguarding human rights and freedoms.[7] A key element in this process was the separation of police from the intelligence services whose primary duty during communism had been the suppression of dissent. To this effect, the country's legislation enshrined guarantees for fundamental rights including the right of assembly, free speech, the right to a fair trial, the inviolability of private property and the right of human treatment in police custody; all of which had direct implications for policing in Albania. However, in practice, during this period the focus of policing in Albania was mostly geared towards crime-fighting duties rather than safeguarding human rights. Moreover, throughout the 1990s, the increasingly conflictual politics in Albania diminished the police's ability to fight crime or protect fundamental freedoms and rights.[8] Consequently, when political frictions and economic mismanagement erupted in widespread riots and rebellion in 1997, the police was incapable of maintaining order. The 'thin blue line' proved too thin to contain the anarchy that temporarily engulfed the country.

During the second stage, 1997–2000, most of the efforts were channelled towards re-building and consolidating Albania's state institutions.[9] Police reform was seen as crucial to such efforts as illustrated in the final part of this article. The intent was to move policing away from a mainly law enforcement role towards providing a public service based on respect for human rights and Western philosophies of democratic policing, including community policing. In consequence, as will be demonstrated, the Albanian police was meant to acquire legitimacy in its relation with the polity. Community policing now emerged as a cornerstone of democratic policing and a vehicle of delivering policing by consent. However, we also argue that the current leadership of police in Albania, whilst recognising the significance of human rights, focus much of their attention on incorporating international human rights conventions in law enforcement legislation rather than on guaranteeing these rights for both citizens and law enforcement officials in practice.[10] As a result, there is an evident gap between reform on paper and its implementation in practice.

We come to the conclusion that the implementation of community policing strategies in Albania on the ground is mainly carried out on an *ad hoc* basis. There is little evidence that it has produced the envisaged results in lowering crime or increasing public security, but it has been beneficial to the improvement and protection of human rights.

Human rights and community policing

Our central understanding of the nature of policing relies on the 'Weberian' notion that 'police are the domestic specialists of imposing the state's monopoly over the legitimate use of force'.[11] This calls on the police to maintain civil order and fight crime. Unlike other institutions of the criminal justice system, every-day police conduct defines its place in society. In discharging their duties, the police have to strike a fine balance between maintaining legitimacy and exercising legitimate force while safeguarding citizens' human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The extent of such rights is unambiguously outlined in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) to which current and aspiring members of the European Union (EU) are bound to. Article 2 of the ECHR, for instance, guarantees the right to life; other provisions include the right not to be tortured (Article 3), the right to liberty and security of person (Article 5), the right to a fair trial (Article 6), the right to privacy and family life (Article 8), the rights of freedom of expression (Article 10) and of freedom of assembly (Article 11).[12] Police plays a crucial role in safeguarding such provisions as these articles directly affect its core remit of law enforcement and crime control, which has been referred to as the 'hard' part of policing, or its 'coercive' side.[13] Although police legitimacy derives from that of the state, the police have a duty to maintain this legitimacy through providing a public service and seeking the consent of the population, hence the need for the 'soft' side of policing.

Community policing constitutes an essential part of this 'soft' side of policing as, in essence, it is about involving the public in police work. Whilst few police practitioners and commentators would question the need for police observance of human rights, there is less agreement on the benefits of community policing or its constituting components. It has been described as preventive policing utilising pre-emptive strategies of crime reduction rather than dealing with the consequences of crime.[14] Community involvement is vital for crime prevention strategies as it provides the police with information about potential criminals or criminal activities. Many commentators have also drawn attention to the problem-solving aspect of community policing programmes, which emphasise the close cooperation between the police and other public services such as social work or

social housing departments in dealing with the underlying social issues of crime.[15] In such context, community policing is 'the only viable way for the police to retain public support and a vital prerequisite for attempts to reduce crime'.[16]

However, it appears that due to its broad range of activities and actors involved, community policing has proven a nebulous concept and its 'definitions are a little vague and more than a little aspirational'.[17] Therefore some commentators have tried to draw attention to its composite features. Wesley Skogan, for instance, suggests that community policing as practiced in the United States is more a process than a product and embraces three key elements: community involvement, problem-solving of social issues and a decentralised police service.[18] Other commentators draw attention to the organisational changes that take place within police as a result of adopting community policing initiatives.[19] Quint Thurman et al., for example, suggest that community policing is both a philosophy and an organisational strategy that is tailored to community needs.[20] Beyond emphasising crime prevention and the fostering of community–police partnerships that engage in problem-solving activities, community policing brings about structural changes to police departments and their personnel by encouraging them to participate actively in community policing initiatives.[21] However, Thurman et al. also argue that the close police-community cooperation almost always focuses on police work rather than public needs. They suggest that in its relation with the public, police often act as 'first among equals' and define the crime prevention agenda.[22]

The implementation of community policing initiatives often results in more than efficient crime control. Michael Rowe suggests that these initiatives also aspire to reducing fear of crime, improving quality of life, improving police services and police legitimacy.[23] It is this wide gamut of objectives, which makes community policing hard to define. Perhaps the most comprehensive definition has been provided by Mike Brogden and Preeti Nijhar who approach the concept by describing what the concept is not trying to achieve. Thus, community policing,

> Is not military style policing with a central bureaucracy obedient to directive legislation that minimizes discretion. It is not policing that is autonomous of public consent and accountability. It is not policing that is committed primarily to reactive crime-fighting strategies. It is not policing that is measured by output in terms of professional efficiency. Rather it is policing which is determined by strategies, tactics and outcomes based on community consent.[24]

This definition highlights yet another important element of community policing, namely the need for police to seek the consent of the community it polices. Policing experts such as Peter Neyroud and Alan Beckley highlight this feature in the context of police legitimacy and accountability in democratic policing.[25] These viewpoints suggest that community policing can only be implemented successfully in liberal democracies; an assertion which appears to underpin the ideological export of community policing to transitional democracies around the world.[26] Community policing in these countries has been seen as a vehicle to introduce democratic policing and protecting the human rights of all.

Much of the literature on the relationship between policing and human rights in liberal democracies draws attention to an apparent incompatibility between the two concepts, especially when considering the coercive aspect of policing.[27] This is because practitioners often see the rights and liberties of citizens as being in opposition to policing.[28] But as policing is more than enforcing the law by curbing the rights of citizens who are crime suspects, democratic policing is, essentially, about balancing competing rights in an increasingly heterogeneous society. Therefore, transformational changes in the emerging democracies of

Eastern Europe might be developing a new contract of policing which puts human rights at the centre of police work.[29] Indeed, community policing can play an important role in bridging the gap between police and citizens by involving the public in decision-making processes on policing needs for their area.

Mike Brodgen and Preeti Nijhar trace this characteristic of community policing to the 1970s United States when it developed as a consequence of efforts to introduce the concept of policing as a public service rather than as law enforcement.[30] This new policing philosophy required community involvement, problem-solving policing, decentralisation and policing by consent. It was first envisaged as an alternative to the reactive professional policing model of the 1950s and 1960s, which focused heavily on law enforcement. Traditional policing had come to be seen as failed and police as too detached from the public.[31] This became particularly apparent during the riots of the 1960s and early 1970s when 'rising crime rates and widespread social disorder seemed beyond police control'.[32] Following a substantial self-assessment among both scholars and practitioners of policing many proponents of police reform argued for a more socially responsive policing.[33] Jim Waddington suggests that community policing offered an alternative model of policing which placed its emphasis on civil order, peace and security.[34] The aim of community policing is 'to enhance social cohesion and integration and thus prevent crime through positive influences'.[35] The introduction of such a policing model in the United States was intended to 'transform policing of the community into policing for the community'[36] and it required that 'police officers should see themselves as "peacekeepers" rather than law enforcers'.[37]

Similarly, in the United Kingdom, public disorder in the 1980s acted as the catalyst for the adoption of community policing initiatives by police with the expressed aim of shifting the 'ethos of policing away from law enforcement towards the service function of policing that was founded on the general duty to befriend the community'.[38] Several public inquiries in the 1980s into riots and disorders in London, Liverpool and Manchester criticised the police response to the disturbances and highlighted a gap in police–public relations. These reports underlined that whilst the causes of disorder lied in poverty, alienation and marginalisation of large groups of society, the police's heavy-handed responses to the disturbances often exacerbated the situation. Rioters perceived police to be the repressive arm of a government which, in their eyes, had become oblivious to social sores. Consequently, the British government's hope was that the introduction of community policing initiatives would help address its own legitimacy deficit in the eyes of the public.[39]

Most police forces in England and Wales in the 1980s began implementing elements of community policing including an increased commitment to foot patrols, the development of community liaison departments and an emphasis on various preventative methods of policing.[40]

Critique of community policing

Initially, whilst the rationale for community policing has been to improve police relations with the public, its core tenant was crime reduction. However, several studies in the United States and United Kingdom suggested that community policing delivers only modest success in fighting crime. Jim Waddington points out, however, that these studies concluded that community policing programmes were successful in 'reducing fear of the crime, even though crime levels had remained unaffected'.[41] Similar findings have also been reported in Canada where community policing programmes were successful in reducing fear of crime and strengthening already positive relations between the public and police.[42] Many police themselves seem highly sceptical of community policing initiatives which they see as being

very removed from real policing; consequently existing schemes often lead to 'atrophy without being written off'.[43] Jim Waddington claims that community policing may fail due to three main reasons: (a) its *ad hoc* programmes are often underfunded and under-resourced; (b) resistance by lower ranked police officers who see community policing initiatives as distractions from their daily work; (c) the conceptual confusion of the initiatives makes them difficult to define and implement.[44]

Furthermore, it has been argued that community policing undermines police accountability towards the community and raises questions about the kind of community it purports to serve. Members of the public involved in community policing programmes tend not to be representatives of the community at large. Studies in the United Kingdom suggest involved groups 'tend to be white, middle class, middle aged males and "harder to reach groups" who are more likely to come into conflict with the police are unlikely to attend such initiatives'.[45]

Nevertheless, despite such criticism, community policing still persists as a policing philosophy, not only in the United States and United Kingdom but also as exported to many other countries with very different social and cultural backgrounds. So what accounts for this concept's success? Some commentators attribute it to the vagueness in definition which, they argue, provides senior police officers with opportunities to claim their policies are rooted in community policing while justifying low detection and increased crime rates.[46] Community policing also appeals to governments as an antithesis to coercive authority. In such context it could be described as 'the velvet glove covering the iron hand' of social control. But above all, community policing is a vehicle to achieve police legitimacy from the public and from those in position of power, regardless of its lack of operational success.[47] To the police these two-fold legitimacy aspects are very important as they stem from the Weberian notion of policing as being the enforcers of the state monopoly over the use of violence. Jim Waddington puts it succinctly when he says:

> In a literal sense 'community policing' is an oxymoron, for if the police could serve the whole community, there would be little point in having the police at all … . Policing is the imposition of authority on someone, from this perspective 'community policing' is a strategy of identifying more selectively who that 'someone' is.[48]

In the United States and United Kingdom, police have not had to choose between community policing or coercive policing styles as they both coexist in a symbiotic relationship. Community policing here provides the legitimation for coercive policing while the latter yields the necessary results in fighting crime and maintaining social order.[49]

Exporting the ideology

Despite its limitations, community policing is being marketed as an important vehicle of reform in countries still experiencing the pains of post-communist democratisation. Mike Brogden and Peeti Nijhar argue that Western policy-makers perceived police reform as a priority to 'provide the stability until other elements of the state are able to establish legitimacy' in these transitional countries.[50] Community policing has thus been presented as the 'essential bedrock of social and economic progress',[51] underpinning the development of democratic systems and, like a magic wand, would solve human rights issues.

However, if community policing is more about securing police legitimacy rather than fighting crime, and more about social cohesion and human rights than social control, then its export to transitional countries is, arguably, more about exporting an ideology rather than, simply, a policing model. This raises the question whether community policing

can really be the 'miracle cure' in dealing with increasing crime rates and corrupt policing practices in a country such as Albania.

Policing transformations in Albania

Community policing is a relatively new concept within the process of Albania's police reform.[52] Similar to other post-communist countries, it appears to have been imported into the transformation programmes by experts from the EU and the United States in the late 1990s.[53] These reform drivers' contribution to the development of a new policing philosophy for the country is recognised in the police's strategic document *Strategy of the State Police 2007–2013* that provided the blueprint for Albania's police reform.[54]

The introduction of community policing in Albania constitutes a paradigm shift from policing as authoritarian law enforcement towards policing as order maintenance and peace keeping based on consent. Also here, as will become clear later, the implementation of such initiative seemed to be more focused on securing police legitimacy and observing human rights than on reducing crime rates. This shift in policing philosophy took place in the wake of the near breakdown of state institutions in 1997 following the social unrest that developed when the collapse of several pyramid schemes instigated a widespread rebellion that brought the country to its knees.[55]

With the possible exception of the last decade, Albania does not have a tradition of democratic policing. Following the country's independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1912, police was established under the supervision of two members of a Dutch commission, who assisted the new Albanian government in laying the foundations of the nascent state.[56] Major organisational restructuring took place during the rule of King Zog I (1924–1939) and, given the unstable political situation and the lack of a democratic culture at the time, police was reorganised according to the British colonial model. It changed its name to *gendarmerie* with the sole purpose of maintaining law and order, rather than providing a public service.[57] This force was armed; it performed administrative duties as well as order maintenance, and it was accountable to local authorities. After liberation from Nazi-German occupation in 1944 the Albanian Communist Party filled the political vacuum and set out to rebuild Albania pursuant to the Marxist–Leninist ideology. Consistent with other post-war East European developments, the Albanian police was established as a centralised armed force whose primary duty was to safeguard the new communist state from the enemies from within. Consequently, the police was part of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and established according to the Soviet model. This has been described as embodying a unique form of authoritarian social control whereby the police guaranteed and enforced the state ideology upon its citizens.[58]

In the early 1990s David Fogel observed that Albanian police resembled an early version of the Russian Militia.[59] It retained responsibilities for prisons and fire-fighting duties, services which have since been taken over by the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Local Government, respectively. When the Soviet Ministry of Interior was reorganised in the early 1960s following the de-Stalinisation policy of Khrushchev, Albania had already broken off with the Soviet Union and turned for help to China. However, it retained its Stalinist methods and the Chinese impact was only reflected in a change of uniforms and weaponry. At the start of post-communist transition in the early 1990s, Albanian police thus had no previous experience of any democratic policing culture. Instead it had developed a culture of secrecy, and its activities were conducted outside public scrutiny.

One of the objectives of the new democratic government, freely elected in March 1992, was to reform the police. The immediate priority was to separate police from the feared state

security forces known as *Sigurimi*, whose primary responsibility had been the suppression of dissent. Furthermore, in line with police transformations in other East European countries, the initial reform policies were also intended to create a new police image and to streamline its administration through a process of lustration.[60]

In 1991 new legislation on policing introduced provisions to safeguard the protection of human rights and freedoms.[61] Thus, Article 30 of the Act stipulates that the police are 'categorically prohibited from the use of torture, of physical or psychological pressure or any degrading and antihuman acts against the detainees'.[62] However, despite streamlining the administration, the Albanian police structurally remained still a highly centralised and militarised force. These features increased its potential susceptibility to influence from the government which was at the time pursuing an anti-Communist strategy.[63] Consequently, police reform included a considerable purge of police officers categorised as unsuitable due to their association with the communist era rather than testing them for their professional qualifications. Such procedure was also seen as a way of achieving a new legitimacy for police in post-communist society.

In the mid-1990s, police transformations were taking place in amidst increasingly confrontational politics between a government pursuing an ambitious lustration programme affecting all state institutions and the oppositional socialists.[64] Large numbers of state employees were laid off and replaced. However, with no clear guidelines in place to ensure a meritocratic selection process, this lead to accusations that the only criterion for selection of state employment, including the police, was party affiliation. Such practice, as indicated later, continues at the time of writing. Other observers of Albanian politics at the time attributed the persistence of political conflict in Albania to the fact that the reforms did not penetrate deeply enough.[65] Instead, they argue, reforms were diluted and piecemeal, giving the former communists the opportunity to dominate the new fledging market economy in the country and hamper institutional reforms. Other critical observers of the first post-communist government from 1992 to 1997 pointed to the West sending conflicting messages about the nature of reform at the time.[66] Following Albania's 40-years of self-isolation few international advisors fully understood its situation and this was compounded by a 'cultural misunderstanding' between foreign consultants and Albanian experts.[67] Such analysis was supported by several of our research respondents who intimated that the training courses offered by foreign experts often did not take into consideration the local situation or expertise, but instead focused on providing an outline of general concepts of police work and examples of how such ideas are implemented in others country.[68] Also, a number of police officers interviewed drew unexpected similarities between community policing initiatives being taught in the training sessions and the policing practices during communism at local level, when police officers were encouraged to foster good relations with the community and local authorities and 'keep a close eye' on potential troublemakers.[69] After years of conscientious efforts to break away from anything that reminded them of the communist past, some of the senior officers would ponder wistfully at the irony of the situation and seemed to be at a loss to distinguish between the conceptual frameworks of the new community policing initiatives and those practiced during communism.

For much of the 1990s, the Albanian political scene was characterised by a widening political polarisation, a lack of will for compromise and an underdeveloped democratic culture in general.[70] In this context, policing became increasingly politicised. The police's ability to fight crime or even extend its authorities throughout the country was severely compromised. When the collapse of several pyramid schemes in 1997 resulted in the disappearance of the life savings of numerous Albanians, the social and political

situation in the country resembled a tinderbox. With the government and its main socialist opposition trading blames for the desperate situation, it became clear that order mainten-ance and stability in Albania should have been a by-product of political compromise rather than merely a policing responsibility. The 1997 rebellion that followed represented a massive withdrawal of legitimacy for both the government and police. For the police, to a large extent, this was due to its perceived politicisation and its inefficiency to act as 'mediator of conflict'.[71] The protesters and the opposition parties in several southern towns of Albania perceived its heavy-handed tactics to disperse the mushrooming protests as a clear indication of the excessive use of force by a police state. However, the events of the early months of 1997 were a wake-up call not only for the Albanian polity but also their Western backers who intervened militarily to keep the country together. In the immediate aftermath of the upheaval, policing transformations were put on hold as the focus shifted towards stabilising state institutions at large. If anything, the controversial police response to the unrests had demonstrated that transformational efforts to turn it into a professional law enforcement agency had failed to produce the intended results. What was needed was a demilitarised police service which was politically independent and community-oriented.[72]

Implanting community policing

Demilitarisation, de-politicisation and community orientation appeared to determine the next phase of policing reform in Albania. In its very beginning, between 1997 and 2000, most of policing was still focused on re-establishing state control throughout the country. During this fragile period more than a hundred police officers were killed in clashes with armed gangs still roaming the country.[73] If the events of 1997 presented an existential threat to Albania, the Kosovo war of 1999 forced yet another untimely emergency. When hundreds of thousands of Kosovo Albanian refugees flooded the country fleeing Serb military repression, the capacity of the already weak state institutions, including the police, was stretched to breaking point. The emphasis was on institutional stability, yet it would appear that, upon the insistence of the EU and US policing experts then already in the country, the new socialist government introduced legislation in 1999 which initiated a demilitarisation of the police and pushed it towards the community-policing concept.[74]

In early 2000, the discourse on police reform among Albanian practitioners and inter-national policing experts finally shifted to notions of public accountability and better com-munity relations.[75] Two pilot projects were launched, one in the northern city of Shkodra and the other in the southern city of Berat, where consultation with working groups explored ways of cooperating with local communities.[76] The initial findings in Shkodra in 2003 suggested there was little communication or cooperation between the police and local authorities.[77] The public was mostly indifferent towards police efforts in fighting crime and in some areas there was outright hostility towards the police for its perceived heavy-handed methods.[78] In some cases the public saw the police as acting above the law and its efficiency and effectiveness in the eyes of the public was compromised by pol-itical interference and frequent personnel changes.[79] Other community consultations across the country came to similar conclusions, a fact which was not lost to the Director General of Police at the time. He told a conference of senior practitioners and policing experts in Tirana that 'crime prevention, as a social concept, is not simply a police responsibility'.[80] For the first time, police seemed to be acutely aware of the need to improve its public image, to inform the public, to reach out to local authorities and to establish partnerships with schools and civil society.

In 2006, research in several Albanian cities, conducted jointly by the Police Academy and the University of Tirana, provided some insights into public perceptions of the police. The findings suggest that only 10% of 900 respondents thought the police were doing a good job, 47% were 'somewhat pleased' and 30% were not pleased with the police performance.[81] Although the survey did not include any questions on police's adherence to human rights, when asked about what the police priorities should be, 45% of respondents said the police should focus on arresting criminals; 36% thought it should engage more with the public, and a third of the respondents said it should do more to fight corruption.[82] The research also found that police–public contacts were often on an *ad hoc* basis as no formal structures facilitated them. In some places, such as in the southern cities of Korca and Gjirokastra, the rate of police–public contacts had in fact decreased during 2006.[83] The study concluded that considerably more effort was needed to implement community policing and crime prevention initiatives.[84] It recommended closer cooperation with local authorities and non-governmental organisations involved in crime prevention activities and setting policing priorities at community level.

By 2007, work had begun for a more comprehensive transformational plan at the national level and a new Law on State Police (law no. 9749) was adopted to provide the legal framework. This law envisages the Albanian police as a public service, depoliticised and demilitarised. It stipulates that police is a separate entity within the Ministry of Interior, with its own budget and internal disciplinary procedure. It also establishes the legal conditions for a politically independent Director General of Police by setting out specific terms of tenure. However, Albania's experience from 2007 to the present suggest that full political independence of the police still remains more an aspiration than a reality.[85] Mid- and high-ranking positions still seem vulnerable to political changes.

Meanwhile, throughout the late 2000s, work continued for a detailed policy document that would outline a strategic vision. The *Strategy of State Police 2007–2013* became the blueprint for policing transformations to come. With EU and US experts providing the theoretical conceptualisation drawn from international models of community policing, the document situates community policing at the very heart of the policing model in Albania.[86] It states that community policing in Albania 'consists of the following elements: crime prevention; strategic planning; intelligence based policing; multi-agency partnerships and cost effectiveness'.[87] It also outlines the priorities of policing and the working plans to achieve them. Whilst undoubtedly representing an achievement, the document contains some contradictions. For instance, it states that the top priority of policing is fighting organised crime and terrorism but does not elaborate how this is to be achieved through the implementation of community policing. This raises the question whether such a priority reflects local policing needs or, rather, wider universal concerns such as those of the EU and US advisers who helped compile the strategic policing plan. Other priorities of the *Strategy of State Police 2007–2013*, which are consistent with a community policing model, include establishing multi-agency partnerships, improving the quality of service and public trust and implementing intelligence-led policing. However, the strategic plan does not contain any explicit provisions for the protection of human rights. Instead, these seem to be implied in the general emphasis on democratic policing.

Police shortcomings in safeguarding human rights have often been highlighted by Amnesty International's annual reports on Albania from 2007 to 2012. A recurring theme in these reports is the mistreatment of detainees in police custody. For instance, Amnesty's 2010 report quotes a study by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture that states 'ill-treatment by the police … often appears to be related to an overemphasis on confessions during criminal investigations'.[88] Amnesty adds that the Committee

had received allegations of serious ill-treatment in police stations in Korça, Pogradec and Elbasan, and at Korça remand centre.[89]

These findings were echoed in a report published by Albania's Ombudsman's Office in 2012 which criticises police for infringing the human rights of suspects in police custody.[90] The document states that, during 2011, the Ombudsman's Office received 119 complaints by citizens for alleged torture, mistreatment and illegal detention.[91] The report also provides a damning assessment of police detention spaces which it describes as filthy and in contradiction with the minimum requirements envisaged by law. It identifies several cases when police had failed to follow their own procedures for holding suspects in custody due to a lack of basic training. According to the report, as late as 2011, training programmes at the Police Training School included few provisions on human rights.[92] During visits to local police stations the Ombudsman found that, as a result, many low level police officers lacked basic knowledge of the 2007 Police Law. The provision of independent institutions overseeing human rights in the country, such as the Office of the Ombudsman, was new to them. They also had no knowledge of the important international documents on human rights and prevention of torture and mistreatment in custody.[93]

A more worrying assessment is the Ombudsman's assertion that the detention of crime suspects in police stations could be illegal altogether as it is not envisaged in the current legislation. Instead, this legal duty rests with the General Directorate of Prisons. This, the report concludes, may have been a legal oversight, and it recommended an urgent amendment of the 2007 Law on State Police.[94] The Ombudsman's findings were not challenged by police, except for the observation that much of the reason for the poor state of the detention facilities was due to underfunding. Funding issues might be relatively easy to fix. It seems that by far the greatest challenge for policing in Albania has remained the balancing of competing demands between politics and society.

Part of the reason for a persistent politicisation of the Albanian police has been attributed to neo-patrimonial practices, described in this context as a practice of appointing state officials on the basis of party or personal affiliation. As Stephan Hensell points out, 'the recruitment of the police was determined above all by the dynamics in the political field … [where] … the competition between the two largest parties, the Democratic Party of Albania (*Partia Demokratike e Shqiperise*) and the Socialist Party of Albania (*Partia Socialiste e Shqiperise*) which had alternatively formed the government since 1992, played a decisive role'.[95] A case in point here is that of a senior police officer in Tirana who, a few days after the announcement of the results of the 2013 general elections, won by the opposition Socialists, posted a comment in his personal social media account urging the supporters of the freshly defeated Democratic Party to overthrow the newly elected Socialists.[96] After a brief suspension, the officer was reinstated following a swift investigation that concluded that he was not the author of the offending message in his Facebook account. This did not stop the Socialists from claiming that far from being an isolated case, this case highlighted the need for change at the top echelons of the police.[97]

The two main parties continue to have conflicting, and sometimes unrealistic, views of the crime situation in the country or the efficiency of police work and its need for reform. In one of his speeches on the issue, delivered in late 2012 on the centenary of the founding of the Albanian police, the then-prime minister Sali Berisha (Democratic Party) praised the country's police for the 'extraordinary services' to the country, emphasising the people's 'admiration for the extraordinary high levels of crime detection and crime fighting capabilities which had discouraged … the spread of criminality in Albania'.[98] For the then-opposition Socialists, however, the crime situation in the country was perceived as alarming. Unveiling his anti-crime manifesto in early 2012, the Socialist leader, Edi Rama, said,

'crime is suffocating Albania with each passing day'.[99] Adding, 'you only need to turn on the television or read the daily papers to see that (the high level of) criminality in the country has become a social angst for Albania's citizens'.[100] And whilst the Prime Minister urged the police leadership to keep up the good work, the opposition leader promised a root and branch reform if they return to power in the elections of mid-2013. Similar calls in the past have resulted in a change of police leadership at the central and local level, often with no safeguards against political appointments or neo-patrimonial practices. Having won the 2013 elections, Edi Rama and his government put forward their vision of reforming the police. Whilst promising 'far-reaching reforms' and plans for a 'streamlined, centralized police force', the document simply reaffirms many of the crime-fighting and community-policing policies already in place.[101]

Community policing in practice

An important element of the 2006–2013 Police Strategy is its requirement for national and regional operational plans in order to implement community policing initiatives. They have been adopted by every county police department and include:

a) The permanent deployment of police patrols;
b) The deployment of beat patrols with the express aim of reassuring the public and gathering information on potential criminal activity;
c) Consulting the community on patrol standards and potential trouble spots;
d) Forging and maintaining partnerships with other agencies involved in community policing.[102]

These operational plans also envisage measures for media information campaigns to provide regular updates on police activities in fighting crime. They also include guidelines for programmes, such as 'the open doors week', during which the public, especially schools, are encouraged to carry out annual visits to police stations where they are informed on what police is doing to fight crime and maintain order. Although such measures constitute a positive step, they appear to be largely a public relations exercise aimed at improving public perceptions of the police. As a senior police officer intimated during our research, 'community policing so far has been seen as an attempt to open the police up to the public, but not much is being done to establish concrete links to see what the public wants from the police'.[103]

Despite the wide breadth of community policing programmes, an examination of the estimated financial costs for the implementation of the seven-year police strategy suggests that only 0.3% of the funds have been earmarked for them. The bulk of the estimated €100 million budget envisaged for the implementation of the new strategic plan has been allocated to 'harder' areas of policing duties, such as crime investigation and border control.[104] Furthermore, the regional action plans contain no financial breakdown of policing costs or provisions to evaluate the effectiveness of community policing implementation. Senior police officials seemed aware of this, pointing out one reason for this oversight was that community policing had been embedded into the very fabric of order maintenance duties of the beat patrols and that officers were not required to produce separate evaluations.[105] Middle and lower ranking officers consulted as part of our research appeared often even more sceptical of such programmes, explaining that community policing constitutes one teaching module of 10 hours out of a total of over 700 hours of the 22 week-long basic police training course only. They also highlighted that there was no

evaluation or analysis of the effectiveness of such training. However, as one police trainer suggested, a lack of cooperation between the police and local authorities on community policing initiatives as experienced in practice often made police cadets very sceptical of the merits of such programmes.[106]

The contribution of EU and US experts in providing theoretical guidance and policy development has been invaluable but their work has also drawn criticism within the policing ranks. Several interviewees intimated that much of the training provided by the EU officers of the PAMECA (Police Assistance Mission of the European Community to Albania) missions was repetitive and overlapping and that there was little continuity between the different missions. The US officers of the ICITAP (International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Programme) mission faced particular criticism from former and current senior officers and trainers of the Police Training School who seemed to resent the scaling down of the Police Academy into a Basic Training School. One retired officer succinctly stated, 'the Academy used to run three-year long courses to prepare future leaders of police, now we turn out half-ready police officers on twenty-two week long courses'.[107]

Elsewhere, community policing success is assessed through their impact on crime rates. However, as we mentioned earlier, several studies in the United States and United Kingdom suggest community policing decreases fear of crime, leaving crime levels largely unaffected.[108] In the case of Albania, its police crime records are notoriously unreliable, a fact recognised by police practitioners and politicians alike.[109] For instance, figures from the General Prosecution Office show that in 2010 there were over 31,000 reported crimes, an increase of more than 40% compared to two years earlier.[110] Police annual reports present the increase in crime levels as evidence of successful detection rates.[111] Still, a European comparison suggests that Albania remains one of the countries with one of the lowest recorded crime rates in the region.[112] This paucity of reliable data raises serious questions about the police ability to measure the effectiveness of its work in general and the efficiency of community policing initiatives in particular.

Our interviewees from both the police and local authorities consistently suggested that their cooperation with each other often depended on the political will at the local level. When local authorities were of the same party as the central one, this seemed to boost their cooperation with the police. But, police–local authority relations would grind to a halt if the opposition won local elections.[113] This correlation is apparently due to the centralised nature of police. Although the law requires to inform and consult local authorities of crime trends and policing priorities, police actions are ultimately the responsibility of Tirana Police Headquarters. This situation makes the police vulnerable to political changes and influence, a point highlighted in the *Strategy of State Police 2007–2013*.[114]

The 2007–2012 reforms attempted to detach Albanian police from the constant political conflicts in the country. These tended to flare up during elections, as in the parliamentary polls of 2008 and the local elections of 2011, both won by the then governing Democratic Party. For over two years after the elections, the oppositional Socialist Party fiercely, yet without success, contested the results, boycotted parliament and engaged in a campaign of civil disobedience demanding a rerun. The explosive nature of the political conflict was brought into sharp focus by a riot on 21 January 2011 when opposition supporters tried to storm the Prime Minister's residence. In the ensuing violence, four protesters died from gunshots allegedly fired by several members of the Republican Guard. At the time of writing their trial still continues. This event was a reminder that, perhaps more than any other state institution, the Albanian police constantly has to navigate the dangerous waters of the country's politics.

Conclusion

In the past decade Albanian police has changed towards becoming a demilitarised public service with the primary objective of maintaining public security and guaranteeing human rights and freedoms. Recent transformational attempts have underlined the need for more crime prevention methods through the introduction of community policing programmes. Nevertheless, these efforts have been piecemeal and their success is still questionable. As argued here, the very concept of community policing is nebulous and unfocused. Its emphasis on community-driven policing is embedded in the experience of community-police relations in the United States and United Kingdom with very different social, political and cultural backgrounds than those of Albania. Furthermore, community policing initiatives had little effect in reducing crime levels. They do, however, have a tangible effect on the public legitimacy of police and on its adherence to human rights. It has been suggested that, for this reason, community policing initiatives now constitute one of the main export drives from the West towards countries in transition.[115] Several studies on the issue have underscored that community policing works best in decentralised police forces that are capable of setting up their own policing priorities in consultation with local communities. The research findings presented here concur with these studies and demonstrate that in the case of Albania with its centralised police force and a paucity of the necessary legal framework, police cooperation with the local authorities still appears as dependent on the political will at both the central and local levels. This situation has condemned many of the initiatives to atrophy and diminished any initially positive results. It would appear that in their present form, community policing initiatives are simply geared towards opening up the police towards the public, yet have not succeeded in a meaningful engagement with the community. The lack of resources and paucity of research data on the impact of community policing initiatives in Albania has further compounded the difficulties for a successful implementation of policing reforms. The experience of community policing elsewhere has shown that it cannot and should not take over all policing activities. Instead, it always coexists with the 'harder' side of policing. Similarly, community policing cannot be the sole vehicle of ensuring the protection of human rights by police because much of policing, its coercive part, is about enforcing the law and fighting crime where the challenges lie of guaranteeing human rights in policing.

Disclosure statement

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Notes

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113.   This issue was underlined during interviews conducted as part of our field research in Tirana and Shkodra in May 2012.

114.   Ministria e Brendshme [Ministry of Interior], *Strategjia e Policise se Shtetit 2007–2013* [*Strategy of State Police 2007–2013*], 9. The document points out that political interference is seen as a potential danger to the implementation of the community policing model in Albania. Other potential dangers it identifies include the frequent changes of personnel and resistance among police ranks to embrace this new policing philosophy.

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