

**COUNCIL OF EUROPE**  
COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

**Recommendation [Rec\(2001\)10](#)  
of the Committee of Ministers to member states  
on the European Code of Police Ethics**

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers  
on 19 September 2001  
at the 765th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.b of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Recalling that the aim of the Council of Europe is to achieve greater unity between its members;

Bearing in mind that it is also the purpose of the Council of Europe to promote the rule of law, which constitutes the basis of all genuine democracies;

Considering that the criminal justice system plays a key role in safeguarding the rule of law and that the police have an essential role within that system;

Aware of the need of all member states to provide effective crime fighting both at the national and the international level;

Considering that police activities to a large extent are performed in close contact with the public and that police efficiency is dependent on public support;

Recognising that most European police organisations – in addition to upholding the law – are performing social as well as service functions in society;

Convinced that public confidence in the police is closely related to their attitude and behaviour towards the public, in particular their respect for the human dignity and fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual as enshrined, in particular, in the European Convention on Human Rights;

Considering the principles expressed in the United Nations Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials and the resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on the Declaration on the Police;

Bearing in mind principles and rules laid down in texts related to police matters – criminal, civil and public law as well as human rights aspects as adopted by the Committee of Ministers, decisions and judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and principles adopted by the Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;

Recognising the diversity of police structures and means of organising the police in Europe;

Considering the need to establish common European principles and guidelines for the overall objectives, performance and accountability of the police to safeguard security and individual's rights in democratic societies governed by the rule of law,

Recommends that the governments of member states be guided in their internal legislation, practice and codes of conduct of the police by the principles set out in the text of the European Code of Police Ethics, appended to the present recommendation, with a view to their progressive implementation, and to give the widest possible circulation to this text.

## **Appendix to Recommendation [Rec\(2001\)10](#) on the European Code of Police Ethics**

### **Definition of the scope of the code**

This code applies to traditional public police forces or police services, or to other publicly authorised and/or controlled bodies with the primary objectives of maintaining law and order in civil society, and who are empowered by the state to use force and/or special powers for these purposes.

#### **I. Objectives of the police**

1. The main purposes of the police in a democratic society governed by the rule of law are:

- to maintain public tranquillity and law and order in society;
- to protect and respect the individual's fundamental rights and freedoms as enshrined, in particular, in the European Convention on Human Rights;
- to prevent and combat crime;
- to detect crime;
- to provide assistance and service functions to the public.

#### **II. Legal basis of the police under the rule of law**

2. The police are a public body which shall be established by law.

3. Police operations must always be conducted in accordance with the national law and international standards accepted by the country.
4. Legislation guiding the police shall be accessible to the public and sufficiently clear and precise, and, if need be, supported by clear regulations equally accessible to the public and clear.
5. Police personnel shall be subject to the same legislation as ordinary citizens, and exceptions may only be justified for reasons of the proper performance of police work in a democratic society.

### **III. The police and the criminal justice system**

6. There shall be a clear distinction between the role of the police and the prosecution, the judiciary and the correctional system; the police shall not have any controlling functions over these bodies.
7. The police must strictly respect the independence and the impartiality of judges; in particular, the police shall neither raise objections to legitimate judgments or judicial decisions, nor hinder their execution.
8. The police shall, as a general rule, have no judicial functions. Any delegation of judicial powers to the police shall be limited and in accordance with the law. It must always be possible to challenge any act, decision or omission affecting individual rights by the police before the judicial authorities.
9. There shall be functional and appropriate co-operation between the police and the public prosecution. In countries where the police are placed under the authority of the public prosecution or the investigating judge, the police shall receive clear instructions as to the priorities governing crime investigation policy and the progress of criminal investigation in individual cases. The police should keep the superior crime investigation authorities informed of the implementation of their instructions, in particular, the development of criminal cases should be reported regularly.
10. The police shall respect the role of defence lawyers in the criminal justice process and, whenever appropriate, assist in ensuring the right of access to legal assistance effective, in particular with regard to persons deprived of their liberty.
11. The police shall not take the role of prison staff, except in cases of emergency.

### **IV. Organisational structures of the police**

#### **A. General**

12. The police shall be organised with a view to earning public respect as professional upholders of the law and providers of services to the public.
13. The police, when performing police duties in civil society, shall be under the responsibility of civilian authorities.
14. The police and its personnel in uniform shall normally be easily recognisable.
15. The police shall enjoy sufficient operational independence from other state bodies in carrying out its given police tasks, for which it should be fully accountable.
16. Police personnel, at all levels, shall be personally responsible and accountable for their own actions or omissions or for orders to subordinates.
17. The police organisation shall provide for a clear chain of command within the police. It should always be possible to determine which superior is ultimately responsible for the acts or omissions of police personnel.
18. The police shall be organised in a way that promotes good police/public relations and, where appropriate, effective co-operation with other agencies, local communities, non-governmental organisations and other representatives of the public, including ethnic minority groups.
19. Police organisations shall be ready to give objective information on their activities to the public, without disclosing confidential information. Professional guidelines for media contacts shall be established.
20. The police organisation shall contain efficient measures to ensure the integrity and proper performance of police staff, in particular to guarantee respect for individuals' fundamental rights and freedoms as enshrined, notably, in the European Convention on Human Rights.
21. Effective measures to prevent and combat police corruption shall be established in the police organisation at all levels.

*B. Qualifications, recruitment and retention of police personnel*

22. Police personnel, at any level of entry, shall be recruited on the basis of their personal qualifications and experience, which shall be appropriate for the objectives of the police.
23. Police personnel shall be able to demonstrate sound judgment, an open attitude, maturity, fairness, communication skills and, where appropriate,

leadership and management skills. Moreover, they shall possess a good understanding of social, cultural and community issues.

24. Persons who have been convicted for serious crimes shall be disqualified from police work.

25. Recruitment procedures shall be based on objective and non-discriminatory grounds, following the necessary screening of candidates. In addition, the policy shall aim at recruiting men and women from various sections of society, including ethnic minority groups, with the overall objective of making police personnel reflect the society they serve.

#### *C. Training of Police Personnel*

26. Police training, which shall be based on the fundamental values of democracy, the rule of law and the protection of human rights, shall be developed in accordance with the objectives of the police.

27. General police training shall be as open as possible towards society.

28. General initial training should preferably be followed by in-service training at regular intervals, and specialist, management and leadership training, when it is required.

29. Practical training on the use of force and limits with regard to established human rights principles, notably the European Convention on Human Rights and its case law, shall be included in police training at all levels.

30. Police training shall take full account of the need to challenge and combat racism and xenophobia.

#### *D. Rights of police personnel*

31. Police staff shall as a rule enjoy the same civil and political rights as other citizens. Restrictions to these rights may only be made when they are necessary for the exercise of the functions of the police in a democratic society, in accordance with the law, and in conformity with the European Convention on Human Rights.

32. Police staff shall enjoy social and economic rights, as public servants, to the fullest extent possible. In particular, staff shall have the right to organise or to participate in representative organisations, to receive an appropriate remuneration and social security, and to be provided with special health and security measures, taking into account the particular character of police work.

33. Disciplinary measures brought against police staff shall be subject to review by an independent body or a court.

34. Public authorities shall support police personnel who are subject to ill-founded accusations concerning their duties.

## **V. Guidelines for police action/intervention**

### *A. Guidelines for police action/intervention: general principles*

35. The police, and all police operations, must respect everyone's right to life.

36. The police shall not inflict, instigate or tolerate any act of torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment under any circumstances.

37. The police may use force only when strictly necessary and only to the extent required to obtain a legitimate objective.

38. Police must always verify the lawfulness of their intended actions.

39. Police personnel shall carry out orders properly issued by their superiors, but they shall have a duty to refrain from carrying out orders which are clearly illegal and to report such orders, without fear of sanction.

40. The police shall carry out their tasks in a fair manner, guided, in particular, by the principles of impartiality and non-discrimination.

41. The police shall only interfere with individual's right to privacy when strictly necessary and only to obtain a legitimate objective.

42. The collection, storage, and use of personal data by the police shall be carried out in accordance with international data protection principles and, in particular, be limited to the extent necessary for the performance of lawful, legitimate and specific purposes.

43. The police, in carrying out their activities, shall always bear in mind everyone's fundamental rights, such as freedom of thought, conscience, religion, expression, peaceful assembly, movement and the peaceful enjoyment of possessions.

44. Police personnel shall act with integrity and respect towards the public and with particular consideration for the situation of individuals belonging to especially vulnerable groups.

45. Police personnel shall, during intervention, normally be in a position to give evidence of their police status and professional identity.

46. Police personnel shall oppose all forms of corruption within the police. They shall inform superiors and other appropriate bodies of corruption within the police.

*B. Guidelines for police action/intervention: specific situations*

*1. Police investigation*

47. Police investigations shall, as a minimum, be based upon reasonable suspicion of an actual or possible offence or crime.

48. The police must follow the principles that everyone charged with a criminal offence shall be considered innocent until found guilty by a court, and that everyone charged with a criminal offence has certain rights, in particular the right to be informed promptly of the accusation against him/her, and to prepare his/her defence either in person, or through legal assistance of his/her own choosing.

49. Police investigations shall be objective and fair. They shall be sensitive and adaptable to the special needs of persons, such as children, juveniles, women, minorities including ethnic minorities and vulnerable persons.

50. Guidelines for the proper conduct and integrity of police interviews shall be established, bearing in mind Article 48. They shall, in particular, provide for a fair interview during which those interviewed are made aware of the reasons for the interview as well as other relevant information. Systematic records of police interviews shall be kept.

51. The police shall be aware of the special needs of witnesses and shall be guided by rules for their protection and support during investigation, in particular where there is a risk of intimidation of witnesses.

52. Police shall provide the necessary support, assistance and information to victims of crime, without discrimination.

53. The police shall provide interpretation/translation where necessary throughout the police investigation.

*2. Arrest/deprivation of liberty by the police*

54. Deprivation of liberty of persons shall be as limited as possible and conducted with regard to the dignity, vulnerability and personal needs of each detainee. A custody record shall be kept systematically for each detainee.

55. The police shall, to the extent possible according to domestic law, inform promptly persons deprived of their liberty of the reasons for the deprivation of

their liberty and of any charge against them, and shall also without delay inform persons deprived of their liberty of the procedure applicable to their case.

56. The police shall provide for the safety, health, hygiene and appropriate nourishment of persons in the course of their custody. Police cells shall be of a reasonable size, have adequate lighting and ventilation and be equipped with suitable means of rest.

57. Persons deprived of their liberty by the police shall have the right to have the deprivation of their liberty notified to a third party of their choice, to have access to legal assistance and to have a medical examination by a doctor, whenever possible, of their choice.

58. The police shall, to the extent possible, separate persons deprived of their liberty under suspicion of having committed a criminal offence from those deprived of their liberty for other reasons. There shall normally be a separation between men and women as well as between adults and juveniles.

## **VI. Accountability and control of the police**

59. The police shall be accountable to the state, the citizens and their representatives. They shall be subject to efficient external control.

60. State control of the police shall be divided between the legislative, the executive and the judicial powers.

61. Public authorities shall ensure effective and impartial procedures for complaints against the police.

62. Accountability mechanisms, based on communication and mutual understanding between the public and the police, shall be promoted.

63. Codes of ethics of the police, based on the principles set out in the present recommendation, shall be developed in member states and overseen by appropriate bodies.

## **VII. Research and international co-operation**

64. Member states shall promote and encourage research on the police, both by the police themselves and external institutions.

65. International co-operation on police ethics and human rights aspects of the police shall be supported.

66. The means of promoting the principles of the present recommendation and their implementation must be carefully scrutinised by the Council of Europe.