

## LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND PUBLIC SECURITY: POSITION OF THE PUBLIC SECURITY IN THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL COMMITTEES OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENTS OF HUNGARY

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**Abstract:** Today, the public safety plays an increasingly important role in people's live and improving it more and more task falls to local governments. In the light of the above, the present paper examining the Hungarian situation tries to answer the following questions:

- to what extent is public safety present in the committee structures of the municipal councils in case of the local governments examined and how its situation changed after the 2014 municipal election?
- which factors influence the presence of public safety in the committee structure of municipal councils?.

**Key words:** public security, local governments, municipal council committee, Hungary

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### INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, good public security is listed among the fundamental rights, thus it is entitled for everybody who is the citizen of a democratic state. Consequently, from the point of view of most societies it is a question of fate how the public security situation develops especially in the light of the social and economic changes and processes taking place in the world during the past almost two decades which made the issue of public security to become even more determining (Sallai & Ritecz, 1996).

Achieving public security meeting the needs of the citizens is based on three pillars: state, local government and local population. The objectives to be obtained by the State (police) can become part of the local social policy only with the active involvement of the local governments and population (Tóth, 2007; Mátyás, 2011; Velez & Lyons, 2014). Many surveys found that the local population associates public security with the public security situation of their own habitats, and considers the public security and criminal situation of their wider environment, and even their country, on the basis of that (Salgó, 1995). It is essential, therefore, to improve the public security situation on the local level, and to increase the subjective sense of security of the population (Jármy, 2003). However, first of all that approach should be changed (both on the population and local government level) which claims that the maintenance and improvement of public security on the settlements lie solely with the police. The unfavourable criminal processes during the past few decades also confirmed it for certain that the criminal statistics could be improved only on those settlements where the local governments themselves took an active part in crime prevention. It is essential, therefore, that the local governments should provide both material and moral support (e.g. installation and operation of surveillance camera systems, supplement payment for the public order workers, provision of tied accommodation, infrastructural developments /cars, computers, renovation of buildings/ etc.) for the police. The local governments should also regard it as their duty to pay an important role in the maintenance and improvement of public security on the local level.

In Hungary the importance of the correlation between the local level of public security and the local governments is also shown by the fact that the related legislations deal with the topic on both sides. On the one hand, Act XXXIV of 1994 on the Police provides, *inter alia*, that for the establishment and elimination of police headquarters, border branches and other local police authorities and prior to the appointment of the head of police headquarters and other local police authorities, the Police should request the opinion of the municipal council of the local governments operated in the jurisdiction concerned (Árva et al., 2014).

On the other hand, the latest legislation concerning the local governments (Act CLXXXIX of 2011 on Local Governments in Hungary) states that participation in ensuring the public security of the settlements is the task of the local governments, and (which did not exist in the previous legislation /Act LXV of 1990 on Local Governments/) discusses the public security related tasks of the local governments in a separate section.

Within the local governments, the primary entitled body of the surveillance of public security – similarly to the other fields – is the municipal council which however may transmit some of its scope of duties and competencies to the committees established by it (Belányi et al., 2010). The scope of tasks and competencies is in most cases wider than their names might indicate nevertheless, we think that, to some extent, the name chosen reflects the system of preferences of the local government. In the majority of the cases, the municipal council created after the local elections considers new aspects (e.g. the system of preferences of the Government, the future situation of the budget) also in addition to the consideration of the earlier traditions when setting up the committees, and this fact – taking into account the local elections of Hungary in 2014 – also justifies the actuality of the survey.

In the spirit of the above, the analysis seeks answers to the following questions:

- how the presence of public security changed in the municipal council committees of the local governments after the local elections in 2014;
- what the most important characteristics of the appearance of public security in the committee structure are;
- which factors determine the presence of public security in the committee structure.

### **DATABASE AND METHODS APPLIED**

The settlements with more than 5 000 inhabitants in Hungary constituted the target group of the research (meaning 273 local governments in total). The necessary data were ensured by the Organisational and Operational Rules of the municipal council, in the absence of these the websites of the settlements and the records of the body of representatives were consulted. During the research four categories were set up on the basis of the size of the settlements chiefly due to the fact that the number of the members of the bodies of representatives differ according to the size of the settlements (Table 1). The expression “public security”, however, may be regarded only as a generic term since the names of the committees dealing with the topic vary greatly (e.g. public safety, police, crime prevention, public order, public order protection), and these are included in the survey. The collected data were organised in an Excel file and were analysed using the SPSS software.

**Table 1.** The number of elected representatives on the settlements with different sizes  
(Data source: Act L of 2010 on the Election of Local Municipality Representatives and Mayors)

<b>Number of inhabitants</b>	<b>Number of elected representatives</b>
5,001 – 10,000	8
10,001 – 25,000	11
25,001 – 50,000	14
over 50,001	minimum 17

### **PUBLIC SECURITY AND THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL COMMITTEES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS**

Analysing the data reveals (Table 2) that nowadays the municipal councils regard it important to include the expression “public security” in the names of the committees only to a limited extent: only less than 20% of the local governments participating in the survey had a committee with “public security” included in their names which means the 14<sup>th</sup> place in the ranking by sectors. The intensifying role of public security, however, is correctly reflected by the increasing proportions at the elections following the local elections in 2014 which could be detected in the case of only a limited number of sectors (Table 2 showing six).

The importance of the sectors is marked to a certain degree by the fact that a given area is dealt with a committee whose scope of tasks and competences consists of only that one sector, or the committee must deal with other areas as well. Looking at the consolidated data (Table 3), from among the three options analysed an approximately equal ratio can be found, and this situation has not changed significantly after the local elections in 2014 either. Analysing the position of public security, the picture is not too positive (Table 4): the sector belongs to the scope of tasks and competences of such committees which deal with at least two more areas.

**Table 2.** The representation of the sectors in the municipal council committee structure before and after the local elections in 2014 (the table contains only those sectors which were mentioned by at least 5% of the committees at the two given times, %)

(Data source: Organisational and Operational Rules of the local governments of the settlements concerned, records of the municipal councils and the websites of the settlements)

	before the local elections	after the local elections
finance	100.0	100,0
urban development	69.6	71.1
social	71.4	68.9
procedures	70.3	67.0
culture	64.5	60.8
sport	52.7	50.5
education	60.4	49.8
healthcare	52.0	46.2
economy	35.2	32.2
law	35.9	31.9
human	24.5	31.9
environmental protection	28.6	28.6
youth	25.6	24.9
public security	17.2	19.4
urban management	14.3	14.3
tourism	10.3	13.9
public procurement	10.6	9.5
proprietorship	9.2	8.8
agriculture	8.4	8.8
declaration of assets	7.0	7.3

**Table 3.** The most important elements of the municipal council committee structure on the studied settlements

(Data source: Organisational and Operational Rules of the local governments of the settlements concerned, records of the municipal councils and the websites of the settlements)

	A	B
proportion of committees dealing with only one sector/area	30.2	30.5
proportion of committees dealing with two sectors/areas	37.1	37.3
proportion of committees dealing with three or more sectors/areas	32.7	32.2

**Note:** A – period prior to the municipal elections in 2014, B – period following the municipal elections in 2014

**Table 4.** The presence of public security in the municipal council committee structure on the studied settlements

(Data source: Organisational and Operational Rules of the local governments of the settlements concerned, records of the municipal councils and the websites of the settlements)

	A	B
number and ratio of committees dealing only with public security	2 (4.3%)	2 (3.8%)
number and ratio of committees dealing with one more sector/area in addition to public security	13 (27.6%)	15 (28.3%)
number and ration of committees dealing with two or more sectors/areas in addition to public security	32 (68.1%)	36 (67.9%)

**Note:** A – period prior to the municipal elections in 2014, B – period following the municipal elections in 2014

In the spirit of the above, it is very interesting to look at the sectors with which the municipal council committees deal with in addition to public security (table 5). Looking at the complete committee structure, the first three places are occupied by procedures, law and environmental protection, besides them the topics of sport and urban development should be also highlighted. In the case of the committees dealing with only two topics, the predominance of procedures is clear, while in the case of those committees which deal with at least three sectors law also gets an important role. The outstanding significance of these two areas

can be mainly explained by the fact that people most often link the issue of public security/public order with law (legislation), and it is reflected in the correlation of the thematic areas (able 2 shows the highlighted role of procedures as opposed to law, and it is also reflected in their correlation with public security).

**Table 5.** Distribution of the thematic areas linked to public security on the studied settlements after the local elections in 2014 (%)  
(Data source: own data collection relying on the websites of the local governments concerned)

	A	B	C
procedures	47.1	53.3	44.4
law	33.3	13.3	41.7
environmental protection	15.7	20.0	13.9
sport	13.7	0.0	19.4
urban development	11.8	0.0	16.7
youth	9.8	0.0	13.9
culture	9.8	0.0	13.9
education	7.8	0.0	11.1
finance	5.9	0.0	8.3
equal opportunities	3.9	0.0	5.6
external relations	3.9	0.0	5.6
agriculture	3.9	0.0	5.6
social	3.9	0.0	5.6
civil	2.0	6.7	0.0
ethics	2.0	0.0	2.8
human	2.0	0.0	2.8
minority	2.0	0.0	2.8
tourism	0.0	6.7	0.0
urban management	2.0	0.0	2.8

**Note:** A – total number of settlements, B – local governments with committee structure dealing with public security together with another sector, C – local governments with committee structure dealing with public security together with two or more other sectors

**Table 6.** Composition of the municipal council committees during the period after the local elections in 2014 (ratios of the internal and external members; the Table includes those sectors where there are at least 15 committees)

(Data source: Organisational and Operational Rules of the local governments of the settlements concerned, records of the municipal councils and the websites of the settlements)

agriculture	1.47
environmental protection	1.50
tourism	1.50
civil	1.51
youth	1.51
public security	1.52
education	1.53
urban management	1.53
human	1.54
economics	1.55
culture	1.55
sport	1.55
health	1.57
social	1.57
urban development	1.57
finance	1.60
law	1.62
proprietorship	1.69
procedures	1.81
public procurement	1.85
declaration of assets	2.59
conflict of interests	2.63

One of the most important principles of public administration is democracy, one of its forms of appearance being the democracy of participation. In the case of the local governments it is manifested, inter alia, in the participation of the representatives of the population (or at least the experts of a given area) as external members in addition to the members of the municipal councils in the work of the committees. The issue is not regulated by legal acts, thus the municipal council is absolutely free to decide about the personal composition of the committees. Analysing the data (Table 6), the important role of professionalism can be observed: public security can be listed among those sectors where the involvement of external members is substantial.

### FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PRESENCE OF PUBLIC SECURITY

In respect of the factors influencing the presence of public security, the impacts of three elements were analysed:

- size of the settlement;
- number of crimes committed on the settlement;
- number of criminals linked to the settlement by place of residence.

Looking at the impact of the size of the settlements (Table 7) an absolutely obvious relationship may be observed: with the increase in the size of the settlements the ratio of those local governments gradually increases whose municipal council found it important to create a committee whose name contains "public security". It can be mainly explained by the fact that in the case of the bigger settlements the municipal councils have more members (Table 1) which consequently have the opportunity to cover more sectors.

**Table 7.** Presence of public security in the committee structures after the municipal elections in 2014 on the different settlement sizes (%)

(Data source: Organisational and Operational Rules of the local governments of the settlements concerned, records of the municipal councils and the websites of the settlements)

Settlement categories	A	B
5 001 – 10 000 inhabitants	10.6	12.1
10 001 – 25 000 inhabitants	23.2	22.1
25 001 – 50 000 inhabitants	21.4	32.1
over 50 001 inhabitants	27.8	38.9

**Note:** A – period prior to the municipal elections in 2014, B – period following the municipal elections in 2014

**Table 8.** Presence of public security in the committee structure on the areas variously infected from the aspect of criminal offences (number of crimes per one thousand inhabitants in 2013)

(Data source: Organisational and Operational Rules of the local governments of the settlements concerned, records of the municipal councils and the websites of the settlements)

	A	B	C
significantly infected (the value considerably exceeds the national average)	38.5	40.0	60.0
strongly infected (the value exceeds the national average)	27.0	40.0	60.0
moderately infected (the value is lower than the national average)	21.8	35.3	64.7
hardly infected (the value is significantly lower than the national average)	12.1	18.8	81.2

**Note:** A – the ratio of local governments indicating the label "public security" in the committee structure within the settlement category (%), B – the ratio of local governments with independent public security committee and the local governments handling public security with another sector within the category of local governments presenting the name public security in the committee structure (%), C – the ratio of local governments handling public security with two or more sectors within the category of local governments presenting the name public security in the committee structure (%)

Looking at the relative (per 1,000 inhabitants) number of crimes committed on the settlement, there is also an obvious relationship (table 8): on the settlements highly infected by crimes the appearance of public security is much more pronounced in the municipal council committee structure than on the less infected settlements. The closeness of the relationship is shown by the fact that while in the former category public security appears over the average in those committees which deal with only one other sector beside public security, while on the latter settlements those committees dominate whose scopes of tasks and competences include at least two other sectors.

No such close relationship can be detected from the aspect of the third test factor, the residence of the criminals (Table 9): the ratio of settlements having a committee dealing with public security (as well) is the highest in the case of the settlements with moderate criminal emitting settlements, and the ratio decreases into both directions.

**Table 9.** Relationship between the presence of public security in the committee structure and the residence of the criminals (number of criminals per one thousand inhabitants)

(Data source: Organisational and Operational Rules of the local governments of the settlements concerned, records of the municipal councils and the websites of the settlements)

	A	B	C
significant emitter (the value considerably exceeds the national average)	16.9	30.0	70.0
strong emitter (the value exceeds the national average)	19.7	38.5	61.5
moderate emitter (the value is lower than the national average)	25.3	32.0	68.0
poor emitter (the value is significantly lower than the national average)	10.2	20.0	80.0

**Note:** A – the ratio of local governments indicating the label “public security” in the committee structure within the settlement category (%), B – the ratio of local governments with independent public security committee and the local governments handling public security with another sector within the category of local governments presenting the name public security in the committee structure (%), C – the ratio of local governments handling public security with two or more sectors within the category of local governments presenting the name public security in the committee structure (%)

## CONCLUSIONS

The most important conclusions of the study can be summarised as it follows:

- When creating committees, the municipal councils of the local governments do not consider public security as a particularly important area; nevertheless, the significance of this sector increased after the municipal elections in 2014.
- As far as the committee structure is concerned, “public security” in most cases forms a joint committee with the areas of “procedures” and “law”.
- Due to the special subject, the ratio of external experts is very high in the committees.
- The appearance of public security in the municipal committee structure is mainly influenced by the size and criminal infectedness of the settlements.

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Submitted:  
April 2, 2015

Revised:  
April 28, 2015

Accepted:  
May 1, 2015

Published online:  
May 1, 2015