

COMMUNICATION AS A MEANS OF INFLUENCE ON PUBLIC OPINION REGARDING THE ASSESSMENT OF THE NATIONAL POLICE ACTIVITIES

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Annotation. The article examines communication as a means of influencing public opinion regarding the assessment of the National Police activities. The Roadmap on the Rule of Law in the context of Ukraine's accession to the European Union under Cluster 1 «Fundamentals of the EU Accession Process» provides for reforming the National Police activities with a focus on increasing public trust in the police. One way to strengthen police cooperation with civil society institutions and citizens is to communicate between representatives of the National Police and relevant departments to align police activities with the public need to ensure public safety and order under the legal framework of martial law. This determines the relevance of the research topic. The object of the study is the social relations in the field of communication between departments and officials of the National Police and citizens and civil society institutions in the context of the National Strategy for the Promotion of Civil Society Development in Ukraine for 2021–2026. The subject matter of the study is the legal provisions that regulate communication between the police and civil society institutions. The article analyses the impact of public opinion regarding police activities on the effectiveness of the performance of police duties under the legal regime of martial law, as well as the means and methods of communication of the National Police departments and officials to create a positive public opinion of police activities. Under martial law, the issue of effective communication between departments and officials of the National Police takes on significant importance, requiring the use of new forms and methods of informing the public. It is noted that national legislation lacks provisions setting out possible courses of action when assessing public opinion, particularly in the event of positive or negative public opinion, and, consequently, the effectiveness of the forms and methods of communication used. It is important to counter Russia's information expansion.

Key words: public opinion, activities assessment, public trust, public control, the National Police.

1. Introduction.

The implementation of the Roadmap on the Rule of Law is a priority for the state in the context of European integration, as the level of public trust in the National police under martial law directly affects the effectiveness of the security and defence sector in repelling armed aggression by the Russian Federation [1]. An important stage in police reform was the amendment of the Law of Ukraine «On the National Police» regarding the introduction of the legal regime of martial law. The main idea behind the amendments was building trust towards the National Police, that is, to legally enshrine a partnership model of relations between society and the police. This model was effectively reflected in a key principle of police activities, which consists of the police's efforts to secure public trust and the support of citizens. The implementation of this principle of police activities has become a basic task for the law enforcement system; it directly influences the development of administrative legislation governing the National Police activities.

2. Analysis of scientific publications.

The issue of public trust towards the activities of state authorities in Ukraine is reflected in the works of V. Averianov, V. Bakumenko, V. Luhovyi, V. Kniaziev, M. Kovaliv, Z. Kisil, I. Koliushko, V. Ortynskyi, O. Obolenskyi, Y. Surmin and others. Scientific studies have investigated certain aspects of public assessment of state authorities' activities, in particular the analysis of the legislative framework, theory, methodology and practice of public administration decision-making, the implementation of administrative reform. However, the issue of evaluating the National Police activities in the context of cooperation with civil society institutions is not comprehensively discussed in the academic literature from the perspective of system analysis, and this requires further scientific research.

3. The purpose of this work is to examine public opinion as a criterion for evaluating the National Police activities.

4. Review and discussion.

Public opinion is the independent citizens' assessment of the positive and negative aspects of the activities of any subject or specific process. It arises under certain conditions and is formed by various objective and subjective factors. In the mechanism of interaction between society and police, aimed at ensuring public trust and support for police, it is necessary to consider the institution of public opinion regarding police activities.

The concept of «public opinion» is defined as the set of judgments prevalent within society and within specific social groups, expressing assessments of facts and events in public life, as well as people's attitudes towards these phenomena. Social consciousness is regarded as the set of theories, ideas and views that reflect actual social existence and the historical process within a specific period. Public opinion is a statistical snapshot of social consciousness, limited by the period over which data are collected.

The term «public opinion» is used in two senses: the opinion held by a significant number of people, or by members of a particular social group or subculture within society, and the prevailing view among members of the public. V. Pustovar notes that public opinion is one of the key social mechanisms influencing the content and direction of policy, particularly in a democratic system of government. It acts as a kind of corrective to government decisions, enabling the authorities to respond to public attitudes and maintain their political legitimacy and support [2, p. 93].

The search for the best form of government prompted discussions that turned to public opinion as the foundation of good governance. Civil society develops within the context of conflictual situations, as it encompasses many social groups, each with its personal, corporate and societal interests. Within these institutions in the sphere of public administration, clashes of interest arise due to the prioritisation of different values.

Conflicts can be situational and short-lived, or persistent and long-lasting. However, properly organised monitoring and analysis of social processes are clearly underestimated, and social factors are hardly ever taken into account in forecasts of socio-economic development. Such a situation leads to an escalation of social tensions.

Ya. Kovach clearly defined the purpose of public opinion monitoring. Accordingly, monitoring and assessment are key management processes aimed at achieving results. Assessment involves periodically comparing operations and/or results of activities against a set of explicit and implicit standards to improve activities [3].

The Law of Ukraine «On the National Police» (Part 3 of Article 11) stipulates that public opinion is the primary criterion for assessing police activities [4].

The scholars have attempted to define the concept of «public opinion regarding the National Police» and to expand its meaning and the mechanism by which it is applied. According to S. Subota, public opinion is

used on a daily basis to assess the actions and decisions of both individual police officers and the internal affairs authorities as a whole. Depending on the results of their activities, this assessment may be positive, negative or neutral. The assessment is influenced by the extent to which police activities align with generally accepted values, interests and social attitudes [5, p. 60].

The police, like other state authorities, will always be under close public scrutiny. The National Police's ineffective media relations are not a problem for the public that breeds mistrust, but rather a problem for the National Police, which must carry out systematic and effective work in this area to foster a positive public perception of police activities.

A. Kubaienko suggests that public opinion regarding the National Police is a form of social consciousness, in which the attitudes of various groups of people towards police activities and their assessment are manifested. This evaluation arises from the individual characteristics of respondents under the influence of environmental factors, performs supervisory, directive and administrative functions, and influences public administration in the sphere of internal affairs. According to the researcher, the traditional model, based on post-factum responses and hierarchical management, is gradually losing its effectiveness under modern conditions, where preventive risk management, community engagement and the integration of digital technologies are becoming essential [6, p. 118–119].

The essence of police activities is determined as public information activities carried out by state authorities, aimed at building trust between citizens and the police, and fostering an objective assessment of their work through the provision of comprehensive and accurate information on the results of law enforcement activities. These activities must be carried out using the digital platform of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine as a public service. A digital platform for the provision of public services should be regarded as a complex entity comprising a set of information technologies and/or information systems, and/or software for electronic computers, through which various participants interact [7, p. 356]. This is consistent with the European Union's experience of digitising public services [8].

Public opinion regarding the National Police serves as a form of public control over police activities. It is rather difficult to determine the actual level of public trust towards the National Police, because the data from various sociological research centres differ significantly. Public opinion not only serves an informational and evaluative function (since the public's assessment of law enforcement services is one of the key indicators of results), but also acts as a means of public control.

Monitoring public opinion of police activities can certainly be regarded as a special form of public control over police activities. Continuous monitoring of public opinion is an invaluable resource for improving the effectiveness of police activities. A qualitative assessment of the National Police activities makes it possible to identify operational issues that require organisational responses.

Based on public opinion, we will obtain a powerful and objective tool for evaluating police activities. Only an open dialogue with civil society can ensure that the police take on board constructive public suggestions on how to improve their work. Consequently, studying public opinion is vital today, as it enables us to improve police activities.

M. M. Prokofiev, in examining the administrative and legal foundations for building trust, asserts that public trust is fostered through a variety of means. Public trust and support are key principles determining police activities. They are established in the Law of Ukraine «On the National Police», which defines the functional essence of the police. Public trust towards the police is built on a system of factors and conditions rooted in public opinion, which is formed by both external influence and internal, personal, subjective interactions between citizens and the police [9, p. 242].

Public opinion can be used as one of the key criteria for the official assessment of police activities in a given area.

In the research on the effectiveness of police activities in relation to road safety, S. S. Yesimov notes that public opinion is one of the main criteria for evaluating police activities [10, p. 195].

The results of sociological research should establish a dialogue with the public and help prevent breaches of the law and various abuses of authority by police officers. Furthermore, it is essential to take into account people's needs and expectations regarding police activities. When appealing to public opinion, there must undoubtedly be higher standards for the quality of information on which the public's assessment of police activities is based.

The analysis of public opinion is an essential condition for the existence of a democratic state. It is necessary to use this analysis to manage the functioning of various social institutions, including the police. The practical aspects of studying public opinion can be beneficial to society and make a significant contribution to the development of social institutions, particularly to the process of optimising police activities.

It should be noted that some authors propose a list of measures designed to improve public opinion regarding the National Police. For example, publishing up-to-date materials and reports on the National Police activities, creating public service announcements on law enforcement, covering the work of law enforcement officers in the media, public addressing of the heads of National Police bodies and departments at workplaces and public meetings, producing printed materials of an informational and preventive nature, and so on.

The academic literature contains critical views on the use of public opinion when assessing police activities. The issue of the effective and efficient use of public opinion in the management of law enforcement agencies is complex, multifaceted and controversial. It requires constant attention and further study. It is important to recognise that sociology does not solve practical problems. Even carefully formulated practical recommendations will remain a scientific curiosity unless they are followed by practical action.

The comments on the draft law «On the National Police» prepared by experts from the National Public Platform «Reforming the Ministry of Internal Affairs: Transparency and Responsibility» and the Human Rights Agenda state that the level of public trust towards the National Police is the primary criterion for assessing the effectiveness of the National Police bodies and departments. Trust is a rather complex indicator that does not always depend on activities, and therefore cannot be the main factor in assessing activities. It is proposed that the term «level of trust» should be replaced by the term «public opinion on the activities of ...» [11].

In this context, it is essential to keep the public informed about the findings of sociological studies on relations between the public and the police, so that the public knows that their views are not only taken into account but also actively put into practice. This leads to an increase in the public's self-esteem, civic engagement, and support and cooperation with the police in various forms of interaction. Scholars question the necessity and effectiveness of the police themselves conducting studies of public opinion regarding police activities.

The Law of Ukraine «On the National Police» provides for independent sociological organisations to survey public opinion on police activities through a tender process in accordance with the Law of Ukraine «On Public Procurement» [12].

An analysis of the views expressed by these legal experts and sociologists leads to the conclusion that public opinion regarding the National Police is highly influential. Firstly, monitoring public opinion on the National Police can be regarded as a unique and effective form of public control. Secondly, public opinion polls help to establish a continuous dialogue between the public and the police. Thirdly, public opinion regarding the National Police is being considered a criterion for assessing the effectiveness of police activities. Fourthly, public opinion enables the identification of significant problems in police activities and the elimination of breaches of the law and abuse by police officers. Fifthly, there is a link between public opinion, public trust and citizens' support for the police.

There are no provisions in Ukrainian legislation that indicate possible courses of action when assessing public opinion, particularly in the case of positive or negative public opinion. As historical experience in this area shows, the collection of public opinion on the police was subject to extremely weak legal regulation and was largely of an internal nature.

The Law of Ukraine «On the National Police» establishes an obligation to monitor public opinion regarding police activities and the police's interaction with civil society institutions.

The results of this monitoring must be regularly communicated to state bodies and local authorities, as well as to the public, via the media and the Internet.

Constant monitoring of public opinion regarding police activities is a method of conducting sociological research that ensures the continuous obtaining of information that reflects the public's views on police activities and the factors influencing those views.

The results of public opinion surveys on the National Police are published in print and online media in the form of summarised or structured sociological data. The work involved in conducting surveys of public opinion on police activities in specific regions of Ukraine constitutes research carried out with the aim of detailing the results of public opinion polls on police activities to identify and analyse the factors influencing the assessment of police effectiveness within a specific administrative-territorial unit.

Under martial law or a state of emergency, the assessment is temporarily suspended at the national level. The assessment will resume the following year once martial law or the state of emergency in Ukraine has been terminated or cancelled [13].

Public trust and support must be secured through a mechanism for monitoring public opinion regarding police activities. If the transparency and reliability of such monitoring cannot be guaranteed, it is unlikely that this legal mechanism will serve to enhance public trust towards the police or ensure adequate public support for law enforcement agencies.

Some scientists have noted a lack of universality and practicality in the research conducted by various sociological institutions to assess public opinion on police activities (NGO «Kharkiv Institute for Social Research», Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, Ilko Kucheriv «Democratic Initiatives» foundation, the Razumkov Centre's sociological service, and Taylor Nelson Sofres Ukraine LLC (TNS in Ukraine).

The Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine «On the Approval of the Procedure for Assessing Public Trust towards the National Police» [14] sets out the criteria on which the assessment of public trust is based in accordance with the powers of the National Police as established by the Law of Ukraine «On the National Police»; and the degree of representativeness of social groups within the population.

However, during the pre-war period, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine did not issue any regulatory acts addressing these issues. The practical value of public opinion surveys means that the results must be taken into account in police activities. At the same time, the public must be informed about how the results of monitoring public opinion on police activities are taken into account.

Under the Law «On the National Police», public opinion is a criterion for assessing police activities; consequently, the National Police must have a direct interest in the results of such assessments. The legislation must set out clear mechanisms providing for independent control over the monitoring of public opinion regarding police activities.

5. Conclusions.

Public opinion is a key criterion for evaluating police activities, enabling enhanced communication between the public and the police, diagnosing issues within police activities, and timely implementing measures to address and resolve them. Registration of public opinion on police activities is an important form of special public control over the National Police, enabling the establishment of a constant dialogue between the public and the police, the identification of significant problems in police activities, and the elimination of breaches of the law and police misconduct. This ensures the necessary level of public trust and support for the police. The results of monitoring public opinion on police activities may be regarded as an official assessment of police activities only if they are officially published in open sources.

The legality of law enforcement activities increase public trust and support for the police. The lawfulness of police activities increases public trust, and public trust compels the police to operate within the law. Therefore, it is important to involve the public in upholding this legal framework, which serves as a mechanism for enhancing public trust and support for the police.

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