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Determinants of the Credibility of the Police Force from the Perspective of Citizens' Complaints about the Police Service

Abstract

The study deals with research on the credibility of the Police Force based on content analysis of complaints from citizens of the Slovak Republic. It aims to define, on the basis of this analysis, the areas that citizens perceive as sensitive in the work of the police in relation to their trust in the police organisation. The analysis is based on the data contained in the Report on the handling of complaints and petitions within the competence of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic for the year 2021 and on our research of complaints registered in the first half of 2021 at the Presidium of the Police Force in Bratislava. On the basis of the study of complaint files at the Complaints Department of the Control Division of the Presidium of the Police Force as a representative research sample, it is possible to identify the friction areas of police work and its perception by the public in both qualitative and quantitative terms. At the same time, the above-mentioned period allows for an assessment of the extent of the influence of a particular security situation (the COVID-19 pandemic) on the relationship between the public and the police. The potential for strengthening the credibility of the Police Force is outlined, particularly in the area of police ethics.

Keywords: *Police Force, credibility, complaints, police ethics, public opinion.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Trust is a prerequisite for the successful implementation of social goals and contributes to building a creative social atmosphere. This social aspect is constituted in concrete personal, social and historical relationships.¹ It reflects the dynamics of life, the process of building, creating, sustaining and perhaps very simply losing. The impermanence of this attribute was already captured by Aristotle, who, in his short note on trust, characterises it as an important habit of common life and perfect friendship, which, however, requires time (Aristotle, 1979). In doing so, the need for trust does not only arise at the individual level of personal relationships; it also carries over into the functioning of civil society and is a prerequisite for the effective functioning of social institutions. It is no different in the case of the Police Force. “Without the trust of citizens, the police cannot fulfil their social functions, as they would lack the necessary source of information and the necessary social acceptance and support” (Bilský, Pajpachová, 2002: 9).

The long-standing low credibility of the Police Force in the Slovak Republic has led to a number of research studies that have focused not only on the state of public opinion about the police organisation but also on the factors that influence the credibility of the Police Force.² The aim of the present study is, based on the analysis of complaints of natural and legal persons of the Slovak Republic registered at the Complaints Department of the Control Division of the Presidium of the Police Force in Bratislava, to define the areas which citizens perceive as sensitive in the work of the police in relation to trust in the police organisation. The given analysis is based on the data contained in (1.) the Report on the handling of complaints and petitions within the competence of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic for the year 2021; (2.) the own research of complaints registered in the first half of 2021 at the Complaints Department of the Control Division of the Presidium of the Police Force in Bratislava.

The object of the conducted research was the credibility of the Police Force. The subject of the research were selected determinants of it captured in the complaints of citizens of the Slovak Republic. The qualitative research consisted of a content analysis of citizens' complaints and the subjectively accentuated misconduct of police officers in the performance of their duties. The available files containing the complaints in question were divided and examined in terms of i) misconduct of an administrative nature, ii) the ethicality of the police officer's actions, and iii) dissatisfaction with the services of the police force conditioned by technical possibilities. The inductive approach made it possible to identify problem areas of action that need to be addressed in order to enhance credibility and strengthen integrity in the Police Force.

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² Among several researches we can mention the implementation of scientific research tasks at the Academy of Police Force in Bratislava: *Analýza faktorov ovplyvňujúcich dôveryhodnosť Policajného zboru* (Erneker., Bilský, Čuřík, 2000), *Spoločenské postavenia a úloha polície v názoroch občanov Slovenskej republiky* (Erneker, Bilský, Čuřík, 2000), *Vývoj dôveryhodnosti Policajného zboru u občanov Slovenskej republiky a analýza faktorov, ktoré ju ovplyvňujú* (Bilský, Pajpachová, 2006), and *Teoretické východiská skúmania dôveryhodnosti Policajného zboru* (Dinušová, 2022).

Based on the study of the complaint files of the Complaints Department of the Control Division as a representative research sample, it is possible to identify the frictional areas of police work and its perception by the public in both qualitative and quantitative terms. In pursuit of the above objectives, the underlying assumption is that the research in question does not take into account the validity of complaints. From the point of view of the phenomenon under study, it is not relevant (or even possible) to prove/refute the citizen's objections but to focus on the areas that the citizen perceives as problematic, regardless of their validity. While the Report on the handling of complaints and petitions of the Ministry of the Interior for 2021 provides a basic orientation on the issue and frames the level and categories of citizen complaints, our research on the files of the Complaints Department of the Control Division allows us to capture qualitative differences in a smaller sample and provides a probe into the citizen's perception of the police and its work. The qualitative research of the files was carried out by analysing the files registered at the Complaints Department of the Control Division of the Presidium of the Police Force in the first half of 2021. The period under study is not chosen at random but was deliberately defined to also highlight the particular circumstances in citizens' perception of policing, as represented by the situation surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. In several studies, the factor of the security situation of citizens is mentioned as relevant to the indicators of the credibility of the Police Force. (Erneker, Bilksý, Čuřík, 2000) The pandemic presented a unique security situation - the specifics of the regulations, their enforcement, the performance of the police officers, the legitimacy of their position, and the ethical assumptions of their actions that may have been reflected in the trust of citizens in the police. In the same way, this situation makes it possible to identify, according to the content of the complaints examined, the degree of influence of a given particular situation on aspects of the credibility of the Police Force.

Acknowledgments for the opportunity and access to the research material and professional consultations are extended in particular to the Director of the Control Division of the Presidium of the Police Force, Col. JUDr. Magda Ružbacká and the staff of the Department. The results presented in the present study are obviously the result of the fruitful interaction of security theory and practice.

2. THEORETICAL PREREQUISITES FOR THE STUDY OF CITIZENS' TRUST IN THE POLICE FORCE IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Civil society requires personal engagement and social interaction. This is not possible without people seeing each other as trustworthy, having enough responsibility to participate in social life and trust in the political system. (Jarmara, 2023: 18). As Putnam points out, there must first be a community with the presence of solidarity, cooperation and trust, which then transfers these attributes to institutions (Putnam, 1993). These assumptions can also be transferred to an understanding of the trustworthiness of a particular social institution - the Police Force.

The credibility of the Police Force is realised in the field of police-public relations. This relationship is complicated by the complexity of current social relations but also by the nature of police work and the internally differentiated activities of the Police Force (Cipro, 2023). Like any other relationship, the relationship between the police and the public is not unilateral, and therefore, when examining it, it is not possible to take into account only the

unilateral factors that shape it, but it is bilateral and is thus shaped under the influence of factors resulting, on the one hand, from the activities of the police, the quality of its work and its ability to fulfil the established social functions, on the other hand, the credibility of the Police Force is underwritten by the general social mood, the security and economic situation, and the general situation of the citizen and the public (Dinušová, 2020). “The trust relations of citizens towards the police are those relations in which the dominant attitude, the inclination to believe that the Police Force reliably performs the tasks based on the position it occupies in society. On the other hand, relations of distrust of citizens towards the police are those relations in which citizens are dominated by an attitude or tendency to believe that the Police Force performs its tasks unreliably.” (Bilský, Čučík, Erneker, 2000: 24)

The need to examine practical efforts to increase public trust in the police stems from the derivation of policing from public consent. This view is particularly present in the countries of the European Union (including the Slovak Republic), while the derivation of the legitimacy of the police to perform their functions on the basis of social consensus is explicitly expressed in a range of legislative and ethical documents regulating the status and functioning of the police in European societies (Council of Europe, 2002). Public trust in the police organisation is closely linked to the legitimacy of the police organisation in society, which has practical implications for its own activities. Trust in the police leads to voluntary cooperation between citizens and law enforcement authorities, as well as voluntary compliance with the law. Citizens who trust the police willingly cooperate with the police by either reporting crimes, providing important information leading to arrests or directly reporting persons who have committed crimes (Flexon, Lurigio, & Greenleaf, 2009). Thus, in some theoretical treatments, public trust in the police (1) influences police effectiveness and legitimacy (Goldsmith, 2005); (2) legitimizes police action (Hough, Jackson, Bradford, & Myhill, 2010).

Mutual trust is important both in relation to the functioning of a democratic society and in relation to the fulfilment of the social functions of the police in the state. According to the Eurobarometer surveys the credibility of the police in the Slovak Republic has been below 50% for a long time (Figure 1).



Figure 1 Development of police credibility in Slovakia over the past seventeen years (2004 - 2021).
Based on Eurobarometer surveys 2014-2021.

The degree of trust in other social institutions in the Slovak Republic is also very telling for the study of the above social phenomenon. As K. Murdza said, “Similarly, it is impossible to separate the frustration of Slovak citizens with the failure of state institutions from the negative consequences that cause a decline in trust in these institutions. It is logical that citizens transfer their criticism and general dissatisfaction with the state of functioning of society, its chaotic economic and social management, or the enforcement of the law, to those whom they label as guilty and incompetent to establish order and justice. The symbol of the failure of the entire justice system ultimately becomes its most visible instrument - the police.” (Murdza, 2021: 88) Trust in the police organization does not take place in a social vacuum but can be assumed to be related to trust in other state institutions. In the period under review, the courts, the parliament and the government recorded lower trust among citizens.

CREDIBILITY OF SELECTED INSTITUTIONS IN SLOVAKIA IN 2021

(SPECIFIED IN %)

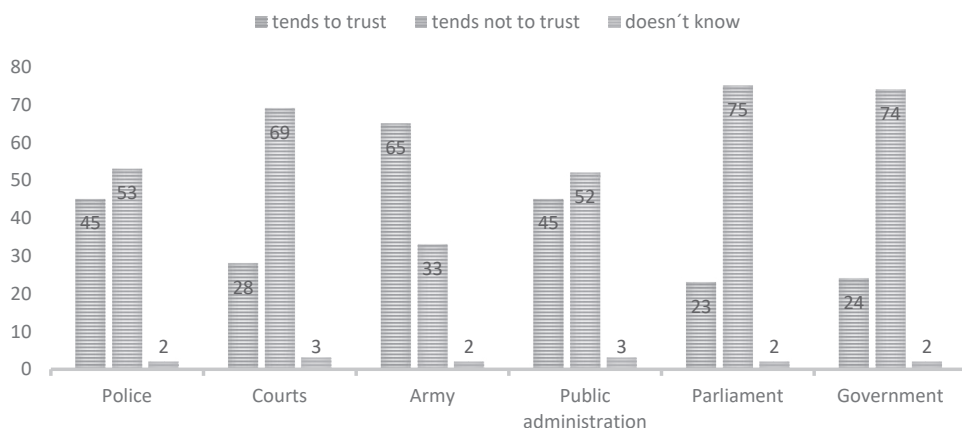


Figure 2 Credibility of Selected Institutions in Slovakia in 2021. (Based on Standard Eurobarometer 92 (winter 2020/2021). Public opinion in the European Union. Wave EB92.3 Available online: [eb_94_data_annexe_en.pdf](#))

Gaining trust is a long and complicated process, which is not only related to the fact that the police can have crime under control, resp. and is effective in detecting and clarifying, but is related to overall social conditions, changing norms and economic changes (macro level), as well as to the professionalism of police officers, their communication skills, etc. (micro level). (Sabayová, Junková, 2022:155). The perception of the police stems both from individual experience with a police officer, with police work, with a police department, and from social predispositions - the general social atmosphere, the security situation of citizens, the state of the judiciary, etc.

3. IDENTIFICATION OF SELECTED FACTORS CORRELATING WITH THE CREDIBILITY OF THE POLICE FORCE THROUGH THE PRISM OF THE ANALYSIS OF COMPLAINTS OF NATURAL AND LEGAL PERSONS

The subjective right to judicial and other legal protection arises directly from the Constitution of the Slovak Republic - Article 46 (1), which states that “Anyone may claim his or her right in accordance with the procedure established by law before an independent and impartial court and, in the cases provided for by law, before another body of the Slovak Republic” (Constitution of the Slovak Republic, Act No 460/1992 Coll.) and is subsequently regulated in a number of special legal regulations. One of them is the Act on Complaints, which regulates the procedural aspect of ‘the submission of complaints, their handling and control of the handling of complaints by natural persons and legal persons’ (Act No 9/2010 Coll. on complaints). Its current legal regulation empowers the handling of complaints by state and local government bodies and organisations established by them, persons entrusted by law with the decision-making on the rights, legally protected interests or obligations of other persons, and possibly other bodies of the Slovak Republic, within the meaning of special regulations, if their elimination is within the competence of one of the public administration bodies (Section 1(1) of Act No 9/2010 Coll. on complaints).

A complaint under the Act in question is a submission by a natural person or a legal person by which these persons seek protection of their rights or legally protected interests, which they believe have been violated by the action or inaction of a public administration body, and at the same time point to specific deficiencies in their activities, in particular to violations of legal regulations, the elimination of which is within the competence of the public administration body. The handling of complaints involves a range of activities, from receiving and registering complaints, analysing their content, investigating them, and deciding how they should be handled or how they should proceed. This is followed by the processing of a notification of the outcome of the investigation or of a different way of dealing with it or a review of the correctness of the handling of a previous complaint.

In general, the number of complaints lodged and investigated has been on a long-term downward trend. In 2021, a total of 2,084 complaints were handled, with more than 60% of complaints against the Police Force. These were mainly complaints from citizens (natural persons). The second-highest share was accounted for by anonymous complaints. The overall structure of complainants consisted of citizens (natural persons), organisations (legal persons), foreigners, anonymous submissions and others. (Figure 3)

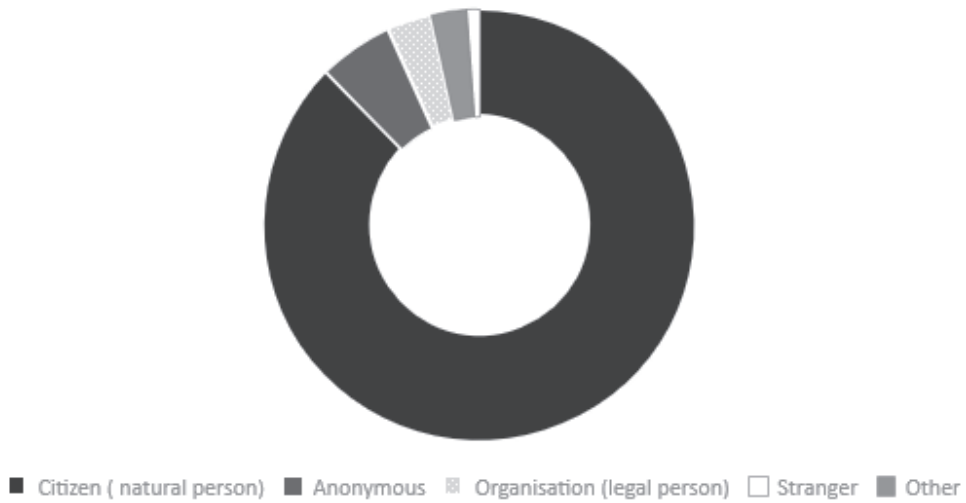


Figure 3 Structure of complainants.

The complaints registered concerned various aspects of the performance of police activities. In terms of the subject matter of the complaint, the following categories were registered:

- The procedure in the misdemeanour proceedings,
- receipt, screening, documentation of reports,
- criminal procedure,
- inhuman (harsh, degrading) treatment,
- maladministration,
- handling of previous complaints,
- delays or inaction,
- use of coercive measures,
- procedure in administrative proceedings,
- receipt of requests (for residence, access to the file, etc.),
- use of physical violence,
- searching for persons and things,
- restriction of personal liberty,
- abuse of powers,
- causing damage,
- procedure of a police authority,
- improper conduct and behaviour,
- inhuman treatment - special motive,
- abuse of official position, arbitrariness,

- protection of personal data,
- procedure of the investigating officer,
- seizure of a matter,
- performance of tasks arising from special regulations,
- interference in civil matters,
- placement in a police security cell or other locked premises,
- the conclusions of the complaint investigated,
- official interventions against persons under 18 years of age,
- intolerance - discrimination, xenophobia, racism,
- not being allowed to enter the territory of the Slovak Republic,
- the procedure of the State Archives,
- internal affairs issues,
- other / not specified (Report on the handling of complaints and petitions within the competence of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic for the year 2021).

Out of 1,369 complaints handled within the competence of the Ministry of the Interior of the SR, a total of 1,228 complaints had been handled by the end of 2021, of which 1,182 were directed to the Police Force.

Eight per cent of the complaints against the police officer were referred outside the competence of the control units of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic, 44% of the complaints were postponed, and 48% were investigated. Of the investigated complaints, only 16% were substantiated; on the contrary, 62% were found to be unfounded, and 22% could not be investigated. For the substantiated complaints, the bodies responsible for the misconduct were mainly reprimanded 69.72% and reprimanded in writing 6.34% or in some other unspecified way. Two per cent were repeated complaints by the same complainant on the same matter without any new facts being brought to light. The investigation of the repeated complaints did not establish merit in any case. A large number of complaints are directed at the way in which a previous complaint was handled when the complainant was not satisfied with the outcome of the handling of the complaint - a 'complaint against the handling of the complaint'.

As stated in the report, "The diversity of the nature of the submissions, as well as of the issues that are the subject of the submissions, requires a demanding legal analysis and the application of various forms and methods to establish the true state of the case, which places high demands on the expertise of the staff handling and investigating the complaints." In the spirit of the principle of substantive truth, evidence of all the relevant facts relating to the complaint, irrespective of the complainant's assertion, and the related documentation (minutes, written notifications of the outcome of the investigation of complaints, etc.) concerning the investigation or the manner in which the complaint was dealt with, must be lawful and not open to argument or professional challenge.

In terms of the assessed causes that led to the filing of justified complaints in 2021, the main causes were ignorance and misinterpretation of legal provisions (45%), negligence and indiscipline (39%), deliberate violation of internal rules (4%), and other (12%).

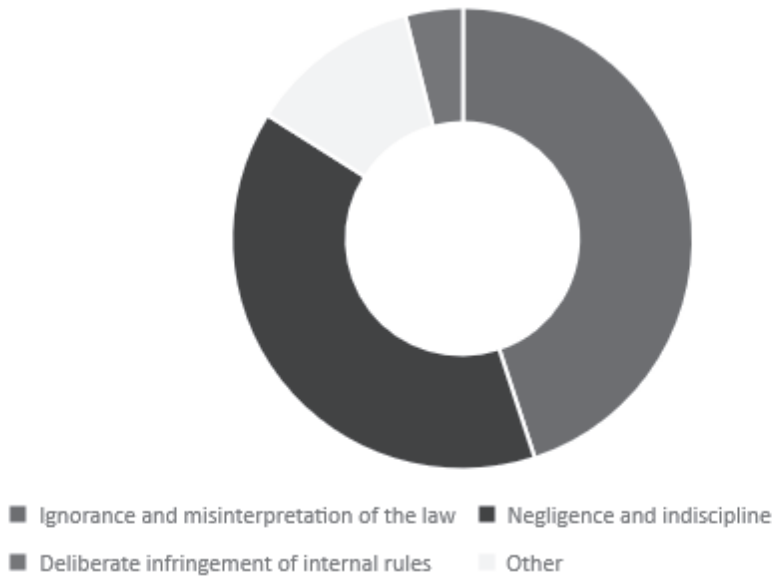


Figure 4 Evaluated causes of substantiated complaints for 2021.

The above information provides a basic framework for examining the content of individual complaints and subsequently defining areas that citizens perceive as problematic and which may have a negative impact on public confidence in the Police Force. Thus, against the background of the above-mentioned changes, a qualitative research of the content of the complaints registered at the Complaints Department of the Control Division of the Police Presidium in the first half of 2021 was carried out. For the purpose of the study, a formal division was made between complaints against alleged administrative malpractices/deficiencies and complaints indicating unethical behaviour and actions of police officers. The selection was made on the basis of the subject matter of the complaint and its content. The facts perceived by the citizen as key to the complaint were monitored. Out of the research sample, the former group constituted 40.5% of the complaints and the latter group 32% of the complaints. A total of 27.5% of the complaints were other complaints - complaints against the handling of complaints, complaints dealing with neighbour disputes, and complaints pointing to technical deficiencies in the facilities provided by the police departments, etc.

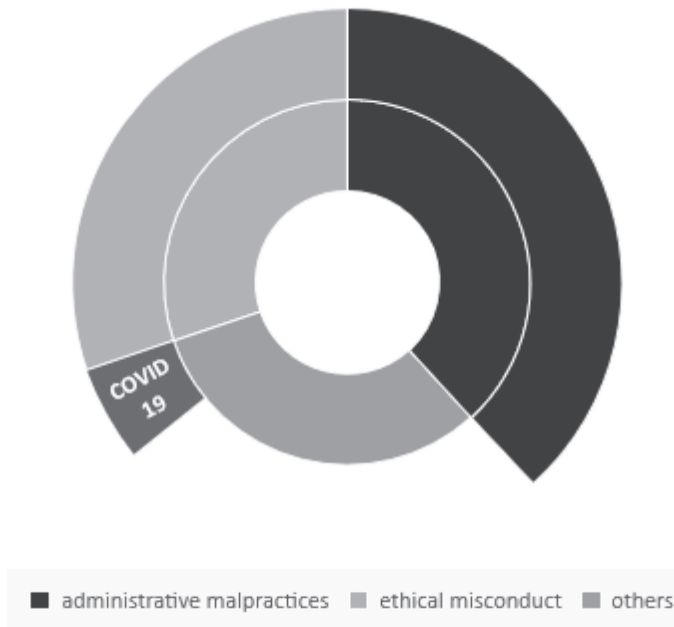


Figure 5 Complaints examined by content.

With regard to challenges to administrative procedure, the most frequent complaint made by complainants was

- the procedure in the misdemeanour proceedings;
- receipt, screening, and documenting notifications;
- the procedure in criminal proceedings;
- maladministration;
- handling of a previous complaint;
- delays or inaction;
- handling of a previous complaint.

Complaints were dominated by ‘incorrectness and illegality of the procedure’ of the administrative authority, in particular the Foreign Police (mostly after refusal of the application) and technical problems or non-functionality of the registration system of the client centre (most often the vehicle registration). Repeated complaints were directed against the actions of the administrative authority during the pandemic, with the majority of complainants describing the actions of the police as bullying. However, there were also complaints about police officers who allegedly ‘failed to keep a safe distance’, ‘approached vehicles without covering their upper respiratory tract’, and ‘failed to carry out their duties while on duty at border crossing points’ during the pandemic. The circumstances of the pandemic were taken into account in a total of 6.6 % of the complaints examined.

Although the term “unlawful procedure” is repeated quite often in complaints, in most cases, it is an expression of the complainant’s subjective feeling without any relevant factual and legal arguments.

There are repeated complaints that certain specific complaints were not handled “as the complainant expected”, e.g. the citizen did not find the police procedure “right”, was indignant that the police did not want to document what he thought they should document, or felt that the police were intruding on his privacy. It is no exception to covert pressure through verbatim references to this being a “media sensitive matter”, and the complainant does not rule out “taking the matter to the media” or making the same complaint to a number of other central authorities. At the same time, it is possible to observe in the complaints the adoption of the media narrative about the work of the police: “The newspapers write most about police officers who are dishonest, take bribes, do not respect the law, do not control basic human rights, act without us, like the policewoman...”.

Complainants are often convinced of their involvement, hence the complaints against, for example, the actions of police officers who allegedly refused to act on their complaint of a suspected crime, or, if such a complaint was received by a police officer, “failed to inform the whistleblower of how the investigation was progressing”. In this context, the complainant’s often subjective assessment of the timing of complaint handling is understood and faulted as “inaction” by the police.

The fact that 32% of complaints were devoted to ethical issues suggests that police ethics is one of the key areas in the ambition to build a positive relationship between citizens and the police. Police ethics is institutional ethics, ethics primarily deontological, whose object of inquiry is shaped in the context of the interaction of general ethics and security practice (Herzogová, 2000). The broader range of theoretical and practical ethical issues that the police profession raises (police integrity, articulation of the norms of ethical codes, social, legal, philosophical justification of ethical principles, etc.) can be captured in the concrete impulses of citizens, in which citizens’ expectations and perceptions of policing meet their practical experience.

According to the Report on the handling of complaints and petitions within the competence of the Ministry of the Interior for the year 2021, the examination of the complaints handled did not reveal any deficiencies in control and management nor any moral defects, despite the fact that many of the complaints suggested such an element.

In 2021, out of a total of 129 complaints investigated that could be related to unethical behaviour, only one complaint was substantiated.

Subject	Equipped	Investigated	Substantiated
Inhuman (abusive, degrading) treatment	128	97	1
The use of coercive means	11	8	-
The use of physical violence (not in the context of coercive means)	10	7	-
Misuse of privileges	8	3	-
Inappropriate behaviour and conduct	-	-	-
Inhuman treatment (special motive)	4	2	-
Misuse of official position (arbitrariness)	15	12	-
Intolerance (discrimination, xenophobia, racism...)	5	-	-

Table 1 Subjects of complaints in the ethical field.

In the light of the examination carried out, the validity of the complaints can be seen secondarily in relation to the reference to the area in which the complainant feels affected. Noting the areas that the citizen perceives as problematic, we find the complaints against the allegedly unethical behaviour of the police officers most often directed (1.) against the investigators during the interventions and in connection with the traffic accident and (2.) against the investigators during the implementation of the interrogation.

In the first case involving traffic accidents, complaints pointed to the officer's lack of interest in properly investigating the accident, there were allegations of concealment and tampering with accident evidence, and then there were complaints about the handling of the complaint in relation to the documentation and investigation of the traffic accident. In the latter case, complainants frequently rated the investigator's conduct during questioning as 'unprofessional, inappropriate and coercive', 'confrontational to the point of being unpleasant', complained of 'bias on the part of the police officer during questioning', were outraged if the police officer allegedly 'failed to write down in the statement the information that the interviewee testified to with justification', that it did not matter", pointing to the lack of impartiality of the interrogator and "favouritism towards the suspect", "failure to inform the interrogated person in advance that he would be interrogated and in what context", "taking advantage of the unpreparedness of the interrogated person", often arguing that this was an abuse of the power of a public official. It was not infrequent that police officers were described as corrupt in this context without further explanation of the reason. The above-mentioned characteristics appeared in large numbers in complaints against the foreign police.

Another often negatively perceived ethical aspect of police activity was the speech of police officers (superiority, arrogance, and inappropriate verbal language are reported); citizens perceived empathy when conducting body searches as problematic, indicating "disrespect", "injury to honour and dignity", "out of place comments and questions". These impulses respond to consideration as a moral value of the police profession, with which the overall culture of the police officer's demeanour is closely related as an essential attribute of his/her personal equipment. It is based on the awareness of human dignity as a fundamental attribute of a human being defined by the demand for respect, which is manifested in the basic requisites of the treatment of human beings. The aforementioned level is embodied in the basic deontological document of police ethics in the conditions of the Slovak Republic - the Code of Ethics of a Police Officer, which establishes the claim to trustworthiness also in the requirement for courtesy, politeness, tact and consideration (Ministry of the Interior, 2022, Art. 6(3)). In this regard, there were complaints of "unprofessional attitude and superiority" in relation to the police intervention, when "serious harm to the honour and dignity of the person" was to be caused, namely by the use of physical violence, also by the disproportionate nature of the intervention towards the family members of the accused who live in the same household with him, especially towards the complainant's children who were present and who had witnessed the disproportionate action. According to the complaints, threats to family members if they refused to cooperate, inappropriate comments made by the peepers during the intervention, disrespect towards the woman, inappropriate questions, etc., are often present.

However, in terms of the citizen complaints analysed, a wide range of citizens' perceptions of the dignity of the human person is noticeable. For example, searches of personal belongings at the airport are considered undignified. Police officers are accused of a lack of empathy, but also the general behaviour of officers at the airport, who are "dressed down,

disgusted, no greeting, ... “ The occurrence of complaints against being discouraged from filing a criminal complaint, or even from reporting a fact that a citizen defines as unlawful, can also be considered ethically problematic.

In addition to the wide range of perceptions of allegedly unethical (i.e. inappropriate, inadequate) speeches by police officers, there is a noticeable friction between what is generally considered moral (decent, appropriate, right) and police intervention, which in terms of its nature interferes in the sphere of human experience, by definition presupposes a substandard situation for the citizen, often with strained emotions. In these situations, the ethically correct actions of the police officer may be perceived by the citizen as inappropriate in the context of the overall situation. This inappropriateness, however, may not lie in the violation of ethical standards but in the very nature of the activity, which is in itself unpleasant for the citizen (official intervention, personal search, etc.). This fact does not relieve us of the responsibility for the continuous improvement of police activities in an ethical sense, on the contrary, it forces us to reassess the ways of carrying out police activities towards a better perception by citizens. In this way, police ethics is exposed to a critical evaluation of its potential and encouraged to seek effective tools for approaching the public and influencing a more positive perception of the difficult situations of police service - difficult for members of the Police Force and for citizens.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The credibility of the Police Force is a topical issue in security theory and practice. It is a challenge in the mirror of the long-standing low trust in the Police Force in public opinion polls, as well as the need for its theoretical elaboration and the ambition of practical increase is evidenced by the rich research interest. Mapping the areas of security practice correlating with citizens' trust in the police organisation is also made possible by the present analysis of complaints from natural and legal persons in Slovakia. Based on the data from the Report on the handling of complaints and petitions within the competence of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic for the year 2021 and the analysis of selected complaint files at the Complaints Department of the Control Division of the Presidium of the Police Force, several conclusions can be drawn:

In their experience, citizens describe the negative aspects of police activity as mainly administrative (malpractice), ethical, and technical deficiencies. In terms of alleged ethical misconduct, in specific reference to police activities, citizens most often considered violations during questioning and investigation of traffic accidents. In terms of alleged ethical violations in the concretization of the content of police ethical standards, the most frequent complaints of citizens included (1.) violation of the principle of impartiality (citizens perceive impartiality as one of the key ethical attributes of the police service, which, according to the statements contained in the analysed documentation, has a decisive influence on the reliable operation of the police); and citizen complaints pointing to the verbal speech of the Police officers (arrogance in their demeanour, use of inappropriate derogatory terms, etc.).

From the above, it can be concluded that the relevant area providing tools for increasing the credibility of the Police Force is the area of police ethics, which is evidenced by the rich research interest in the conditions of the Slovak Republic in this topic, as well as the call to

increase the credibility of the Police Force through the implementation of some measures. In this context, mention can be made of the update of the Code of Ethics of Police Officers, which also brought about the inclusion of a separate article presenting ethical standards of behaviour aimed at building the credibility of the Police Force. Following the update of the Code of Ethics, a guide to the Ministry of the Interior Regulation No. 41/2022 on the Code of Ethics for Police Officers was issued with the ambition of expanding further training in this area.

The range of citizens' perceptions is diverse and often responds to the specific life situation of the complainant: complaints contain subjective political attitudes of the complainant, there are references to the corruption of police officers with reference to media cases, and many complainants are the authors of numerous complaints. These aspects must also be taken into account when working with the empirical material in question.

Complaints can certainly direct our attention to areas that citizens perceive as problematic in relation to policing (taking into account the fact that this is their subjective perception), but at the same time, they are often testimonies of people's problems that peripherally affect policing, but which citizens perceive in the face of social contradictions. The present is generally marked by fear of insecurity: insecure jobs, social security, and old age (Dinuš, 2015). In the period under review, the citizen's situation was compounded by the security risk posed by the pandemic. The statements contained in the complaints include statements such as: "I live in a state that I cannot call home because home is where nothing can happen to me"; Corruption destroys society, lowers the self-confidence of the nation and stifles the talent and creativity of individuals; Corruption steals money from where it is most needed - from families, pensioners, and honest businessmen; Corruption makes public services more expensive, multiplying the cost of building highways, medical equipment and information systems. ..."; "I am no longer interested in seeking justice because I am becoming convinced that not even living water will help this state!" The issue of the credibility of the Police Force, its interpretation and the ambition to implement tools to increase it, which are a constant challenge for security theory and practice, thus contains within itself a broader context of understanding the image of the state, the functioning of its institutions and the contradictions between the expectations and the quality of life of citizens.

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Sažetak

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Odrednice vjerodostojnosti policijskih snaga iz perspektive pritužbi građana na policijsku službu

Studija se bavi istraživanjem vjerodostojnosti policijskih snaga na temelju analize sadržaja pritužbi građana Slovačke Republike. Cilj mu je na temelju te analize definirati područja koja građani percipiraju kao osjetljiva u radu policije u odnosu na njihovo povjerenje u policijsku organizaciju. Analiza se temelji na podacima sadržanim u Izvješću o postupanju s pritužbama i predstavkama iz nadležnosti Ministarstva unutarnjih poslova Slovačke Republike za 2021. te na vlastitom istraživanju pritužbi registriranih u prvj polovici 2021. pri Predsjedništvu policijskih snaga u Bratislavi. Na temelju proučavanja pritužbi u Odjelu za kontrolu kao reprezentativnog istraživačkog uzorka moguće je identificirati područja trenja policijskog rada i njegovu percepciju javnosti u kvalitativnom i kvantitativnom smislu. Istodobno, navedeno razdoblje omogućuje prikaz razmjera utjecaja određene sigurnosne situacije (pandemija bolesti COVID-19) na odnos javnosti i policije. Istaknut je potencijal za jačanje kredibiliteta policijskih snaga, posebice u području policijske etike.

Ključne riječi: policijske snage, kredibilitet, pritužbe, policijska etika, javno mnijenje.

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