1. INTRODUCTION

It is a well-known fact that the breakdown of a State, be it a dictatorship, democracy or a mixture of structures, creates an empty space, which is momentarily filled with criminal elements, trying to replace public order systems with their own organisations. It was the case in Europe during the transition from Monarchy to Republic after the First World War. International crime developed rapidly and Interpol was founded with the aim of enabling the fast exchange of information and co-operation across national borders in order to combat crime more efficiently. It was also the case after 1989 when the iron curtain came down: Millions of individuals gained mobility and liberty. The transition from state-socialism to democracy has been followed by migration movements and an infiltration of criminal elements and organisations from East to West.

Very soon after the breakdown of the communist system in the former so-called ‘Eastern Block Countries’ of Europe a new form of tourism was noticed in Austria and Germany along the border line to the former Eastern countries – the so-called ‘criminal tourism’. The incidence of robbery, burglary, car theft, pickpocketing, shoplifting and trickery increased rapidly. This development may be explained by the enormous income gap between the home countries of the offenders and the wealthy countries of the victims. The Austrian and German police reacted and the risk for the individual increased. They began using spies, watch-dogs and other methods. More and more criminal groups or ‘gangs’ came over. Very soon the lower level of organised crime had to be structured. ‘Gangs’ were simply taken over by larger organisations.

The political, economic and social developments in Central Europe have been accompanied by virtually unknown forms of crime and threats to internal security. Since 1989 the trend in criminal activities in Central Europe has revealed an increasing number of ever more serious criminal acts linked to organised crime. These constitute a particular challenge to all police forces in this region. The law enforcement agencies are forced to search for ways and means to combat and prevent border-crossing and international crime more effectively. In order to deal with the new and growing problems, there is a need for the most comprehensive police co-operation possible. Co-operation between police forces that builds on concrete international findings and contacts may lead to success, providing that appropriate organisational, legal and human resources are always available.

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Contacts, as well as event-oriented police action, need to be based, in their preparation as much as their implementation, on adequately trained police officers who have suitable language capabilities and a network of personal contacts. Police officers who meet these requirements are not available in sufficient numbers in the Central European countries.

Police training work is the basis of active, formative and lasting co-operation. A particular effort, therefore, needs to be made to boost co-operation at this level. Unlike co-operation in the operational or analytical spheres, which is bound by practical constraints, this type of co-operation also establishes a common view of the role to be played and a job philosophy which, in the internal security field that is so important to people, constitute indispensable preconditions for the creation of comparable living and security conditions in Central Europe.

Based upon these considerations a joint Austrian/Hungarian police training scheme was initiated in 1991. The Ministers of the Interior of the two countries signed a mutual statement in Budapest in 1992. The statement also envisaged a call for direct Europe-wide co-operation between the police forces based on a target-oriented training of police officers. A joint Austrian/Hungarian course was organised in 1992, held under the name AHPA (Austrian-Hungarian Police Academy). It was an advanced training course for police officers with several years of practical experience.

The project partners evaluated the results of the course. Based on the experience the independent Central European Police Academy (Mitteleuropäische Polizeiakademie – MEPA) was founded in 1993. Five other countries became members of MEPA within the next three years. The MEPA is now jointly organised and financed by police training establishments from the following states: Republic of Austria, Czech Republic, Federal Republic of Germany, Republic of Hungary, Republic of Poland, Swiss Confederation, Slovak Republic, Republic of Slovenia.

The main aim of MEPA is *inter alia* to strengthen swift, direct and unbureaucratic police co-operation transcending national borders, with graduates of the Academy functioning as interlocutors, contacts and catalysts. Through the exchange and transmission of specialist knowledge and experience it is hoped to achieve long-term harmonisation of the standards of police knowledge and controls in the participating states, something which should also help to bring the police forces of the Associated States of European Union more in line with the acquis communautaire and Western European practice.

2. OBJECTIVES AND TASKS OF THE CENTRAL EUROPEAN POLICE ACADEMY

The most important aims of the joint training measures at the Central European Police Academy are:

- to impart, develop and consolidate the knowledge, experience and skills required to direct cross-border and international police work.
- In view of the political, economic and social changes in Europe and developments in crime, there is a particular need for specific and systematic preparation of police officers belonging to police organisations which specialise in cross-border and international police co-operation and are not solely concerned with national policing problems.
- To impart professional know-how relating to legal and organisational requirements, prac-