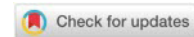


# COOPERATION OF THE POLICE AND PRIVATE SECURITY ON CRIME PREVENTION IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA – CURRENT STATE AND POSSIBILITIES

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**Abstract:** Crime prevention is focused on preventing the manifestation of certain forms of crime that endanger human rights and freedoms. Modern approaches to crime prevention are increasingly moving toward expanding the circle of entities (actors) responsible for preventing various forms of criminal behavior. In addition to state security bodies, the private security sector is playing an increasingly significant role in this regard. Due to the growing number of forms of crime and the limited capacity of the police to effectively counter them, the police, as the traditional state body responsible for crime prevention, are no longer able to perform this function independently. This has, among other things, led to the need for and emergence of private security as an additional form of protecting citizens and their property, as well as “filling the gap” in terms of the optimal state of security that the police could not fully achieve. One of the basic functions of private security is precisely prevention (of both crime and other forms of endangerment). Since the goals and functions of the police and private security are nearly identical, the need for mutual cooperation emerges as a logical outcome. The increasing presence of private security in practice, as well as the legal regulation of private security through the Law on Private Security in the Republic of Serbia, creates the need to adapt to new circumstances, primarily in terms of legal, organizational, and functional changes within the police, which ultimately should lead to the establishment of a public-private partnership. As one of the fundamental principles of the police and private security is legality, it is necessary to legally regulate the issue of cooperation. Therefore, in this paper, we will critically analyze theoretical approaches regarding the forms and areas of cooperation between the police and private security in the Republic of Serbia aimed at crime prevention. We will observe this through the lens of relevant positive legal sources (Law on Police 2016, Law on Private Security 2013 and accompanying bylaws) that regulate their work. Our goal is to describe, classify, and partially explain the various forms and areas of their cooperation, to identify certain challenges that hinder cooperation, and propose solutions to overcome these challenges. All of this should lead to the practical use of the capacities of both sectors in the best possible way when it comes to crime prevention.

**Keywords:** crime prevention, police, private security, police and private security cooperation, public-private partnership.

**Field:** Social sciences (Security studies and Law).

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The primary function of the security system is the timely detection and prevention of all forms of antisocial activities (Stajić, 2021: 42), including criminal activities. The increasing number and destructiveness of threats to the safety of citizens and their property have significantly influenced the involvement of the local community, citizens, and private security in the crime prevention process, alongside the police. The success of crime prevention largely depends on the lawful, coordinated, synchronized, and cooperative actions of the police and private security.

The cooperation between the police and private security has evolved through the improvement of their mutual relations, has a long history, and has not always been at the level it is today. It involves interaction and mutual support between private security and the police in crime prevention and should be planned, organized, continuous, legally regulated, and primarily based on the timely exchange of information (Radivojević, 2019: 172). Comparative studies indicate that operational cooperation and networking between the police and private security in crime prevention are imperative in modern society. Experience shows that various forms of collaboration between the police and private security have had a positive impact on crime reduction. Research also suggests that both the police and private security perceive their relationship as cordial and complementary, though sometimes unequal and competitive (Chinwokwu, 2018). Additionally, reduced interaction between the police and private security has been identified despite the advantages of cooperation in crime prevention (Wangara, 2024). Some research highlights the necessity of establishing organizational structures, coordination, and operational mechanisms for effective collaboration (Uzuegbu-Wilson, 2016). The relationship is also characterized

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by unsystematic and ad-hoc cooperation (case-by-case, occasional), with the police still considering themselves the superior and primary security provider, while private security is viewed as subordinate (Gerasimoski, 2013: 304).

The existing legal framework regulating the organization and operations of the police (the Law on Police from 2016 and accompanying bylaws) and private security (the Law on Private Security from 2013) in the Republic of Serbia should enable the establishment of mutual cooperation. In this regard, we will specifically analyze the relevant provisions to highlight certain issues, aiming to create legal assumptions for planned, continuous, and organized cooperation in the future. Of course, when legally regulating cooperation, it is essential to acknowledge that it is nearly impossible to anticipate all activities related to prevention in advance. Therefore, continuous monitoring of the implementation of existing regulations and their alignment with observed security needs and practical issues is necessary.

## 2. CRIME PREVENTION – CONCEPT, ACTORS AND ACTIVITIES

Crime prevention is understood as “the use of all measures and means to mobilize individuals, social groups, organizations, and institutions aimed at preventing occurrences that are not in accordance with criminal legislation and that, by their nature, cause harm to individuals, social groups, or society as a whole” (Krivokapić, 2002: 32). Similarly, crime prevention can be defined as “the practical activity of public and private entities, which, in accordance with applicable legal and ethical norms, is directed toward eliminating or reducing the negative influence of risk factors (individual, social, and situational) that may lead to the commission of a criminal offense and strengthening protective factors that may deter an individual from committing a crime...” (Vuković, 2020: 3). This clearly indicates that a broad range of societal actors participate in crime prevention, whose actions must be legally and ethically regulated. Additionally, there are numerous factors that may contribute to or prevent criminal acts. Based on the nature of the factors whose influence is to be mitigated or strengthened, crime prevention is theoretically classified into social and situational prevention. From the perspective of the role of the police and private security in crime prevention, situational prevention is particularly significant, as it encompasses a set of “measures and actions aimed at reducing opportunities and physical possibilities for committing a criminal offense” (Vuković, 2020: 195). To integrate the measures and actions of various actors for greater efficiency and effectiveness, cooperation between them is established.

Although the police still play the primary role in crime prevention, there is a noticeable trend of expanding the number of actors who also take on responsibility for planning, organizing, and implementing preventive measures. One such actor is private security, whose fundamental function is crime prevention through the provision of various security services (ZoPO 2013, Article 2). More specifically, private security today contributes to crime prevention by performing specialized protection tasks that were traditionally under the exclusive jurisdiction of state security agencies (police). These include migrant control (Gammeltoft-Hansen, 2016), domestic violence prevention (Harkin, Fitz-Gibbon, 2017), security at public gatherings, sports, and cultural events (Radivojević, 2016; Janković, 2020), critical infrastructure protection (Stajić, 2018), emergency response (Lončar, Radivojević, Radošević & Mirković, 2019), and others. All these activities align with the general trend of specialization within the private security sector, which will undoubtedly continue to develop alongside various forms of cooperation with the police in the future (Radivojević, 2017).

In modern conditions, the effectiveness of police work in crime prevention (ZoP 2016, Article 30) requires the police to establish cooperation with private security. Among the various types of collaboration, the most significant is cooperation based primarily on security and operational-professional tasks, as well as on improving work processes (Radivojević, 2019: 178). Security and operational-professional tasks include information exchange and mutual notification about security-relevant events and individuals, patrol activities, securing public gatherings, sporting events, critical infrastructure, cash and valuables transport, and more. Cooperation in improving work processes primarily involves the possibility of conducting joint training (in the previously mentioned security and operational fields), as well as the exchange and donation of equipment, devices, and resources to enhance task execution within their respective competencies. The growing presence of private security in ensuring the safety of individuals, property, and business operations, along with the tasks it performs (ZoPO 2013, Articles 6-7), represents a reality that necessitates legal, organizational, and functional changes within the police.

The expanding scope of police duties and responsibilities—including domestic violence interventions, the “School Police Officer” project, child internet safety, assistance in enforcement actions, compliance with court, prosecutorial, and other state authority orders, and various administrative tasks—combined with limited personnel, ongoing education, and time constraints, significantly impacts the organization and

execution of crime prevention efforts. The private security sector was originally conceived and designed to assist in detecting and preventing crime, particularly offenses against persons and property (Gerasimoski, 2013: 297). Moving away from the paradigm in which public security was exclusively the responsibility of the police, a “Copernican shift” is needed—where the police should “turn” toward private security. This shift can be achieved through collaboration in planning and organizing crime prevention efforts, particularly by leveraging the advantages of private security, which include a large workforce (as of 2023, 37,510 individuals were employed in private security in Serbia, according to the Chamber of Commerce, 2023, 17), extensive coverage of secured areas, advanced equipment, specialized training, and more (Radivojević, 2019).

### **3. COOPERATION BETWEEN THE POLICE AND PRIVATE SECURITY IN CRIME PREVENTION IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA – CURRENT STATE AND POSSIBILITIES FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

The relationships between the police and private security in the Republic of Serbia have evolved significantly, moving from independence and competition to cooperation (Radivojević, 2015). The results of certain empirical studies indicate that the mutual relationships between private security personnel and police officers are satisfactory. In this regard, private security personnel view these relationships more positively, holding a very favorable opinion and high regard for the police and its members, whereas police officers perceive these relationships more negatively (Janković, Cvetković, Milojević & Ivanović, 2022; Janković & Cvetković, 2022). This certainly affects the possibility of establishing mutual cooperation in crime prevention. One of the key prerequisites for this shift is that the police recognize and acknowledge the role of private security in crime prevention.

Recognizing the role of private security in crime prevention is primarily reflected in the clearly defined positions and facts presented in various strategic and other policy documents regulating police operations. The Strategic Public Safety Assessment (2017) states that one of the police’s priorities will be the “full implementation of the Law on Private Security, so that the private security sector in the coming period becomes a partner to the police in maintaining citizen and property security, as well as in preserving public order and peace” (Strategic Assessment 2017: 10, 126). Additionally, the Strategic Public Safety Assessment for 2022-2025 highlights that “one of the reasons for the continuous decline in property crimes is the increasing implementation of physical and technical security measures in business and other facilities” (Strategic Assessment 2021: 57). Moreover, Threat Assessment of Serious and Organized Crime notes that the declining trend in robbery offenses, particularly in establishments handling large amounts of cash, will continue. This trend is attributed to the growing application of physical and technical security measures and systems for facility protection (Assessment 2024: 77).

As the limited scope of this paper does not allow for an analysis and description of all forms and areas of cooperation between the police and private security, we will focus on those considered the most important by the authors. Based on mutual relations and experiences in other countries, cooperation between the police and private security in crime prevention should primarily be reflected in: 1) the exchange of information and mutual notification, 2) the coordination of fieldwork and 3) possibilities for joint engagement in performing tasks within their jurisdiction.

The exchange of information and mutual notification form the foundation of the police’s success in crime prevention. The systematic observation, collection, processing, and utilization of security data serve to predict (assess) future changes in the environment. Of particular importance to the police are security data that act as indicators, as well as data that reveal trends in security conditions, occurrences, and events (Stevanović & Stajić, 2015: 183). Based on the collected and processed data, it is possible to plan and make decisions regarding crime prevention activities (such as police operations in the security sector, planning patrol police activities, etc.). An analysis of police regulations shows that there is no explicit mention of the necessity of exchanging information with private security, though this does not mean such exchanges do not occur informally in practice. The primary reason for involving private security in the information-gathering chain is based on the fact that “when more people know what to observe and how to report their observations to police organizations, the likelihood of collecting information that can be used to prevent crimes increases” (Šebek, 2014: 132-133). The previously mentioned comparative advantages of private security indicate that it is a significant partner for the police in gathering information. Therefore, the police should take the initiative in involving private security in the information collection process. This is further supported by the police intelligence model (ZoP 2016, Article 34) as a method of conducting operations. On the other hand, the police should also share information with private security, particularly regarding potential threats to individuals, property, and the business operations of legal entities

that private security serves (for the purpose of security assessments), while respecting legal restrictions. What specific information will be shared depends on the particular case, as well as the “requests” made by private security to the police (Radivojević, 2019: 180-181).

The necessity of coordinating mutual efforts arises from the very nature of crime prevention by both the police and private security. One of the fundamental forms of regular police activity that contributes to crime prevention is work within the (security) sector, whether understood in its traditional form or its modern interpretation as part of the broader concept of community policing (Ristović, 2021; Instruction, 2020). Security sector tasks are carried out by officers from general and traffic police units through beat (foot) patrols, operational activities, traffic control and regulation, and other duties. The concept of community policing is primarily focused on preventive police action, requiring the establishment of new relationships (partnerships) with citizens and the community (local government units, neighborhood associations, residential and commercial complex representatives, etc.), which also includes private security—whether contracted or self-provided (ZoPO 2013, Article 2). The most important components of community policing are community partnerships and problem-oriented policing. Recognizing that numerous security issues at the local level cannot be resolved solely by police actions necessitates joint efforts with private security. Joint and coordinated work, shared resources (intellectual, material, and financial), and joint responsibility lead to proactive measures. Problem-oriented policing further supports this by fostering an interactive approach between the police and private security in identifying and resolving specific security issues in local areas (Nikač, 2014: 49-50). However, certain challenges exist in implementing community policing and crime prevention programs. These include: issues within the police (reluctance to adopt new organizational structures and work methods, professional standards, and value systems); insufficient cooperation and coordination between the police and other governmental and societal entities (especially private security); and the lack of a legal framework mandating cooperation between the police and all other community actors (Nikač, 2014: 143-146).

Some of these issues can also be identified in our legal acts. The ideas of the community policing concept first appeared in the Law on Police (ZoP) from 2005. The new ZoP from 2016 explicitly mentions “community policing” in Chapter IV of the law under the title “Organization and Competencies of the Police” (ZoP 2016, Article 27). Regarding the cooperation established by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MUP), the ZoP 2016 stipulates that the MUP cooperates with other state authorities and the local community, while cooperation with non-state entities (which include private security entities) is not even mentioned (ZoP 2016, Articles 15-21).

The Ordinance on the Manner of Performing Certain Police Duties (PoPPP) from 2018 further elaborates on the provisions of the Law on Police (ZoP 2016). Although this rulebook also does not explicitly mention private security as a partner to the police in crime prevention and community safety enhancement, certain provisions implicitly suggest cooperation. Specifically, crime prevention programs and action plans addressing events and phenomena that endanger the community generally include: an assessment of the situation; planned activities; responsible entities; established long-term and short-term goals; priorities; internal and external resources for implementation; methods of cooperation and coordination of activities; timeframes for execution; methods, deadlines, and measurable indicators for evaluating the results of undertaken measures and activities. These programs and action plans are aligned with the annual, monthly, and other police work plans (PoPPP, Article 7). The rulebook further stipulates that cooperation and partnerships in the community are realized in two ways: by supporting the work of advisory security bodies at the level of local government units or territorial autonomy and by concluding agreements with other entities (at the national, regional, or local level) for the implementation of preventive programs and action plans. The police support the work of advisory bodies through information exchange and resource sharing in taking measures and activities to resolve security issues and create favorable security conditions in local communities. On the other hand, cooperation agreements, based on the ZoP and other regulations, define methods of cooperation, procedures, obligations, responsibilities, resource utilization, duration, and other relevant aspects of the specific cooperation. It can be assumed that private security may also be included in these agreements. Such agreements can be concluded by the head of an organizational unit at the headquarters or the chief of the police administration, with the approval of the police director and the minister’s consent. When carrying out activities within advisory security bodies or under cooperation agreements, the police may exchange information and data except for those protected by law. All financial and other material resources of local government units or other police partners may be used only after completing the prescribed financial and material-business procedures (PoPPP, Article 8). These provisions provide a solid foundation for developing police-private security cooperation and partnerships. It remains to be seen whether these provisions will be effectively implemented in practice and whether the development of partnerships with private security will depend solely on the willingness

of police leadership.

When it comes to joint engagement in task execution, it is most prevalent in the field of securing public gatherings and sports events (Radivojević, 2016; Radivojević, 2019), as well as in the increasingly present activities related to school security. This has certainly been influenced by the legal framework regulating these areas of cooperation. Additionally, opportunities for establishing cooperation should also be directed toward addressing issues related to urban security. Namely, the increase in property and violent crime in urban areas requires new approaches to their prevention within the framework of situational crime prevention. These approaches are based on the redesign of public spaces and greater involvement (engagement) of private security agencies (Stajić, 2015). The justification for involving private security into joint engagement in task execution lies in the fact that private security officers are more present in the field when securing shopping centers, financial institutions (banks, exchange offices), schools, municipal and city buildings, critical infrastructure etc. Additionally, private security plays a significant role in conducting patrol activities (through the patrol team) when securing specific facilities or areas (ZoPO 2013, Articles 3, 44).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Crime prevention aims to influence the future by taking specific measures in the present. It is essential to recognize the potential of both sectors, utilize them rationally, and achieve the highest possible level of effectiveness and efficiency. One of the fundamental forms of cooperation between the police and private security in crime prevention in Republic of Serbia is the exchange of data and information, as well as coordinated field activities and joint activities. These should be encouraged, with the primary responsibility resting on the managers of both sectors. The vast amount of data and information that private security collects daily in the course of its work can and should be of mutual benefit when planning and organizing future crime prevention activities.

Respecting the aforementioned points, as well as the legally established activities of private security, it is evident that police and private security activities are complementary. This complementarity serves as the foundation for establishing cooperation. Since private security officers are present in security sector areas 24/7, it is necessary to coordinate mutual activities. Through patrol and beat (foot) duties, police officers can establish direct contact with private security officers, collecting relevant data and information within their assigned areas. At the same time, they can familiarize security officers with the security situation in the sector, enabling them to perform their duties more effectively. Additionally, besides the existing ones, joint activities that will expand in the future will serve the purpose of further developing and enhancing cooperation.

Future directions in crime prevention will certainly be shaped by new relations between the police and private security, which should focus on changing perceptions and fostering mutual respect (primarily from the police toward private security). It is essential to recognize that private security will never replace the police in protecting people and property but will always serve as a supplementary force. On the other hand, the police must acknowledge that it is first among equals. If private security is professional, trained, skilled, well-equipped, and possesses a high level of security culture, it will be a valuable partner to the police and, consequently, to society as a whole. To achieve this, the legal framework for private security must be further adapted to modern security theory and practice. At the same time, the police need certain changes in both organizational structure and operational functioning, accompanied by shifts in organizational culture. Awareness of the significance and role of private security as a partner in crime prevention must be a priority, and all levels of police management are responsible for this. A significant contribution to these efforts will come from the development and implementation of new and updated academic programs at higher education institutions that study police-private security cooperation in crime prevention. This includes police education and training curricula (such as those at the University of Criminal Investigation and Police Studies, law and security faculties, the Secondary School of Internal Affairs, and various specialized courses) as well as training programs for private security personnel—not just the basic training required for licensing but also advanced professional and specialized training programs.

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