

## CREATING THE IMAGE OF THE POLISH POLICE OVER THE LAST 20 YEARS

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The police, not only in Poland but all over the world, are an organization that is constantly being assessed by society. Every society wants to feel that their safety is ensured by professional, trained officers who act in the interest of the citizens. Society does not assess the police as an entire organization, but rather through the prism of individual police officers. People have contact with rank-and-file officers most often, for example, during a roadside check. In such situations, people remember this experience and how they were treated by police officers and whether the police officers treated them with respect [7, p. 137].

Representatives of the doctrine emphasize that the social image of the Polish police – understood as credibility in public opinion [5, p. 169] – is not positive. This hypothesis prompted the author of this paper to identify the reason for the negative reception of Polish police by the public. The author also presents examples and strategies for improving the image of the Polish police. Currently, the police are received in a completely different way than 30-40 years ago. The history of policing is difficult for Polish society. For a long time, many Poles perceived the police as a tool in the hands of the communist system. Of course, in many cases, this image did not have any rational basis [9, p. 8]. Despite this, it remained a problem for many years. Despite the passage of time, the image of the police in Poland is still not perfect [8, p. 92].

For about 20 years, the police have realized that part of society perceives them in a negative way. After 2000, the police began to realize the importance of the communication process. They realized that police officers needed to improve their image, so they hired communication experts. The police had not paid much attention to this aspect of policing before and they soon found that the media described the police as having a “besieged fortress syndrome” [4, p. 229]. When police officers began to be criticized for their statements in the media, they quickly realized how important communicating with the media was.

There have been several examples of warming the police image. One program is called “*community policing*”. The program aims to improve the sense of security of residents of local estates. The main task of the program is to implement the idea of close cooperation between a “neighborhood” policeman and members of the local community [2, p. 129].

In recent days there have been many examples of the “neighborhood” of the police in Poland. Every day, police officers visit residents in home quarantine caused by the coronavirus. Two young policemen from Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki visited one of the families every day. One day, the officers did an unexpected favor for the children of this family because these children could not leave the house for many days. Police officers presented a previously prepared dance choreography for a well-known song. The dance was recorded by passers-by. The Polish police made the recording available on the official Facebook profile. People posted positive comments and shared the recording more than 6,000 times.

Another example of warming the image of the police is publishing a humorous message on the Polish police fan page: *“Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused panic and imposed many new tasks on us and sometimes unpredictable behavior of many people expecting constant help from us and other services, please stop all criminal/shameful/vile activities until further notice. We will appreciate the expected cooperation related to refraining from committing crimes and offences and we thank you in advance for your cooperation and understanding. We will notify you in a separate message when you can return to daily criminal activities. Then we will be able to continue the old ‘policeman-thief’ game.*

Another very important aspect of improving the image of the Polish police is the improvement of officers' skills and qualifications. Much depends on the personal capabilities of individual policemen. In 2012, 93 training projects were carried out in the police force, in total 8,458 policemen participated, including 5,269 policemen in basic training, 277 in training for university graduates and 2,912 policemen in specialist courses [6, p. 69]. This was not much. In 2013, the number of training projects remained at a similar level. Fortunately, there have been more training projects in recent years. The police are constantly looking for solutions to prepare officers in the most effective way to perform their work. The police realize that the education and professional training of police officers has a huge impact on the quality and effectiveness of their work [1, p. 139]. Thanks to this, the police have become a learning organization at all levels, which gives good prospects [3, p. 200].

To sum up, I positively assess the actions taken by the Polish police to improve their image in the eyes of the society. The solutions are well chosen. Of course, there is no doubt that much time and successive actions are still needed for these measures to produce real results. Nevertheless, the Polish police are on the right path.

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