

# POLICE AND POLITICS

**Gojko Šetka, PhD<sup>1</sup>**

Faculty of Security Science, University of Banja Luka, Republic of Srpska

**Dragomir Jovičić, PhD<sup>2</sup>**

Faculty of Security Science, University of Banja Luka, Republic of Srpska

**Abstract:** Police are one of the most important state bodies and their importance is seen in the nature of jobs confided by state to the police as a specific expert body. Having in mind that the police secure citizens and their property, society as a whole, everyone is interested for security to be at the top level. Police are the body of executive government and the executive government depends mostly on police and police organization. Police organization direct executive government bodies to act, police included. Also, it is clear that professional and politically independent police can provide the needed security to citizens and the state.

**Keywords:** politics, police, security, professionalism, political organization, state.

## INTRODUCTION

Various state assignments are accomplished through state administration. In accordance with that, state administration has a wide variety of activities and their forms. One of the basic activities of bodies of state administration certainly is the implementation of laws and regulations and general acts of the National Assembly, Government and President of Republic. Therefore, older term “law execution” is now replaced by “law implementation”. Police are one of the state bodies that daily implement wide variety of regulations (law and bylaw) that often reach the sphere of human rights and liberties.

The state administration of the Republic of Srpska (further on, RS), as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina, still has not completed the transition process, meaning the administration bodies did not reach the goals expected in the developed democratic societies. Besides the lack of organizational nature, the issues of oversized political influence over the state administration work are still expressed. Such influence of politics on all spheres of administration is such that the most important thing is to achieve

---

<sup>1</sup> gojko.setka@fbn.unibl.org

<sup>2</sup> dragomir.jovicic@fbn.unibl.org



such influence without negative reflections on entire state activity. Having in mind the role and activity of police, which is in interest sphere of every citizen, we can deduce that police as a specialized state body, may be the focus of such influence.

## ON POLICE

The foundation of police is the product of the eternal aspiration of society in every form to achieve personal and collective order, peace and security. Police have been since its beginnings a very important instrument of society that prevents violation of relations established by norms of a community. In performing these activities, vital interest for each community is the police with significant authority to apply the means of force. The authorization to apply force says a lot about the significance of police, as police are the only body with such power, which may be specially given also to military or judicial police.(Jovicic, Setka, 2018:31) The police, along with the army, make the core of each state and holds monopoly of physical force. However, since the basic function of police is organizing and sustaining inner social order and peace, while army has functions of defending state in wartime, we can say police are closer to judiciary than military.( Pusic, 1973:173)

The term “police” derives from the ancient Greek city-state – polis, and it covers entire state activity within each polis, other than judiciary and military. Up until 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, police had different meaning, closer to the Greek word “polythea”. It was a very developed state administration with the role to take care of both state and population interest. The police activity was to provide security and well-being to population and only well modeled state was considered the one with such organized police. (Jovicic, 2021:15)

The foundation of police and the development of their basic functions has been the thing of historical development of human society, as we can see in historical facts. Police begin with the beginnings of state and represents the system of special bodies within administration and under administrators and their task is to maintain public order in the state. In performing everyday duties in the state, police act preventively and repressively. What citizens expect from police is prevention, which brings them to the first place in the system of the Ministry of Interior Affairs. The Ministry’s organization is subordinated to prevention of unlawful behavior and the increase of efficiency in clarification of performed unlawful acts in order to raise the level of general security in the state. (Tulezi, 2000:9-11)

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an interior differentiation of state administration appeared between functions of improving the development of society and its welfare and suppressing the dangers for the state and society from within. Ever since, the term “police” has not covered entire state administration but only its function of removing the interior dangers in the state. Thus began the process of fast differentiation of state administration that is not finished even today. The interior administration divided into multiple departments. Therefore, what once was the general interior administration now is narrowed down to interior affairs and only keeps memory of its previous width with such name. (Pusic, 1973:179)

Since different periods and different countries shaped state administration differently (and police as well), it is necessary to emphasize that the term “police” must be differentiated from the wider concept of maintaining public order and peace, although modern society regularly looks at those term as equal. The term “police” refers to a certain type of social institution while the maintenance of public order and peace represents a process of social functions. Police organizations and personnel may have various forms but a kind of keeping public safety and order is proven to be the universal need of each social system. (Cooper, 2009:992)





So, by the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the interior administration divided into multiple departments with police separating its functions. The functions of police are maintenance of public order and peace and suppressing crime. Today the term “police” has various meanings in our country and around the world. Definitions mostly put police organization and its functions on the first place. So, organization wise, police represent state body with its organizational elements. Police are one of the most important state bodies and their importance is seen in the nature of jobs confided by state to the police as a specific expert body. Our law system defines police as the body of state administration that provide the needed security to citizens and the state. They keep public safety by prevention and repression of crime as well as other activities under their jurisdiction. (Talijan, Arandelović, Velimirović, 2001:26)

It can be said that the basic function of police as state body is tied to the term of public order. Maintenance of public order covers: 1) prevention of violation; 2) repression against the violators; 3) creation and sustainability of stabilization of public order. Public order covers the system (political institutions, human and civil liberties, functionality and realization, mutual relations) founded by the constitution and legal regulations of one state. Public order is therefore equalized with constitutional order, i.e. system of public institutions, relations and rights of constituents and those protected by law. Every unlawful activity against this constitutional order represents a threat to public order. The majority of such unlawful activities are criminal acts that are followed by administrative penalties and measures of protection. Under protection of public order, we can enlist any removal of any threat to normal functionality of the constitutional order (enabled through judiciary). Therefore, police act through “management of maintenance of public order”. The protection of public order encapsulates forceful law execution, support for constitutional order, protection of human lives and property from both delinquents within population and natural disasters, such as fire or flood. (Jovicic, 2021:17)

Depending on whether police are observed historically or in modern context, the very term of police can be determined historically and in modern context. The content of that term changed throughout history and it used to mean something entirely different than it does today. Actually, what also changed was the role and the organization of police. The modern meaning of term “police” is defined in various ways. There are significant difficulties, because of different organizational models, but also because of different assignments for police in some countries. Having all of that in mind, we can define police as a specially organized service (or multiple services and their personnel) for maintenance of public order, prevention and repression of crime and execution of law. (Milosavljevic, 1997:7)

Police as a part of the Ministry of the Interior are tied to public order, i.e. human and civil liberties, political institutions and their functionality. The scope and volume of police actions depends mostly on political relations in our society, but also on the level of negative phenomena and security issues and dangers. The scope and increase of police actions are determined by the increase of state apparatus on one side and the demands for democratization and humanization of state authorities in general, on the other side. Regarding the police organization, there are multiple topics open in order to improve its efficiency: should police be singled out as special unit or merge it with the rest of state organization; should police organization be centralized (as a unified body) or decentralized (formation of local police units besides the state police); should police be given the power to apply some forms of discretionary authority or subordinate it to constant strict control; whether decentralization of police should lead to formation of auxiliary forces, i.e. communal, field, river, railroad, judicial, etc. (Jovicic, Setka, 2020:280-281)



## ON POLITICS

Democracy is present in state development for over two millennia, both as a term and a form of political system. It became a part of political life and life in general, and to achieve democracy it is necessary to fulfill certain conditions or elements. The basic element necessary for the realization of democracy and political culture is the developed political conscience of citizens. For citizens to participate in political life of some community or state and influence the authorities as a true political factor instead of being just an object, they have to have enough knowledge and information on political scene. They should have the knowledge of their own interests and the interests of their social group and, of course, other social groups. Therefore, individual must have conscience on what is good for them and their community as well as other communities and groups. Without information on important processes influencing their everyday lives, citizens are unable to develop their will or correctly express their political interests. (Jovičić, 2018:83)

The term *politics* has its roots in the Greek term *politiká* (Πολιτικά, 'affairs of the cities'). We can today build on that meaning defining it as the set of activities that are associated with decision making and forms of power relations in groups and between individuals. Such tendencies may be local or world level and politics can be seen in different ways:

- Rational activity in modeling community or the elements of community
- Power relations and possibility to impose the will of political factors despite the resistance of other factors
- Institutions and establishments of political activity
- State as a fundamental institution of modern political era that translates social tendencies into law and power into government
- Articulation and representation of different or even conflicted interests in a community and influence on various types of behavior and choices within that community
- Consent creation and change of historical circumstances and modeling relations among people within community and between people and natural environment. (Radosavljevic, 2011:9)

Motives of participants in politics are recognized through the ideals their groups support as well as the methods they use for the achievement of their goals. That is why the analysis of ideals of participants in political life is the beginning of any political analysis. Not all political ideals are equally acceptable and therefore we have differences between the ideologists and those who accept or deny such ideals. That often depends on the circumstances in certain political communities. Ideals are often conflicted which provides wide options to choose from and from that stem different political activities. (Radosavljevic, 2011:9)

Every individual had a certain group of beliefs, opinions, values and interests in relation to political process. Political preferences come from deep rooted historical or cultural identities like ethnicity, religion or language. Different individuals and groups have different preferences which may lead to conflicts in political process. (Hix, 2007:149)

A variety of methods are deployed in politics, which include promoting one's own political views among people, negotiation with other political subjects, making laws, and exercising force, including warfare against adversaries. Politics is exercised on a wide range of social levels, from clans and tribes of traditional societies, through modern local governments and institutions up to sovereign states, to





the international level. In modern nation states, people often form political parties to represent their ideas. Members of a party often agree to take the same position on many issues and agree to support the same changes to law and the same leaders.

A new conception of political subjecthood emerged through the increased use of “subjects of the realm,” achieved by joining “subject” and “realm” directly in the discourse. Through this new articulation, a person became a political subject by virtue of being tied to the state rather than through giving personal allegiance to the ruler. These discursive articulations, however, could not break completely with former conceptions, as they had to nest on these in order to be legible. The fact that these discursive articulations were nested on pre-existing discourses is also what legitimated them. As such, the state’s discourse bears witness to the discursive innovation within the existing discourse. From owing allegiance to the ruler, political subjects were now tied directly to the state. This, in turn, had effects on the conception of the state. With its subjects tied directly to an abstract notion of the state, the state emerged as the site of a new type of power from which new modes of governance could be deployed to establish, define, and maintain, a political community, beyond securing the obedience and allegiance of the political subject. (Radosavljevic, 2011:11-12)

From the aspect of ordinary citizen, the most acceptable determination of politics is the skill of state management. That makes all activities of state administration a way to enable citizens to satisfy their needs. State-building is the process through which states enhance their ability to function. The structures of the state are determined by an underlying political settlement; the forging of a common understanding, usually among elites, that their interests or beliefs are served by a particular way of organizing political power. The quality of life influences the quality of state bodies and our citizens are then satisfied with realizing their basic human right and liberties. (Jovicic, 2007:7) International architecture for economic, political and development cooperation is based on assumptions about state capability and structure that do not take account of complex realities. The task of police as one of the most important bodies of state administration is to enable political will of the ruling political elite but only when it is in general interest.

## THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICS ON POLICE IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

As we are aware, political parties are formed with the aim to gain power and keep it for as long as possible. It is clear that it is impossible if political elites in power have no influence over executive state apparatus. Police, being one of the key components of behavioral influence in the society, through performing their activities also enable the government continuation. In every country political structure will eventually influence the work of police. In modern circumstances it is necessary to make such influence without disturbing professionalism of police in performing their activities and in order to fulfil police role prescribed by law.

However, cases where political organizations give police tasks that are not in accordance with professional standards are not rare. It is found in developed countries and especially expressed in countries where the role of police as the protector of every citizen on equal principles is not yet understood properly. Bosnia and Herzegovina (further on, BiH) with its general situation and political differences that burden the country for more than three decades is also one of the states where the political influence on operative work of police is expressed. Political elites are persistent in creating a different image.





An example of this is the article published in the *Assessment of police integrity in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (2015). Based on the interviews with police managers, a big issue is that the work of the police agencies is sometimes made too transparent and media presence is not often welcome in some sensitive cases. This occurs when it comes to arrests of high-ranking officials, politicians, etc., that are often done in the presence of the media, especially TV crews and afterwards broadcast to the public. This creates the situation that, in the eyes of the public, the arrested people are declared guilty in advance, i.e. before any trial and legal verdict. Later, if they are set free or acquitted of charges, the citizens have less confidence in police fighting corruption. However, we come to an important issue here: "How is it possible that media representatives are aware of the arrests if it is a confidential police action?" The problem of recording such actions is caused by the police, not the media. Therefore, we can claim that, to some extent, police contribute to declaring some individuals guilty in the eyes of the public.

Further on in this assessment it is said that, although both police and judicial institutions claim that they are independent and impartial, the influence of politics and the ruling structures is evident. It often happens that massive police operations and spectacular arrests of political leaders are conducted during election campaigns, while shortly after an election and formation of a new government, as a rule, either no investigation is conducted or cases are dismissed over a lack of evidence against the suspects. (Hadzovic, Djordjevic, 2015:6-7)

There have been some attempts of local governments aimed at depoliticization of police work, however, the influence of politics on police work still remains very strong, especially when it comes to identification and investigation of corruption and related cases. Over 80% of citizens of BiH consider that there is a pretty high influence of politics in police operational work. Activities aimed towards depoliticization and the improvement of professionalism of police organizations in BiH started in 2002. The institutions of police directors were established in BiH entities, while in the cantons the institutions of police commissioners were established. The duty of the police directors/commissioners was to organize police work in professional terms, unlike the ministers of the police, whose roles were primarily political. However, the members of the committee have the discretionary right of selecting candidates who meet the criteria. This is a moment where corruption can occur, i.e. the selection on the basis of suitability or other unprofessional criteria. Cases of political interference in these appointments can happen as the members of the committee might be influenced by a particular political party to select a preferred candidate. Although the independence of managers of police agencies from the executive branch or from political interference in the appointment and dismissal of key people in the police is theoretically ensured, the practice has recorded cases which were subject to arrangements of political elites as well as peer influences due to certain roles of professional members from the same institution in the selection process. (Hadzovic, Djordjevic, 2015:9-10)

Especially interesting is another data from the *Assessment*. The public opinion survey conducted by IPSOS showed that over 80% of BH citizens believe that politicians have complete or high influence on operating work of police while only 3% of them think there is no influence at all. The political influence on the functionality of police agencies (operative police work) is seen in directing specific police activities (action, investigation) in a way that individuals from political elites initialize them, direct them and/or influence their outcome. That is the hardest form of political influence on police and it is two-way: it directs police actions towards political opponents and it limits police actions towards individuals that are suitable or close to political elites. In practice situations occur that conflict the initialization of police actions, i.e. obstruction of initiative to start police activities in certain spheres and towards certain individuals. (Setka, 2017:506)



The influence on personnel policy in police agencies is what politicians use to enable their influence on the operative police work. Political parties make their first actions when coming to power to put politically suitable personnel in high positions within police agencies. When that is done, politics has a strong influence over operative police work through those personnel. So, in order to achieve influence over operative police work, they first must influence personnel policy. (Setka, 2017:508)

## CONCLUSION

Police are one of the most important state bodies and their importance is seen in the nature of jobs confided by state to the police as a specific expert body. In performing these activities, vital interest for each community are the police with significant authority to apply the means of force. The profession of police officer includes allegiance to complex state system with clear rules, law and bylaw regulations and expressed marks of hierarchy. Members of police forces perform jobs of vital significance for each citizen and individual and that often puts them at risk of resistance, violence and other negativities within society.

By doing their job, police officers are obligated to adhere to law and regulations, including those that their duty is to disregard personal opinions, values and emotions in any specific situation. They are certainly in everyday risk of being physically or psychologically endangered but their obligation is to do their job by not damaging citizens, their property or personal security, no matter the different risks they can face in performing their everyday activities.

Since police job is a profession, and state performs these activities through their specialized body, it is necessary to protect citizens and state on an expected level and highest professional criteria. It also demands the influence of political elites to be taken down to the smallest margin. The higher level of professionalism is in any state work, police especially, the level of security and protection of citizens is higher as well.

As we said above, it is impossible to remove political influence in police work, but it is something that needs to be strived to. It requires hard work and building mechanisms that will minimize that influence for real, and not just declaratively as the case is with Bosnia and Herzegovina. Why is it impossible to exclude the political influence in police work? There are certainly many reasons, but we believe the most visible and important is that the topic of police is not only the topic of police activity or organization but also a very important political topic.

## REFERENCES

1. Jovicic, D., (2007). The impact of transition on the work of state administration of the Republic of Srpska, with special reference to the police. Banja Luka.
2. Jovicic, D., (2018). Introduction to Law. Novi Sad.
3. Jovicic, D., Setka G., (2018). Organization and competence of the police. Banja Luka.
4. Jovicic, D., Setka G., (2020). Public Security. Banja Luka.
5. Jovicic, D., (2021). Control over the work of the police. Banja Luka.
6. Cooper, A., Cooper, J., (2009)., Encyclopedia of Social Sciences. Belgrade.





7. Milosavljevic, B., (1997). Science of Police. Belgrade.
8. Pusic, E., (1973). Science of Administration. Zagreb.
9. Radosavljevic, D., (2011). Contemporary political and legal systems. Novi Sad.
10. Talijan, M., Arandjelovic, D., Velimirovic, D., (2001). Organization and jobs of uniformed police officers. Belgrade.
11. Tulezi, J., (2000). Police and the Public. Zagreb.
12. Hadzovic, D., (2015). Djordjevic, S., Police Integrity Assessment in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Belgrade, Sarajevo.
13. Hicks, S., (2007). Political System of the European Union. Belgrade.
14. Setka, G., (2017). Influence of policy on the functionality of police agencies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Belgrade.

