

Evaluatie Politiewet 2012 in de Eenheid Oost-Nederland en landelijke thema's

Eindrapportage



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Summary

At the request of the commission 'Evaluatie Politiewet 2012', the Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University, conducted an evaluation of the functioning of the Police Unit East-Netherlands (Eenheid Oost-Nederland). In addition, the nationally relevant themes with respect to 'the role of the corps chef', 'the use of the right to appoint', and the 'construction of the police force as a separate legal entity' were included in the evaluation at the request of the minister of Security and Justice of the Netherlands.

The goal of the evaluation is to gain insights into the consequences of the implementation of the national police for the Unit East-Netherlands. The main question of the research can be formulated as, "What is the current state of the implementation of the national police in East-Netherlands?" The results should provide insights into whether the police reform is working in the way the legislator intended for all relevant stakeholders.

The evaluation was carried out in four phases over seven months and was based on a constructivist approach in order to do justice to the multitude of potential perspectives and experiences among the various actors. The decision to adopt a constructivist approach is indicative of the fact that we as researchers understand that every actor has his or her own perspective on the current situation, and that every researcher has his or her own view regarding the research. By taking a multidisciplinary approach, combining expertise from business, management, organisational psychology, social psychology and criminology, and by incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, we ensure that our study takes such differences between stakeholders regarding their perception and appreciation of and interest in the new organisation into account.

A total of 77 interviews were conducted using a semi-structured protocol. The quotes presented in the report were selected as representative of the majority opinion. In case of clearly diverging opinions, this is marked accordingly. Where possible, we combined quantitative and qualitative data. The results of the evaluation reveal the following general picture.

The majority of respondents agree that the national police is a necessity. No one denies that the integrated, centralised management structure has considerable advantages. This is notwithstanding the fact that the national police undergoes a tremendous reorganisation, in which many respondents feel that (too) much is expected in (too) little time with (too) limited resources. Furthermore, it has been underestimated how complex the reorganisation and how big the impact would be on police personnel, while the police work had to continue as before. This – in a nutshell – is the assessment that we found across all levels of the police organisation and all stakeholders groups.

According to the respondents, operational effectiveness increased. It has become easier to bring experts together, it is possible to respond more quickly to new developments in crime (such as radicalisation), and it has become easier to up- and downscale police activities (see for example the "Zwarte Cross festival"). Also, in the area of High Impact Crime (HIC) a broader range of interventions is available, since it has become more commonplace to communicate across units and to exchange best-practices.

Respondents indicate that the centralized organizational structure has led to more efficient and more intelligent procedures and a more uniform delivery of services. One advantage, among others, is that innovations that had been planned for some time (e.g., complaint management) are implemented more easily, as they can now be 'pushed through' centrally.

The new way of dealing with complaints is well received by both police and external respondents. However, there is still a lack of systematic consequences from complaints. Improvements in this area might help to increase the learning potential of the organisation.

In general, citizen satisfaction and perceived safety are rated higher in East-Netherlands than in the rest of the Netherlands. Ratings reported in the 'Veiligheidsmonitor' about the quality of life are also higher for East-Netherlands than the country average. The scores of East-Netherlands as well as the scores for the whole of Netherlands remained stable between 2012 and 2014. The nation-wide decline in the dilapidation of public space and social problems can also be found in the Unit East-Netherlands. It is thus likely that the implementation of the national police has not had a negative impact on these measures in the Unit East-Netherlands. At least, the scores in the 'Veiligheidsmonitor' do not support the apprehension about possible problems due to the large size of the region.

The practical implementation of the position of regional mayor ('regioburgemeester') is satisfying, although different parties point towards the complexity of the position given the large geographical size of the region and the lack of formal (administrative) authority. Creating a second Regional Information Centrum ('Regionaal Informatie Centrum', RIEC) and a second ZSM-case table in the Unit East-Netherlands might partially mitigate some of the objections related to the current size of the region.

The previously mentioned national themes are closely connected to each other. The law has only recently been enacted, and it is therefore difficult to measure informal pressures or expectations by police for political agendas. The findings for these three themes need to be seen as preliminary. Hence, for the present no firm conclusions can be drawn yet. It is therefore advisable to (let) conduct additional research on this topic.

According to respondents, the up-scaling of police efforts has led to an expansion of the operational capacity for the Zwarte Cross Festival. Still, the broader possibilities for deployment of police officers should be considered that awareness of the local context needs to be stimulated. Our respondents also perceived improvements in the approach against radicalisation and HIC-crimes in the Unit East-Netherlands due to the introduction of the national police. Especially shorter lines of communication, improved information exchange and more intensive collaboration between various police levels and police and external partners lead to more efficient processes. Attention should be given to increasing expertise and networks as well as to the tension between regional and national priorities and to the freedom and flexibility to act at the local level.

Other areas to consider are the implications of the more centralised management structure for the authority of the mayor. Time will have to tell to what extent (regional) mayors experience difficulties in fulfilling their role as local authority within the framework of centralised decision making. We recommend that these developments are monitored closely. The centralized organisation of the Public Prosecutor's Office and the police could lead to an upward-directed view within the police hierarchy. Some mayors fear that next to the centralised organisation of the Public Prosecutor's Office national deliberation structures will dominate decision making when it comes to prioritizing administrative issues. This could further limit their local authority. Representatives of the local governing bodies in Unit East-Netherlands thus fear that, due to their closer link with the minister, the four largest municipalities – Rotterdam, Amsterdam, The Hague and Utrecht – will be able to influence agendas and priorities more easily than smaller municipalities. Finally, attention should be given to the tension between centralisation and localisation regarding the uniformity of rules and procedures on the one hand and the required local flexibility on the other.

An important cause for negative reactions surrounding the implementation of the national police is the reorganisation of the labour force (LFNP). The assignment of new functions within the national police and the description of functional profiles within the LFNP run parallel to the implementation of the national police. These two separate processes are seen as *one* change process. The delays in the LFNP-process and the disappointments surrounding the assignment of people to new (or the same) positions have caused considerable concerns for police staff, but also for external stakeholders.

Organizational change fatigue is inherent in long-lasting change processes; yet, feelings of frustration and cynicism can have negative consequences long-term and should therefore not be underestimated. Especially for an authority such as police, it is important to protect the internal motivation as well as the internal and external trust placed in the organisation. The potential consequences of unrest within the police for its ability to perform and for the trust of citizens are considerable.

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