Abstract

Police reform in post-conflict environments is a complex process. Besides the key importance of the police in providing law and order and thus in re-establishing a secure environment in the period following the cessation of hostilities, (re-)building police institutions also ignites the process of reconstructing the state apparatus, as newly formed government institutions start to take shape in the aftermath of war. This process of state reconstruction is thus part of a broader transition from war to peace as well as of socio-economic recovery, which becomes an immense undertaking. This is due not only to the scale of financial and human resources needed for the reconstruction process, but also to the fact that in this process, conflict legacies, including deep-rooted motives that led to the violence in the first place, need to be overcome as part of the post-conflict transition.
Against this background, this PhD thesis analyses the implementation of police
reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1995-present) (thereafter Bosnia), with a
focus on the sustainability of the reform. The notion of sustainability is
important in this context because it determines the reform’s overall success.
Bosnia presents itself as a very pertinent case to analyse the sustainability of
police reform since its implementation proved to be one of the most challenging
tasks for Bosnia’s post-conflict reconstruction. This was mainly due to the
persistent resistance of local political elites and the failure of international
assistance to advance the reform’s completion. Although various reform
alternatives were tested, they did not manage to unlock the pace of the reform
and achieve more than minor progress, which in itself has been insufficient to
complete the implementation of police reform to date.

Drawing on the literature on post-conflict reconstruction, the thesis develops a
general theoretical model for sustainable police reform in post-conflict countries,
which it applies empirically to Bosnia’s specific context. The resulting analysis
provides a deeper insight into the reform’s evolution together with the obstacles
encountered in this context. Here, the thesis generally finds that the
implementation of police reform in Bosnia has only partially advanced towards
the final goal of sustainability. Overall, this is explained by the lack of political
will of local elites to support further reform progress. While this lack of political
will is rooted in elite concerns with not losing influence over the police, it is also
an expression of an unfinished post-conflict reconciliation and statebuilding
process in Bosnia.