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## PECULIARITIES AND CHALLENGES OF MEDIA AND POLICE COOPERATION

**Gabija GRIGAITYTĖ**

*Mykolas Romeris University  
Maironio str. 27, LT 44211 Kaunas, Lithuania  
E-mail: gabija.grigaityte@gmail.com,  
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-9298-1704*

**Rasa DOBRŽINSKIENĖ**

*Mykolas Romeris University  
Maironio str. 27, LT 44211 Kaunas, Lithuania  
E-mail: rasa.dobrzinskiene@mrui.eu  
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-6590-4164*

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**Abstract.** *The cooperation between media and police leads the public to receive the information about criminal events in the country, learns about police reforms and other important events related to police work. The relationship between the media and the police in today's Lithuania is very little examined and analyzed. Taking all of that into account, it was decided to examine the statements of police representatives to the media and journalists to discuss, from personal experience, the cooperation between the two institutions represented by the subjects.*

*Therefore the object of article is the relationship of media and police cooperation. The purpose of the article is to analyze the aspects of media and police cooperation. Objectives of the research are: to reveal the basic information publishing principles of the media; to discuss the main legal acts regulating police cooperation with the media; assessing the attitudes of police spokespersons and journalists towards the aspects of mutual cooperation, to reveal the peculiarities and the challenges of it.*

*The cooperation between the media and the police is assessed as good enough, but there is a clear mutual criticism, which indicates that there are difficulties in their cooperation. Problems arise when police spokespersons avoid providing information to journalists and journalists obsessively demand this information. It is proposed to solve the problems by fostering mutual respect and goodwill, realizing each other's needs. The fact that the information provided by police officers to journalists is distorted is not obvious, but noticeable. This discrepancy in real information stems from gaps in police-media cooperation, with police officers refraining from providing detailed information on a specific crime and journalists lacking the information provided and relying on unconfirmed data. However, according to spokespersons of the police, cooperation with the media brings more benefits to the police than harm. According to them, the improvement of the image of the police is related to the information published in the media, which forms a positive image of the police.*

**Keywords:** *media, relationship, police, cooperation, police spokespersons, journalists.*

### Introduction

The public learns about the police activities, get the knowledge and reviews of the criminal world from the media. So the media's relationship with the police is crucial in order to obtain the most accurate information possible and to inform the public in a timely and accurate manner. The police must have an interest in providing journalists with as much complete, accurate and objective information as possible, in accordance with the law and thus contributing to public education. And the media must comply with all the principles and functions of informing the public, as well as the legal framework, in cooperation with the police and in disseminating relevant information. The question therefore arises as to the challenges of police and media co-operation in educating the public on criminal issues.

The item of police-media cooperation aspect is not widely analysed in the scientific literature. There is a lack of in-depth analysis on the current tendencies of journalists' communication with law enforcement institutions in Lithuania.

In this context, the **subject** of the article is the relationship between media and police cooperation.

The **purpose** of the article is to analyze the aspects of media and police cooperation.

The **tasks** of the article are:

1. To reveal the basic information publishing principles of the media.
2. To discuss the main legal acts regulating police cooperation with the media.
3. Assessing the attitudes of police spokespersons and journalists towards the aspects of mutual cooperation, to reveal the peculiarities and the challenges of it.

**Methods** used in the article: analysis of scientific literature, method of document analysis, method of data collection of qualitative research - interview, descriptive-interpretive analysis.

### **Basic theoretical and legal principles of information disclosure**

Journalists, by providing prompt information, help the public to publish information about the current situation, as well as to create a more comprehensive picture of the whole world, ensuring a careful issue. When collecting and presenting information to people, journalists must follow certain rules and norms that oblige them to do their job honestly and to portray national and world news fairly and realistically.

According to L. Bielinis (2005), it can be stated the media not only informs the society about current news, but also establishes the audience's perception that such an opinion about reality is correct and necessary, may be a misconception. In this way, the media creates reality and becomes the main guarantor of the reality of phenomena and images provided to the public. L. Bielinis (2005) distinguishes three levels of media impact on society:

1. Cognitive - which directly provides attitudes, names values and captures an understanding of a phenomenon (situation).
2. Affective - which forms a feeling of anxiety or joy, fear or appeasement, affects moral judgments and wants to identify or distance oneself from the object being described.
3. Behaviors - activation or suspension of activities, provocation of specific actions.

This article highlights the second level in order to assess media and police cooperation and the importance of this cooperation to society. Discussing the affective level of the media's influence on society, it's distinguished the power of the media, its ability to influence the society by publishing all kinds of current affairs, which one of them is criminal news. The publishing a large amount of information about various crimes in the country interests the public by criminals, but at the same time forms a sense of anxiety through negative and bad news. Makes you interested in one or another problem, delves into it more specifically too. L. Bielinis (2005) also highlights one of many functions of the media – “to direct public opinion towards the necessary problems.” This feature proves that the media can easily manipulate people and stimulate interest in specific issues and prevailing topics, seemingly forgetting other issues and pushing them aside. Another, also important, function of the media, which the author emphasizes, is "changing and neutralizing the parameters of the facts". This function states that the media has a significant influence on a person's perception of the environment, current phenomena and specific events.

The public reads, listens to and watches the news because they want to know what is happening in the world and in the country. The news depicts the reality of today in relation to

a particular issue, event, or process. The audience has to be interested in what they read. In his opinion, journalists have to know the needs of society, to present the current, new and "hot" event at the moment when the public has the most questions about a particular event or phenomenon. Therefore, the news published at the right time will always be interesting and will attract the most people who read, listen to and watch it. The journalist also claims that many medias publish new and relevant news, but in order to interest the audience, the relevant news needs to be expanded, described in more detail and presented informatively. When the news is relevant, interesting and informative, it receives a lot of public interest. This idea is also shared by David Randall (2005), who categorizes news value factors as specific – the factors that make up the relevant facts under discussion, and the general ones – that can be called subjective factors in the value of news. Making every decision, no matter how journalists try professionally to select topics, is inseparable from society's personal attitude. Some may find relevant news about sports, others criminal. Such a factor is natural, acceptable, and does not cause any controversy until journalists begin to distort objective truth by inserting their opinions and embellishments of real truth in order to engage the audience.

In these times of technology it is important that information provided by the media to the general public, which can only see it as soon as it is disseminated on online portals, is published in accordance with all the rules and principles laid down in the media. These principles are described not only in the scientific literature but also in legislation. According to Liudvika Meškauskaitė (2018), the principles of public information are “the general principles of law (basic provisions) enshrined in the legal acts regulating the legal relations of public information, which determine the development of the branch of media law.” The rule of law is, in other words, in ways that clearly define the boundaries of the entity's activities. When it is discussing the legal environment for journalism, the main sources of public information law should be identified. These sources are laws, in particular, which protect the rights of media users, regulate the interests of media workers, and ensure the transparency and accessibility of information provided to the public (Mažylė, 2012).

The item 25 of the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania (Lietuvos Respublikos Konstitucija) provides that a person has the right to have his or her convictions and to express them freely. People must not be prevented from seeking, receiving and disseminating information and ideas. However, the freedom to express one's beliefs and disseminate information is incompatible with criminal acts such as incitement and defamation of national, racial, religious or social hatred, coercion and discrimination. Freedom of expression, together with the prohibition of mass censorship of information enshrined in item 44 of the Constitution, is a fundamental condition for the existence of free journalism. But at the same time, it is argued that freedom of the media is not absolute, as any negative content is restricted and misinformation is prohibited.

In addition to the Constitution, a law of great importance to the media is the Law on Public Information of the Republic of Lithuania (Lietuvos Respublikos visuomenės informavimo įstatymas). This law is the main source of law governing the provision of information to the public, defining the right to receive and impart information, to express one's beliefs freely, and to protect the honor and dignity of natural and legal persons when inaccurate information is disseminated. The Law on Public Information states that “the duty of the mass media to deny published untrue information that degrades the honor and dignity of a natural person or violates the business reputation of a legal person, the conditions for denying such information, and the procedure is established by the norms of the Civil Code“.

The Civil Code is the main codified legislation, the provisions of which are relevant not only to the media but also to media consumers. The Second Book of the Civil Code stipulates

that if inaccurate data has been disseminated through the media, the person about whom the data has been disseminated has the right to draw up a denial and request that the media publish the denial. The Civil Code also obliges the person who published the incorrect information to compensate for the damage caused to the person about whom the misinformation was disseminated. „A media outlet that disseminates degrading and untrue information must compensate for the material and non-material damage caused to the persona.“ (Civilinis kodeksas). This means that the law protects the rights of media users and provides for liability for violation of those rights.

It is also important to look at the legal provisions that guide the police and the media in their cooperation with each other. The Law on the Police of the Republic of Lithuania states that the police shall co-operate with producers and disseminators of public information in accordance with the procedure established by laws and other legal acts. Thus, police cooperation is clearly enshrined in legal acts. The order and methods of police institutions providing information to the media are determined and its form, content and competence of the representatives providing information to the press are regulated by the Order of the Commissioner General of the Lithuanian Police “Approving the Regulation on Provision of Information to Producers and Distributors of Public Information” („Dėl informacijos teikimo viešosios informacijos rengėjams ir platintojams reglamento patvirtinimo“). According to this order, the main objectives of police cooperation with the media can be identified: *to implement the public's right to information; to ensure the publicity of the activities of police institutions; to encourage society to contribute to crime prevention; to create and maintain a positive image of the police.*

These objectives should be pursued in order to ensure high-quality, good and smooth communication with the media. It is also in line with these objectives that the police are encouraged to use the media not only to ensure the publicity of police activities, but also to encourage the public to contribute to speeding up the detection or prevention of crime. Police officers, in cooperation with the media, must not only report on criminal incidents, but also regularly talk about crime prevention, and encourage the public to report on crimes being planned or committed, as well as suspects. This idea is supported by the provision in item 11 of the Police Law that the police shall pay special attention to cooperation with the public in order to provide mutual assistance and the participation of members of the public in ensuring public order, personal and public safety. Police cooperation with the public is facilitated by the media, which can publish not only news on the criminal world on online portals, in newspapers or on radio and television, but also educate the public about policing, good work and encourage people to contribute to policing to create a safe environment.

The Law of the Police, as well as other laws already mentioned above, mentions cases where the police must inform and provide the media with detailed information on: the circumstances of criminal incidents, various events organized by the police that promote public confidence in the police, and publicity, plans and prospects. It should be noted that the police, when informing the public and state and municipal institutions about their activities, may not violate the interests of the individual and society protected by law. Therefore, the Law of the Police stipulates that the police may not disclose information that is a state, service, commercial, industrial or banking secret, except as required by law. It is also stated that information obtained in the course of official activities that would violate the presumption of innocence, harm human dignity or security, legitimate interests of natural and legal persons, prevent, ensure the detection, detection or commission of criminal offenses or administrative offenses may not be published.

Therefore, both when providing information to the media and when trying to obtain information about criminal incidents, the police must comply with the objectives of cooperation under the law and be aware of the legal requirements for the disclosure or non-disclosure of certain information. And both police officers and journalists would be held liable for ignorance of regulation and non-compliance with legal norms.

### **Analysis of the relationship between police and media cooperation**

The main goal of the empirical study is to evaluate the communication aspects of the media and the police, based on the opinion of journalists and police representatives. In order to assess the peculiarities of police and media cooperation, a qualitative research method was chosen - a survey of open questions of target groups was conducted. The interviewees are experts in their field - police representatives for the media and journalists on law enforcement and criminal issues. This method is useful in that "the collected qualitative data (information) does not reveal facts and statistics, but experience, meanings, processes". It is important for the study to clarify the main aspects of police and media cooperation, which are revealed on the basis of the respondents' answers to open-ended questions. The content analysis method was chosen to analyze the results of the study. This method was used to analyze the responses to the research surveys and to identify the main ideas of the respondents' responses. The main ideas were grouped and summarized to describe the results obtained.

Two target groups of study participants have been identified:

1. Journalists. The study involved 4 respondents from different Lithuanian news portals with 3 to 30 years of experience. The work of all journalists involved in the investigation is related to the coverage of criminal news and law enforcement issues in the media.

2. Representatives of territorial police authorities providing information to the media. 7 subjects from the Chief Police Commissariats of different Lithuanian cities with 1 to 20 years of experience participated in the study.

The survey conducted an electronic survey of open-ended questions. This type of survey method was chosen because "it is performed at a convenient time and place for the respondent, which allows for better consideration of the answers." from respondents' work practices. A separate questionnaire was developed for both target groups. Journalists and police officers were assured of the confidentiality of their personal data in order to obtain the most open answers possible. The revealing of the peculiarities of the co-operation is primarily aimed at finding out how the communication between journalists and police representatives takes place.

Police officers were asked about their cooperation with the media as police officers. Representatives of the police pointed out that communication takes place by various means, most often noting that information is transmitted by e-mail, telephone, there are also physical meetings, interviews, and comments are requested at the scene. The majority of respondents to the survey say that police and media communication takes place on a daily basis, and police officers can be reached 24 hours a day: "I have to communicate with the media every day. Every day's work begins with the provision of summaries of the police's daily events to the media. "I work with the media directly and indirectly, through various means and methods of communication (oral, written, physical meetings)."

However, this statement that police and media cooperation is ongoing is contradicted by journalists, whose experience shows that contact with police is sometimes difficult. Police communications departments are said to be open until 5 pm, after this time there are difficulties in obtaining information: "Minor events often make it difficult to get information after work hours and on weekends, who are often reluctant to cooperate and offer to wait until the next day



or Monday for the information to be provided by the representatives.” All journalists involved in the investigation point to the fact that police officers are very reluctant to communicate and are closed, refusing to disclose information even after the pre-trial investigation. However, this is not the case for all police officers. It is therefore not possible to state unequivocally that the entire police communication department is indifferent to informing the public, as this depends on the police themselves personally.

And by analogy, the police also highlight the problems of cooperation with the media: too much and extremely intrusive media interest in the details of the incident; "Of course, there are members of the media who use aggressive attack tactics to invade their premises when they arrive." In doing so, journalists violate the principle of humanism discussed in the theoretical part, which provides for respect not only for the reader, the listener and the viewer, but also for the colleagues with whom they have to cooperate, in this case the police. Journalists demand that information be provided to them as quickly and as fully as possible, trying to extract all the facts and details of the incident, which police officers cannot publish while the pre-trial investigation is underway. Police say the disclosure of pre-trial investigation data could jeopardize the outcome of the case, and is strictly refusing to provide such information to the media. However, the excessive interest of the media and the desire to engage the public in disclosing the circumstances of an incident is a common occurrence: But media ratings are forcing them to search for "Sensation," according to a police spokesman.

However, most people think that today's media is much more cultured than it was 10 years ago: "there used to be attempts - 'Give something you can't tell others', but now it's no longer the case." years of experience in this field, says that cooperation with the media has really improved and changed for the better. Cooperation with the media is based on the principle of equality, which requires that no exceptions be made to the provision of information. Consequently, all journalists should receive information at the same time and in the same way, no one is given any privileges. However, there are differences of opinion between police officers and journalists. According to journalists, the situation is somewhat different. Highlighting the main sources of information, they mention that one of the sources in their work is dating in law enforcement. Journalists say acquaintances working in law enforcement agencies are of great importance. In order to get detailed information even after working hours - you need to have acquaintances. And according to the police, communication with the media is smooth and information is provided in the same way, without exception.

Continuing the idea that cooperation between police officers and journalists has greatly improved over the last decade, the main reasons for this have been largely identified by respondents: the establishment of personal contact. Warm, personal contact is very important in the cooperation between police officers and journalists. The disadvantages, wishes and advantages of communication are expressed in the cooperation. A similar experience is shared by other police officers, who claim that cooperation with journalists is shrouded in warm and quality communication, which is implemented with a sense of respect and understanding for each other. Another reason - the pursuit of a common goal - both journalists and police representatives, as if by agreement, say that the aim of cooperation between the two institutions is to inform the public, so a good level of cooperation can be achieved by both parties to keep the public informed accurately and in a timely manner. "The interest in informing the public is common, it becomes a precondition for smooth cooperation", notes journalist.

Explaining the ways and means of achieving smoother and closer cooperation between the media and the police, what would improve the cooperation between law enforcement authorities and journalists? Most respondents differed in their views on improving police and media communication. One wants to single out the unanimous opinion of journalists, which

shows the outrage of the media about the closedness of the police. It is emphasized that “cooperation will improve when the Soviet legacy in law enforcement disappears, in particular the extreme isolation.” Another respondent comments similarly, stating that “the approach to law enforcement communication needs to change first. Journalists need to become friends, not enemies. Failure to provide information must make sense and it should have very clear criteria and should not be abused. What is being sought now is not how to provide information, but the reasons why not. According to journalists, in order to achieve better and better cooperation between the media and the police, it is necessary to work together to implement the public's right to receive all relevant information in the field of law enforcement news. To achieve this, more detailed information and analysis by police on crimes of active public interest is desirable. Some police officers envisage the following measures to improve co-operation: the absence of a common value and search for ratings, constant contact, answering questions and adhering to communication ethics. Most police officers value communication with journalists as good, and in order for this communication to remain good or continue in a positive direction, it envisages ways to establish and follow the rules, to maintain direct contact.

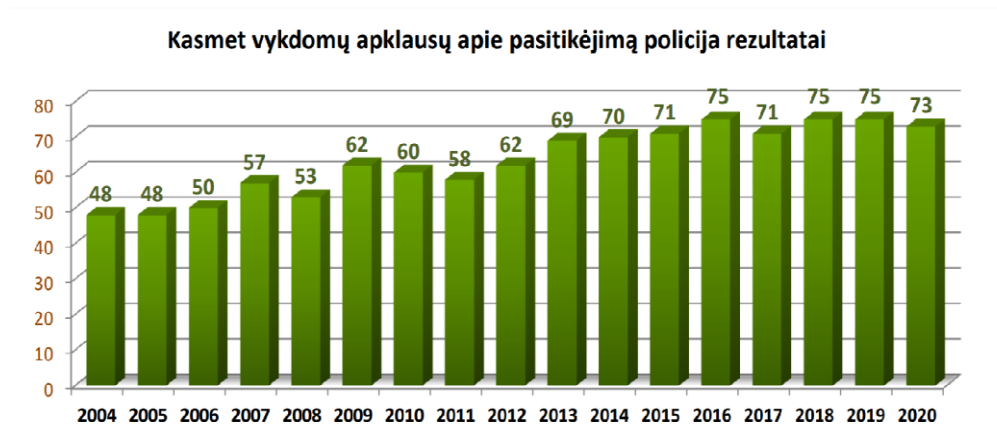
In order to assess the respondents' opinion about the distortion of criminal information in the media and the reasons for the distortion, both police officers and journalists were asked how they assessed the significant discrepancy between the criminal media coverage and the actual crime in our country. Analyzing the answers of the survey respondents to this question, no unanimous opinion can be distinguished. However, the majority of respondents answered that the criminal news in the media is a bit inaccurate and “embellished”. A police spokesman says the criminal information provided in the media does not correspond to reality. According to the respondent, this discrepancy is due to several reasons: “Very often the information provided is inaccurate and sometimes completely untrue. This is due to two reasons: the media's desire to be the first to disclose the facts and the fact that the information itself is obtained from non-official sources is sometimes shared.” and is based on initial event information. And the initial information is that given by the speaker who called General Assistance Center or by the first officials who arrived at the scene. This is often inaccurate and is later corrected and refined as more details become available. The inconsistency of the information is caused by the closed nature of law enforcement institutions: “law enforcement is very closed, the media relies on the stories of one witness, participant in the event, interested person or grandmother who listened to some rumors at all. Such information, intentionally or unintentionally, is often incomplete, distorted, and shows only part of the image. As the law enforcement, for its part, does not comment on or clarify them, the public is exposed to reality. “There is also a perception that criminal information in the media is distorted because journalists do not rely on official data but on unknown sources. The police representative emphasizes that journalists “beautify” the information based on several sources and in order to interest the audience. “As you know, the media relies on a number of sources, so often some high-profile events are embellished, perhaps somewhat 'inflated', surrounded by stories to make it more interesting to the reader.” “The media has to rely on untested sources and considerations to fill the vacuum. “Journalists often fill in the missing elements themselves, so it is often based on misinterpretations. The journalist cites this reason for the inconsistency of information as a way out when, without receiving official information from the police, inaccurate information has to be made public, based on unofficial sources.

The other question was addressed to find out the influence of the media on the image of the police, to analyze the importance of the media for public opinion, publishing not only criminal information, but also news related to police activities, reforms, and successfully

completed investigations. The image of the police is inseparable from the information published by the media for the public about police activities. The more positive information about the police in the media, the more public trust of the police activities and better the image of the institution.

In order to find out the opinion of police representatives about the change in the image of the police, respondents were asked to assess how the image of law enforcement agencies has changed over the past decade. All police officers interviewed noted that the image of the police is only improving every year. Respondents emphasize that the police is becoming more and more open, actively communicating institutions, intensively announcing the daily life of officials and reforms. Some police representatives emphasize that the media does contribute to the improving image of the police, but at the same time the rapidly changing and improving police itself is trying to improve the image. A police spokesman said: "I agree that the media is really a powerful tool to go beyond a positive image. But that is certainly not enough. Words must match deeds. Over the decade, the police authority has changed dramatically within itself, in its vision, mission, thinking and culture. Became innovative and modern. Media culture has also changed. The police are cooperating smoothly with the media and a dialogue based on respect has developed. However, the police is the institution where the events that most often affect citizens have a negative impact, so we will not avoid negative attitudes and experiences." Another police officer shares the idea that the police are modernizing, changing for the better, and the image is also improving: "The police have changed a lot in the last decade. Renewed, integrated many innovations: mobile workplaces; the latest, smart equipment; electronic document management systems; new cars, clothing. This has helped the police react faster and more effectively to events and be closer to the person. All of this received media attention, it was publicized and written. What is known to have raised public confidence in the police."

In order to make sure that public confidence in the police is really growing, it is expedient to examine the information of the 2020 Police Activity Review of the Police Department under the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania, which present the results of the public confidence survey.



**Figure 1. Results of annual police confidence surveys**

Police were also asked whether they thought the media was obstructing police proceedings or whether there were more cases of aiding and abetting. The majority of police representatives agree that the media contributes to the preventive work of the police and facilitates the investigation. "The media is very helpful when it comes to getting our message out to as many people as possible and as quickly as possible, e.g. search for a minor, a request



to identify the persons captured in the photo, etc.”- says a police representative. A similar opinion is expressed by another police representative, who states that “addressing the public with the help of the media, such as identifying a person, or responding to seeing or knowing the circumstances of an incident, really helps to unravel the crime faster and more effectively.” By publishing such information and asking for public help, the media helps investigators unravel the crime faster, find a missing person or disseminate important information. At the same time, in this way, it brings people closer to the work of the police, the public feels involved in the course of the investigation, becomes involved in the activities of the law enforcement institution and thus forms a better opinion about the police.

The investigation revealed that co-operation between the media and the police is ongoing, on a daily basis. Police representatives send last day's summaries to journalists, communicate through various means of communication, and schedule meetings live. The co-operation between the two institutions is defined as working-level, good enough, but there are also problems with co-operation. There is dissatisfaction on the part of the media with regard to the closed nature of police officers, the withholding of information and the constant reluctance to share the circumstances of crimes. Police are more likely to view working relationships with the media more positively, but also point to difficulties that sometimes arise in working with journalists. Those difficulties arise when journalists demand more detailed information about criminal events. In summary, however, police and media co-operation are still improving and a number of measures are proposed to address the issues: mutual goodwill, non-abuse of rights, respect for and fulfillment of each other's needs.

Assessing the fact of distortion of criminal information in the media, it can be stated that the discrepancy of information is not obvious, but noticeable. Based on the criteria for selecting news, which are described as the relevance and novelty of the news, it can be stated that journalists try to provide information as soon as possible while it is still new and relevant, but in most cases such information is unspecified and unconfirmed. This leads to inconsistent information. Also, in order not to jeopardize the pre-trial investigation and sometimes to abuse this right, police officers do not provide any information about the incident to journalists during the investigation, which means that journalists do not always have to search for information through unknown sources. is accurate.

Of course, the benefits of the media in shaping the image of the police are noticeable and at the same time support the ongoing investigation. According to research, the image of the police is improving every year, as evidenced by growing trust in the police. The media contributes to this by announcing and publicizing positive things about the police, such as police reforms and the successful completion of investigations. Therefore, it can be said that both the media and the improving and modernizing police themselves contribute to the improvement of the image.

## Conclusions

The media, in performing its main functions, informing people about what really happened, as well as cultivating moral and spiritual values in a person, must be guided by the principles of justice, honesty and humanism. Additional media functions are often noticeable, in which the audience is not always attracted to the published information by the exact facts. The rights, duties and responsibilities of journalists are governed by the law, which requires the smooth and fair conduct of journalists.

In co-operation with each other, police and media authorities must comply with the objectives of co-operation provided for by law and be aware of the legal requirements for the

disclosure or non-disclosure of certain information. Smooth cooperation between the media and the police, in accordance with legal requirements, is an integral part of this.

An empirical study has shown that co-operation between the media and the police is valued quite well, but there is clear mutual criticism that there are difficulties in co-operation between the two institutions. Problems arise when police officers avoid providing information to journalists and journalists are too obsessively demanding this information. It is proposed to solve the problems that arise by fostering mutual respect and goodwill, realizing each other's needs, not abusing rights, setting clear rules and complying with them. The fact that the information provided to the journalists by the police was distorted is not obvious, but it is noticeable. However, police cooperation with the media benefits the police more than harm. According to them, the improvement of the image of the police is related to the information published in the media, which forms a positive image of the police.

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