

scottish justice matters

POLICING

Reflections on developments and
changes to policing in Scotland





POLICING MUST BE LOCAL, BUT ALSO INFORMED BY GLOBAL EXPERIENCE

Paddy Tomkins, former Chief Constable of Lothian and Borders Police and head of HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland, talks to **Andy Aitchison**, lecturer in Criminology at the University of Edinburgh about his work with the Serbian Ministry of the Interior (MUP).

AA: You have spent two years working in Serbia. What were you trying to achieve?

PT: To help them develop an evidence-based approach to making strategic decisions in terms of constrained resources, and develop a more anticipatory approach to determining what the key challenges are likely to be. The minister, although not responsible for operational policing, was put in a position of making decisions that affect, constrain and determine operational priorities, but on a very reactive basis.

The other imperative for the MUP was that clearly everything is driven by the determination to become a member of the EU, including the adoption of models that we would be familiar with in Europol such as intelligence led policing, risk assessment models and so on.

How welcome was your presence?

PT: Within the ministry, the middle management were very open to change had seen processes working elsewhere, had seen the benefits that brought. The people at the very top were more sceptical and questioning. I think that there was active resistance and some fearfulness. Pressures to change quite dramatically were unnerving.

Did you see that scepticism change?

PT: Yes. I think it's about engagement and talking, and helping people move from the general to the specific with examples of how that would work in the Serbian context.

What additional preparation did you have?

PT: A trawl of various inputs, assessments, reports. Very few of those were actually implemented and sustained. I don't think that's the fault of the beneficiary countries. It's a fault of the donor community many of whom work with little reference to each other in a very complicated environment.

So knowing this record, how did that shape your approach when you arrived in Serbia?

PT: I looked at the strategic aim of the project, €1.5 m of public money, thinking about how I would work with key individuals and change agents or potential change agents to equip them to lead the process and have the confidence and tools to maintain momentum after I'd left.

Who did you find were the most effective change agents?

PT: It was a very much knowledge-based power rather than rank-based power. In some cases at the top it was rank-based power, but below that you could have a very influential detective inspector getting the ear of the minister. Expertise was vested throughout the hierarchy.

Is that a contrast to Scottish policing in terms of how people can cross levels in order to shape change?

PT: It was much more based on personality and relationships and individuals than I would expect to see in Scotland. Policing in Britain as a whole has vested much more effort developing systems and investing in the systems with knowledge and doctrine. There is a degree of resilience built into the Scottish model.

In terms of the task that you thought you were going out to do, how did that shift?

PT: I realised that the development of the process needed to come second to a hearts and minds campaign. Relationships, mutual trust, and mutual respect are very important. It is a huge mistake to go into any environment in international development saying that if we simply transfer the experience and the processes from one environment to another then things will get better.

Primarily it's about supporting the development of individuals to use the lessons from those processes and to develop their own processes that are most appropriate to the environment within which they are working.

Knowing everything you know now, could you go back to 2011 and give yourself one piece of advice, what would it be?

PT: More patience! I was certainly naïve about the degree to which we could invest the process of change with the speed that I would have been familiar with in the UK.

I think that's part of the development of opportunity for us in Scotland. Yes, we have much to offer, but we have much to learn as well. I would see this kind of interaction as not just simply giving something to Serbia or another beneficiary country, but as a mutual benefit.

The UK has a history of sending police officers off to various missions. How well do you think we prepare police officers for foreign deployment?

PT: The people that do go are obviously a minority. They probably don't receive the degree of training and support that they merit and don't get the understanding about how powerful their role can be in influencing perceptions of Scottish or British expertise and willingness to help others.

I learned a great deal from the experience and I think that would inevitably, were I still an operational police officer, help me think about the issues within different communities within my own country when I came back. So for officers who are still serving at different levels, it can only enhance their empathy and their ability to engage with complex social and cultural challenges in Scotland were they to be involved in this kind of activity.

What are the big challenges coming up for the MUP and the Serbian police?

PT: They have very major structural issues. For example, in Serbia the ratio of police to population was about twice that of Scotland. In common with other public services they are there to help get people jobs. It leads to a lack of focus on what the roles of police officers are within society.

There are huge operational challenges around serious organised crime. There are still significant instabilities in the region and there is an increasing expectation from EU police forces that their colleagues in Serbia and elsewhere in the western Balkans will operate at a level which they would expect from their peers.

I've got absolutely no doubt about the competency of the individuals but they need the right training, they need the right equipment, they need the right intelligence databases and so on.

Are there positive things in Serbian policing that you think we could learn from here?

PT: I think that one of the key lessons is that they manage, with far fewer resources than we do, to deliver a policing service in which a very significant level of population have trust and faith. The processes, the equipment, the training, the physical resources, the estate are a long way behind those which we would consider minimal and yet they are inventive and adaptable and responsive in terms of how they still enforce the law and engage with the public.

Their lack of defined processes and intelligence-led models sometimes gives them more freedom for movement than we would be comfortable with. That leads on to the issue of accountability. How do you demonstrate accountability if you're not clear what your standards are? If you don't have the systems to check the quality of data of crime reporting, how do you hold the police service to account? So, they find more informal and individually focused approaches for holding people to account.

What now?

PT: I continue to work with Serbia and the western Balkans, but it's encouraged me to engage in other areas. For example, I'm invited to deliver a symposium in Mexico City talking about police reform, police accountability, police governance, in a very different environment with very profound operational challenges.

Scotland's own experience of profound reform has given me and others a lot of confidence to say that our insights and our experiences are valued just as we should value those of others. The more we do to engage in and promote a dialogue between countries in the discipline of policing, the more our respective communities will benefit.

Where do you see the relationship between police and democracy?

PT: From my perspective the police service is absolutely core to the effective operation of any democracy worthy of the name, principally because it should give the public the confidence to participate in the democratic process: to be able to expect a certain level of service from the government; to hold to account that public service; to question that public service. That's what we seek in Scotland.

There will be a sense of confidence in Scotland that one could question, confront, and challenge policing decisions, the senior leaders of policing, and the relevant politicians and civil servants.

Thank you. Is anything else you feel that you would like to add?

PT: Policing must be local, but it must be informed by global experience. The more we do at all levels, not just operationally, but in training, development, exchanges and so on to help our people understand what it's like to work in different environments with different constraints and different expectations, can only be beneficial and I would like to see that opportunity extended to others and possibly earlier in their careers so they can actually apply it to practice here.

[A fuller version of this interview is available on the website and on SoundCloud.](#)
