

THE "CIVIL MONITORING OF THE POLICE" PROJECT

Project Objectives

The "Civil Monitoring of the police" Project is being carried out by Open Society Institute – Sofia in accordance with a methodology approved of by the General Directorate "Police". Its major goal is to build up trust between the police and the local community, as well as to ensure the transparency of the police.

Project Implementation Tools

The underlying principle of civil monitoring is that the citizens are offered the opportunity to enter the police stations without prior notice and are allowed to observe the process of detention. This is a common practice in many European countries which ensures human rights protection. The existing surveillance method in our country is heavily influenced by England and Holland.

The civil monitoring agents are volunteers who have been selected and approved of by the police and who go through a training period in order to become familiar with the method of civil monitoring. Groups of volunteers conduct civil monitoring of the police stations on the basis of a schedule approved of in advance, which can be accessed solely by the project participants. The volunteers monitor the detention rooms and see to the normative base maintenance according to which people remain in detention for a period of 24 hours. The volunteers prepare a joint report on the basis of the monitoring, which contains facts, established during the monitoring itself.

General reports are prepared on a monthly basis, as a copy of these reports is submitted to the head of the respective regional department of the Ministry of Interior and the civil monitoring agents. Analytical reports are prepared every six months. They are submitted both to the respective regional department of the Ministry of Interior and the media in order to make it known to the public.

Project Status

In progress

Project Development

The monitoring method was first tested in the town of Pleven in 2004 and employed in 2005/2006 in the ninth police stations in the territory of Sofia in partnership with General Directorate "Police", Sofia Directorate "Police" and Sofia Municipality.

Considering the positive results in both towns, Open Society Institute – Sofia intends to expand and popularize the civil monitoring practice in the towns of Varna, Bourgas, Plovdiv, as well as continue to develop the project in Sofia and Pleven. The evolution of this practice will promote the adoption of a uniform civil monitoring methodology until the interaction between the police and the community becomes a natural process.

Results

Results of the project "Civil Monitoring in Sofia police stations":

- The monitoring agents' report has revealed a violation of the sublegislative normative acts according to which the detention centers for arrest and cross-examination had been arranged and that the people under detention had not have access to legal and medical assistance. It is a common practice to cross-examine the people under detention in the offices of operational workers and investigators rather than in special rooms with built-in furniture, cameras and no dangerous objects. In this way the Instruction I – 167 has been disregarded. Moreover, the violation of the normative regulations presupposes a violation of the rights of the people under detention.
- A positive aspect of the project is that while the monitoring was being conducted, there was a relatively small number of violations of power on the part of the police. It had been also established that there were no detention rooms built under the ground level or which did not let in any daylight.
- While the project was in progress, General Directorate "Police" and Sofia Directorate "Police" gave a prompt and effective reaction. Thanks to this and the proposals the volunteers made, the solution that was arrived at resulted in giving food to the people under detention in the police stations.
- The civil monitoring agents gave warnings that there were inconsistencies between the detention letters and the information contained in the registers. They also reported improper maintenance of the information in registers about the people under detention. All this produced positive effects. Thanks to the change in the administrative practice, there was a considerable improvement in the methods used in this field in August 2006.
- The results of the project conducted in the city of Sofia have showed that the practice of civil monitoring is an effective tool to control the police. This has brought about the regulation of this practice in the "Instructions for the way the police should act when detaining people in the structural units of the Ministry of Interior, for the equipment used in the detention rooms and the order that should be maintained there". (published in the state gazette, 9th issue, January 26th, 2007).

Experts and Partners

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- General Directorate "Police"
- Sofia Directorate "Police"
- Sofia Municipality

Funding

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