

# POLICE WATCHDOG

## INFORMATION BROCHURE



## THE STANDING POLICE MONITORING COMMITTEE



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# 1. Foreword

Arising from the Federal Parliament's calls for an external oversight body covering all officials with policing powers, the Standing Police Monitoring Committee, or Committee P for short, was founded in 1991 and began de facto operations in mid-1993. Over the years, the general public have become familiar with this body, as can be seen by the large number of complaints and reports of police misconduct it receives each year.

By examining these complaints, conducting inspection inquiries and drawing on information from a variety of sources, Committee P has a pretty accurate picture of the state of policing at any given time. Particular emphasis is placed on the coordination, efficiency and effectiveness of the federal and local police forces, special inspection services and various officials with policing powers in other entities. There is also a systematic focus on how these parties safeguard citizens' rights and freedoms.

Driven by its ongoing commitment to promoting the effective operation of a democratic, principled and (in the broad sense) community-oriented police, since its creation Committee P has also given substance to various additional duties conferred by the legislature. These include monitoring public transport companies' security services and security officers and the operation of the Coordination Unit for Threat Assessment (CUTA) and, in its role along with Standing Committee I as the data protection authority, controlling the processing of personal data by the CUTA and its processors, as well as examining reports by members of the integrated (i.e. federal and local) police of suspected breaches of integrity by police officials serving in the integrated police.

The fact that Committee P reports to Parliament distinguishes it from other oversight bodies focusing more on inspection duties and reporting to the executive branch, such as the General Inspectorate of the Federal and Local Police, inspection bodies and internal oversight bodies. However, being an autonomous body (albeit under parliamentary supervision) does not stop Committee P liaising closely with the authorities and the many stakeholders involved, with this occasionally even leading to a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with them.

As an external oversight body, Committee P also provides a first port of call for international authorities monitoring respect for human rights and the protection of citizens' fundamental rights.

Committee P can only perform its mission if all the parties involved cooperate fully and meet their obligations, pursuant to the Organic Law of 18 July 1991, in particular with regard to the ex-officio communication of disclosed information.

Our aim – which we hope to have achieved – in compiling this brochure was to set out the objectives, history, organisation and modus operandi of Committee P.

Happy reading!

## 2. Our history

Committee P's history has been marked by seven key milestones.

### 2.1 The conclusions of the commission of inquiry into the Brabant killings

The May 1988 parliamentary commission of inquiry into the approach taken to tackling organised crime and terrorism (or the 'first commission of inquiry into the Brabant killings' for short) drew a number of conclusions regarding monitoring of the police:

*"[...] An external body with the task of monitoring all those with policing powers should be established, as internal oversight has been found wanting. [...] This oversight body would have a supervisory role rather than any disciplinary function. In other words, it would be in charge of monitoring how police duties are performed and should report regularly to the Government and to Parliament"<sup>1</sup>.*

The commission of inquiry's report also painted a picture of a dysfunctional police due to various factors including:

- high levels of mistrust and a lack of solidarity among investigators and between the police and the magistracy;
- rivalry between police forces, exacerbated by differing statuses, recruitment procedures, training measures and fields of activity;
- poor coordination between police forces;
- the undemocratic nature of aspects of some policing methods;
- significant issues relating to the management of investigations;
- overlaps between the powers of various police forces.

### 2.2 Pentecost Plan I and the promulgation of the Organic Law of 18 July 1991

Following up on the report of the commission of inquiry mentioned above, a Government press release issued on 5 June 1990 set out a programme covering policing, citizen security and the fight against crime, better known as 'Pentecost Plan I'.

This presented various action points:

- tackling structural, institutional and mentality issues;
- striving to safeguard and respect democratic rights and freedoms so as to provide transparency and efficiency, and stressing the responsibility of all the stakeholders involved in policing;
- focusing on qualitative rather than quantitative aspects.

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<sup>1</sup> Free translation of a passage from *Parliamentary Documents*, Chamber of Representatives, 1989-1990, no. 59/8, p. 367 (in Dutch and French).

At the heart of Pentecost Plan I are the following issues: the coordination of policing policy, changes to criminal policy, structural adjustments to the operation of the police and intelligence services, and the implementation of the Policing Act.

Pursuant to Pentecost Plan I, in 1991 the Government came up with a proposed arrangement for monitoring the police. This was designed to meet three key objectives:

- respect for citizens' constitutional rights and their fundamental rights and freedoms;
- effectiveness (and efficiency);
- coordination of the various police forces.

At sittings on 27 and 28 February and 12 and 13 July 1991, the two legislative chambers adopted the Organic Law on monitoring police forces and intelligence services, which was then signed by the King on 18 July 1991 and published in the *Belgian Official Gazette* on 26 July 1991. This Organic Law has been amended on a number of occasions in the intervening years.

## **2.3 The 1998 extension of powers**

In 1998, the Government decided to establish a collegiate body to examine appeals against security clearances (i.e. official authorisations to access confidential data) being granted or withheld. The then Government considered it vital that the Chairman or another member of Standing Committee P be part of this body, known as the 'Appeal Body for Security Clearances', and therefore the Chairman of Committee P was appointed to sit on this body along with the Chairman of the Standing Intelligence Agencies Review Committee (Committee I) and the Director of the Data Protection Authority's Litigation Chamber.

## **2.4 The 2004-2005 extension of powers**

The Programme Law of 27 December 2004 conferred on Committee P a whole range of other monitoring powers relating to the supervision of security services and security officers performing their duties for a State-owned public transport company (SNCB/NMBS, STIB/MIVB, TEC, De Lijn), based on an amendment to the Act of 10 April 1990 regulating private and personal security, repealed by the Act of 2 October 2017 regulating private and personal security, which reaffirmed Committee P's competence to exercise oversight over the above-mentioned services and officers.

Therefore, in this brochure the term 'police forces' is used in a broad sense to cover the Federal Police, the local police forces, the special inspection services and the security services used by a public transport company.

In 2005, the legislature decided to extend the rules on security clearances to security certificates and advice, resulting in the appeal body being granted the same adjudication powers with regard to any authorisation, or refusal, to issue any such

certificate or advice. These documents are required for access to certain premises, buildings or grounds or to take up very specific roles.

## 2.5 The 2006 extension of powers

A decision was made when establishing the Coordination Unit for Threat Assessment (CUTA), a body responsible for evaluating the threat posed by terrorism and extremism, to place it under the joint supervision of Standing Committees P and I. This brand-new monitoring task covering a new body and a new domain was a direct result of the Threat Assessment Act of 10 July 2006<sup>2</sup>. Since then, the Organic Law has been called the '*Organic Law of 18 July 1991 on monitoring the police and intelligence services and the Coordination Unit for Threat Assessment*'.

One key element in the functioning and constitution of the CUTA is the legal obligation for 'support services' to communicate to it, either ex officio or at the request of its director, any information which is available to them in the context of their duties laid down by law and which is relevant to the performance of its tasks.

The Act of 10 July 2006 lists the support services involved and makes provision for the King to expand their number, as happened most recently with the Royal Decree of 17 August 2018<sup>3</sup>.

The support services, which must second one or more of their members to the CUTA, are:

- State Security and the General Intelligence and Security Service of the Armed Forces (2006);
- the Local and Federal Police (2006);
- the Federal Public Service (FPS) Finance, in particular the General Administration of Customs and Excise (2006) and the General Administration of Treasury (2018);
- the FPS Mobility and Transport and the FPS Interior, in particular the Immigration Office (2006) and the Crisis Centre Directorate-General (2018); and
- the FPS Foreign Affairs and the FPS Justice, in particular the Directorate-General for Penitentiaries and the Faiths and Organised Secularism Department (both 2018).

## 2.6 The 2018 extension of powers

With effect from 5 September 2018, pursuant to the Act on the protection of privacy in relation to the processing of personal data<sup>4</sup>, Standing Committee P was appointed along with Standing Committee I as the data protection authority charged with controlling the processing of personal data undertaken by the CUTA and its processors as part of their duties as laid down in the Act of 10 July 2006 and under other specific legislation.

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<sup>2</sup> *Belgian Official Gazette* of 20 July 2006 (in Dutch and French).

<sup>3</sup> *Belgian Official Gazette* of 12 September 2018 (in Dutch and French).

<sup>4</sup> *Belgian Official Gazette* of 5 September 2018 (in Dutch and French); hereinafter abbreviated to 'GBW/LPD'.

## 2.7 The 2019 extension of powers

Since the entry into force on 17 June 2019 of the Act of 8 May 2019 amending the Act of 15 September 2013 on the reporting of a suspected breach of integrity within a federal administrative authority by a member of its staff, integrated police staff members have been able to use the whistleblowing system provided for by the Act of 15 September 2013 to report a suspected breach of integrity within the integrated police.

The powers this legislation confers on the Federal Ombudsmen are exercised by Standing Committee P when a suspected breach of integrity is reported by a police official.

Integrated police staff members were already able to report to Committee P any suspected breach of integrity under the procedure provided for in the Organic Law of 18 July 1991. The amended legislation provides for a new procedure featuring a new whistleblowing system, with Committee P as the external body when the whistleblower is a police official.

### 3. Our mission

Standing Committee P's aim is to promote the effective operation of a democratic, principled and community-oriented police.

As such, it is the external body responsible, under the supervision of the Federal Parliament, for overseeing both the general operation of the police, inspection or monitoring services and the policing practices of all those officials with policing powers. In particular, Committee P monitors the way in which efficiency, effectiveness and coordination are achieved and how fundamental rights and freedoms are respected and actively promoted.

In its capacity as a policing watchdog, Committee P aims to use its investigations and assessments (undertaken either on its own initiative or on request) to:

- continually update the overall picture of policing and of the operation of the police;
- review and give its opinion on the operation of the police;
- issue proposals and advice to the competent (police) authorities.

In addition, a number of specialist investigators are specially assigned to criminal investigations conducted to meet the judicial authorities' needs. Priority is given to investigations in areas that are also likely to supply information that will help Committee P fulfil its watchdog role.

The five members of Standing Committee P, in conjunction with all the staff, strive to perform the above tasks:

- focusing primarily on the organisation and operation of the police forces;
- paying particular attention to taking a constructive and proactive approach to problems;
- acting independently of the police apparatus and the police authorities;
- objectively and on a methodologically sound basis;
- endeavouring to maintain a high level of professionalism;
- striving for excellence through its 'learning organisation' approach;
- working in a positive atmosphere;
- through a targeted, collegiate and pluralistic decision-making process.

## **4. Our values**

### **4.1 A positive and constructive approach**

Committee P aims to listen to citizens, Parliament, authorities and police officials. It focuses in particular on the various mechanisms for promoting the effective operation of policing structures within our democratic society.

Committee P's primary mission is to ascertain to what extent the effective operation of the police forces can be maintained and where there are areas for improvement. In this connection, it determines whether changes to the applicable legislation or regulations are required, thereby acting as a police watchdog.

With a view to ensuring that Parliament and the police authorities can live up to their responsibilities in this regard, Committee P must be able to provide a picture of the police landscape and the issues involved that is reliable, relevant and as complete as possible.

It follows from this that the monitoring undertaken by Committee P is not primarily intended to identify individual actions so that they can be brought to book; this role remains the responsibility of the judicial, disciplinary and police authorities. In this connection, Committee P must regularly make clear to both the authorities and the public that it is neither a magistrate nor a disciplinary authority and that it does not have the power to award damages.

Finally, Committee P's oversight goes beyond simply making observations or recommendations. It also checks whether and to what extent its recommendations have been taken on board. However, Committee P always makes an effort to do this in a positive and constructive way and in consultation with the individual or entity under examination.

### **4.2 Neutrality, objectivity and transparency**

Committee P ensures that its duties are performed objectively, neutrally and transparently, adopting a democratic approach that respects the primacy of the rule of law, freedoms and fundamental rights.

## 5. Our organisation

Committee P is assisted in its management and administrative duties by administrative staff operating under the supervision of a clerk.

In the case of investigations, Standing Committee P assigns tasks to the Investigation Department P under the Director-General's supervision.

### 5.1 Standing Committee P

Standing Committee P is made up of five full members, including its Chairman – who must be a magistrate – and its Vice-Chairman, with several substitutes being designated for each one of them. Standing Committee P is assisted by a clerk.

Members are appointed for a renewable six-year term. They must have the loyalty, discretion and integrity required to handle sensitive information. They also have a 'top secret'-level security clearance enabling them to handle classified documents. The Organic Law stipulates various incompatibilities and restrictions designed to ensure their neutrality and independence.

Inspection inquiries are followed up on and complaints and reports of police misconduct are handled under the supervision of one of the five full members of Standing Committee P. However, given Standing Committee P's collegiate nature, all final decisions are taken by the five members meeting in plenary session.

### 5.2 Administrative Department

This department, comprising as it does the Complaints Section, the Data Management Section and the section handling whistleblowing cases, performs tasks inextricably bound up with Committee P's operational duties.

The department's staff receive and analyse complaints and submit the complaint files to Standing Committee P, which decides at a plenary meeting how they will be dealt with (see section 10 below). After receiving the results of the investigation, they prepare to close the case for Standing Committee P, which adopts a position at a plenary meeting.

This department also ensures the uniformity and quality of data encoding to enable analysis of the functioning of the police. Its duties also include processing information from external bodies such as judicial or disciplinary authorities.

The department is also home to the support services. Some of its capacity is taken up by duties in the following areas: legal studies, finance, personnel and logistics, information and communication technology (ICT), translations, media relations and acting as a secretariat. Care is taken to ensure, for example, that the organisation has all the operational resources required in terms of personnel, logistics and infrastructure.

The Administrative Department assists Standing Committee P and Investigation Department P with management and administrative tasks. It is backed up by an optimal framework of 36 members of staff, supervised by the clerk, who performs his/her duties under the collegiate authority and supervision of Standing Committee P.

### **5.3 Investigation Department P**

Investigation Department P is Committee P's operational arm and therefore its most visible department on the ground.

To perform its inspection inquiries and certain investigations into complaints, Standing Committee P make extensive use of this department's services. As regards the inspection inquiries and the investigation of complaints, the specific legal powers of members of Investigation Department P are listed in the Organic Law of 18 July 1991.

Investigation Department P is headed by a Director-General, assisted by two deputies. They are appointed by Standing Committee P for a renewable five-year term. The Director-General leads this department under the collegiate authority, management and supervision of Standing Committee P.

In addition, an optimal framework of 52 members of staff has been established. All of them bear the title of 'commissioner-auditor', regardless of their level or grade. They are either permanent staff or seconded from a police force or public service. The seconded members are also appointed for a renewable five-year term.

Investigation Department P is not just Committee P's investigation arm. It is also involved in sensitive or complex cases as a specialist police entity. As such, it conducts criminal investigations when the perpetrators of the crime are members of a police force or officials with investigative powers.

In this connection, the Director-General, the two Deputy Directors-General and the members of Investigation Department P hold the title of 'judicial police officer, assistant of the public prosecutor'.

On its own initiative or at the request of the prosecutor general, the public prosecutor, the labour prosecutor, the federal prosecutor or the competent examining magistrate, Investigation Department P conducts these investigations, in parallel with the other judicial police officers and agents and even with a right of priority over these. As a result, this covers both information under the authority of the Public Prosecutor's Office and investigations under the authority of the examining magistrate, in accordance with the provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure and certain special laws relating to the powers of a judicial police officer and agent (e.g. the Act on pre-trial detention).

However, the Organic Law of 18 July 1991 expressly states that the performance of these criminal investigations must not jeopardise the performance of Investigation Department P's other duties. By 'other duties' we mean especially, but not exclusively, inspection inquiries, complaints and reports of police misconduct. By ensuring that the



number of investigators legally responsible for criminal investigations does not exceed half of Investigation Department P's staff and by making the Chairman of Committee P responsible for arbitration, the legislature clearly expressed its desire to limit the criminal investigations requested of Investigation Department P by the magistracy to (serious) allegations justifying recourse to specialist investigators with special powers, in accordance with Committee P's specific duties. This desire was confirmed in the Ministerial Directive of 22 September 2011 organising the division of labour regarding judicial police duties for crimes and offences involving police officials. This gives Investigation Department P priority for investigations against members of the police for crimes and offences committed in the course of their policing (or directly related to this) and constituting a breach of citizens' fundamental rights and freedoms.

## 6. Our place in the world of oversight

### 6.1 Our role assisting the Federal Parliament

Committee P's role is inextricably bound up with the principle of the separation of powers. As such it assists the legislature in its constitutional role of overseeing the executive branch, having been established under the auspices of the Federal Parliament to provide the latter with an external monitoring body for the police.

Its monitoring does not cover the judicial authorities or their acts as part of a prosecution, nor does it concern the administrative police authorities.

The relationship between Committee P and the Federal Parliament is fourfold:

1. Appointment of the members of Standing Committee P and the clerk  
The five members of the decision-making body of Committee P (called 'Standing Committee P'), their substitutes and the clerk of Committee P are appointed by Parliament, which has the power to dismiss them. Before taking office, they are sworn in by the Speaker of the Chamber of Representatives.
2. Reporting of Committee P's activities  
Standing Committee P submits a report on each inspection inquiry to the Chamber of Representatives.  
  
It also reports to the Chamber of Representatives and the Senate: (1) annually, in the form of a general activity report, including conclusions, proposals and general recommendations; (2) whenever it deems this appropriate or at the request of the Chamber of Representatives or the Senate, in the form of an interim report on a specific investigation; (3) when the Chamber of Representatives assigns it an investigation; (4) where it ascertains, after a reasonable period (but in any case after more than 60 days), that its conclusions have not been followed up on or that the measures taken are inappropriate or inadequate.
3. Monitoring of Committee P's activities  
A standing committee, the special committee charged with providing parliamentary support for the Standing Police Monitoring Committee and the Standing Intelligence Agencies Review Committee, was established within the Chamber of Representatives to monitor Committee P's activities. This special committee meets with Standing Committee P at least once every three months.
4. Committee P's budget  
The appropriations required for the operation of Committee P are included in the budget allocated by the chambers of the Federal Parliament.

Committee P is not responsible for the organisation or operation of the entities monitored by it and therefore acts as a totally external and independent body, both with regard to the executive branch and the police forces under its supervision. This particular feature distinguishes Committee P from other inspection or monitoring bodies – such as the General Inspectorate of the Federal and Local Police, and the

internal monitoring bodies – which are more focused on inspection duties and report to the executive branch.

## 6.2 Other inspection or monitoring bodies

The police are monitored by various bodies, some of which Committee P has entered into agreements with.

### 6.2.1 The General Inspectorate (AIG) and internal monitoring

In this context, Committee P works in consultation with the General Inspectorate of the Federal and Local Police (AIG), a ministerial body reporting to the two relevant ministers (Interior and Justice), with a view to performing its statutory duties as a police inspection body. Committee P has entered into an agreement with the AIG to this effect. It also strives to forge cooperative ties with the police forces' internal monitoring bodies. In this connection, Committee P has signed agreements with the General Commissioner of the Federal Police and with local police chiefs. However, this cooperation does not affect Committee P's ability – or even obligation – to monitor (whether on its own initiative or following a complaint or report of police misconduct) the operation of the above bodies, including the AIG, which in a way places Committee P above this internal monitoring body.

### 6.2.2 The police information management monitoring body

The Supervisory Body for Police Information Management (COC) was established in 1998 but has taken on a new role following the implementation of the new Privacy Act in Belgium<sup>5</sup>. This body was transferred to the legislative branch in 2014<sup>6</sup> and consequently also forms part of parliamentary oversight.

It has the following tasks:

1. to serve as the data protection authority (DPA) for the integrated police, the AIG and the Belgian Passenger Information Unit (BelPIU) with regard to Chapter II of the GBW/LPD (implementation of the police-justice directive);
2. to serve as the DPA for the integrated police<sup>7</sup> with regard to non-operational missions (see Chapter I of the GBW/LPD, e.g. recruitment and selection (implementation of the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)));
3. to supervise the processing of information and personal data referred to in Articles 44/1 to 44/11/13 of the Act of 5 August 1992 on policing, including those data in the national general database (ANG/BNG), primary databases,

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<sup>5</sup> GBW/LPD.

<sup>6</sup> Act of 18 March 2014 on the management of police information and amending the Act of 5 August 1992 on policing, the Act of 8 December 1992 on the protection of privacy in relation to the processing of personal data, and the Code of Criminal Procedure (*Belgian Official Gazette* of 28 March 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Art. 4(2)(4) of the DPA Act.

- specific databases, technical databases, and shared databases on extremism that could lead to terrorism;
4. to play a role in monitoring the visible and non-visible use of cameras by police (Articles 25/1 to 25/6 and Articles 46/1 to 46/14 respectively, where the COC serves as the BAM/MPA Committee<sup>8</sup>, comparable to the BIM Committee for data collection methods);
  5. finally, to carry out ex-post checks on requests by the General Administration of Customs and Excise for targeted consultation of the passenger database when investigating customs-related offences. In this case, the COC has similar powers to those of the BIM Committee with regard to data collection methods.

### 6.3 Administrative and judicial authorities

The police forces always operate under the authority and responsibility of their administrative and judicial authorities. At the same time, there is regular contact with the provincial administrative (police) authorities (e.g. the provincial governor) and their local counterparts (e.g. the mayor, the police board). There are also formal and informal contacts with the Public Prosecutor's Office (more specifically, the Board of Prosecutors General, the Board of Public Prosecutors or the federal prosecutor). These relate in particular to the appropriate and practical implementation of information provision in accordance with Articles 14 and 26 of the Organic Law of 18 July 1991 (communication to Committee P of judgements, rulings, criminal investigations and offences involving members of the police forces).

### 6.4 Committee I

Committee P maintains close ties with its counterpart, the Standing Intelligence Agencies Review Committee (Committee I). The two committees exchange information about their activities and send each other their reports and conclusions.

They also hold joint meetings at least twice a year, at which further information may be exchanged. At these meetings, they jointly perform their duties on matters relating to both the police and intelligence services, including the division of tasks and the coordination of operations between the police and the intelligence services. Since 1 December 2006, the two committees have together performed their duties pertaining to the Coordination Unit for Threat Assessment (CUTA) and the support services.

The Chairman of Committee P also sits alongside the Chairman of Committee I and the Director of the Data Protection Authority's Litigation Chamber on the body hearing appeals brought under the Act of 11 December 1998 establishing an appeal body for security clearances, certificates and advice.

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<sup>8</sup> BAM/MPA stands for *Bijzondere Administratieve Methoden/Méthodes Particulières Administratives* (special administrative methods).

## 6.5 Other national and international players

Committee P has contacts with many partners at Belgian federal level, getting together with them from time to time at working meetings, e.g. the Police Disciplinary Board, the Federal Police Council, the Data Protection Authority and the Board of Prosecutors General.

Committee P has entered into agreements with the Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism and Discrimination (Unia), the Federal Migration Centre (Myria) and the Human Rights Platform, with a view to promoting information sharing and collaboration.

As well as these public-sector partners, Committee P also has contacts with NGOs, such as the Human Rights League and Amnesty International.

As an external and independent oversight body, Committee P provides a first port of call at Belgian federal level for international authorities responsible for monitoring respect for human rights. Committee P's responsibilities for the protection of citizens' fundamental rights in the context of policing overlap with those of various international authorities established under the auspices of the Council of Europe<sup>9</sup> and the United Nations<sup>10</sup> to ensure respect for human rights.

At the request of the Government (mainly the justice ministry, FPS Justice), Committee P is regularly called on for its collaboration, helping draft state reports, participating in meetings as part of periodic or ad-hoc visits or providing responses to specific requests. The variety of knowledge and information held by Committee P as well as the know-how it has developed in terms of problem assessment and best police practices are of significant interest to these authorities.

On 5 May 2015, Committee P signed the cooperation agreement between institutions whose mandate consists fully or in part of a responsibility for safeguarding human rights, between Unia, Myria, the College of Federal Ombudsmen, the Data Protection Authority, the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men, the Ombudsman of Wallonia and the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, the Ombudsman of the German-speaking Community, the Flemish Office of the Children's Rights Commissioner, the Wallonia-Brussels Federation's Office of the General Delegate for the Rights of the Child, the National Commission on the Rights of the Child, the Combat Poverty, Insecurity and Social Exclusion Service, Committee I and the High Council of Justice.

These institutions together make up the 'Human Rights Platform', whose purpose is to put forward and assess issues affecting various institutions, share practices and .....

<sup>9</sup> Specifically, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, etc.

<sup>10</sup> Specifically, the UN Committee against Torture (CAT), the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

methodologies, learn lessons from relevant experiences and make appropriate use of each institution's powers to tackle shared issues in a spirit of complementarity, and promote inter-institutional cooperation. This forum meets once a month.

Internationally, Committee P belongs to various networks that aim to enable institutions operating in the same field of activity to share their experiences. For instance, Committee P participates in the European Partners against Corruption (EPAC) network launched in November 2004 and made up of institutions, from European Union and Council of Europe member states, that are responsible for police monitoring and preventing and combating corruption. Further to its involvement in the EPAC network, Committee P is also part of the European contact-point network against corruption (EACN) established by Council of the European Union Decision 2008/852/JHA of 24 October 2008. For more details, see <https://www.epac-eacn.org>.

Committee P is also a member of the Independent Police Complaints Authorities' Network (IPCAN), set up in May 2013 on the initiative of the French Defender of Rights. Each year, Committee P participates in this network's annual conference. For more details, see <https://ipcan.org>.

Committee P is also a member of the International Francophone Police Training Network (Francopol), a consultative and cooperative body associated with the International Organisation of La Francophonie. Francopol's mission is to promote the sharing of best practices as well as research and ideas on police training and expertise. It aims to become a centre of excellence in terms of the sharing and emergence of new police training trends. This network intends to boost police skills to better serve citizens. Francopol provides a forum for improving the consistency of public security initiatives and accelerating the modernisation of policing. As such, the network is playing its part in fostering a greater commitment to peace, democracy and human rights across the French-speaking world ('la Francophonie') through police capacity-building initiatives.

Francopol is an international network of police forces, oversight bodies, training centres, universities and other stakeholders operating in the field of police security throughout 'la Francophonie' and beyond. National members also organise activities back home in their respective countries. For more details, see <http://www.francopol.org> (in French).

## 7. Who is monitored by Committee P?

Committee P provides external oversight of what the Organic Law of 18 July 1991 calls 'police services' (also rendered in English as 'police forces'). This is a very broad term.

More specifically, Committee P closely monitors:

- all the constituent parts of the local police zones and the Federal Police, including their internal monitoring and inspection bodies and the General Inspectorate of the Federal and Local Police;
- entities forming part of authorities and bodies serving the public interest whose members hold the capacity of judicial police officer or agent;
- persons individually responsible for identifying and recording offences – private rural wardens are one concrete example of this; overall, it would be safe to say that this affects hundreds of police officials operating in sectors such as the economy, labour and employment, agriculture, public health, social security and public works;
- security services within public transport companies (SNCB/NMBS, STIB/MIVB, TEC, De Lijn) and the security officers who work there doing this job or performing these duties (Article 212 of the Act of 2 October 2017 regulating private and personal security); and
- the Coordination Unit for Threat Assessment (CUTA), which is responsible for evaluating the threat posed by terrorism and extremism, as well as the various services which are required to forward information to the CUTA (the so-called 'support services').

Committee P's mission is to examine how police forces act on the decisions of the judicial authorities, the Public Prosecutor's Office and the administrative authorities (the Interior and Justice Ministers, provincial governors, district commissioners and mayors). Although Committee P has no monitoring powers over these police authorities themselves, its findings inevitably include some relating to the actions or omissions of these authorities.

As such, Committee P investigates the activities and methods of the police and inspection and security services; their internal regulations and directives; any documents regulating the conduct of their members (except the guidelines for detecting and prosecuting offences and the guidelines relating to the administrative police); the activities and methods of the General Inspectorate of the Federal and Local Police as well as the monitoring bodies that are specifically internal to the police forces or police corps.

In terms of the CUTA and the support services, the supervision provided jointly by Committees P and I relates to the duty of the support services to pass on to the CUTA any relevant information, the protection of citizens' statutory and constitutional rights and the coordination and effectiveness of the CUTA.

However, in their capacity as the data protection authority, Standing Committees P and I jointly monitor compliance with privacy legislation with regard to the processing of personal data undertaken by the CUTA and its processors as part of their duties as laid down in the Act of 10 July 2006 and under other specific legislation.

## **8. How does Committee P perform its duties and exercise its powers?**

### **8.1 Watchdog role**

The need to handle a large number of complaints and individual reports of police misconduct has a major impact on Committee P's workload. As a result, the legislature has explicitly encouraged the Committee to shift the focus of its activities back onto its core responsibilities and tasks, namely safeguarding citizens' constitutional rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as seeing to the coordination, effectiveness and efficiency of police forces and officials with policing powers.

Committee P aims to use its watchdog role to carry out this mission to the best possible effect for the benefit of the legislative and executive branches and the judiciary as well as the various police chiefs.

In addition to drawing on its internal expertise, Committee P may call on external experts where appropriate. The process of developing the overall picture is both proactive and reactive, being performed on Committee P's own initiative and on request. As far as possible, it decides as soon as it can on strengths, areas for improvement and problems.

Committee P accomplishes this mission by means of the following activities:

- collecting and recording information;
- performing on-the-ground investigations and making analyses;
- structural aspects are also extrapolated from the examination of individual complaints as they can play a role in improving the functioning of the police in general;
- disseminating its conclusions, including through publications;
- issuing short-, medium- and long-term recommendations and opinions, in line with the early-warning principle or not as the case may be;
- following up on the recommendations.

The legislature has provided Committee P with a number of means for it to perform its overall monitoring mission, meaning that it has various tools of its own or external tools at its disposal. These are detailed below.

### **8.2 Information disclosed to Committee P**

Through various information sources, Committee P has access to data that are indicators of either best practices or potential problems within the police or inspection services. This allows it to substantiate its thinking and decision-making and, where necessary, conduct inspection inquiries or other investigations.

The 'reactive' component relates to:

- (1) complaints and reports of police misconduct submitted by private individuals or by certain police officials or forwarded by national bodies involved in defending human rights or by other non-governmental organisations;
- (2) the information provided by the police forces and corps, the disciplinary authorities, the General Inspectorate of the Federal and Local Police and the judicial authorities, as envisaged by the Organic Law of 18 July 1991.

The following are forwarded to Committee P:

- by the police forces:<sup>11</sup>
  - regulations and guidelines as well as any other documents regulating their members' conduct;
  - a copy of complaints and reports of police misconduct they have received and the results of any internal investigation;
  - disciplinary and law enforcement measures against one of their members;
  - a copy of the annual report or any other general report on their operation;
- by the General Inspectorate (AIG)<sup>12</sup>:
  - regulations and guidelines as well as any other documents regulating its members' conduct;
  - a copy of complaints and reports of police misconduct it has received and the results of any internal investigation;
  - a copy of the annual report or any other general report on its operation;
- by the CUTA<sup>13</sup>:
  - regulations and guidelines as well as any other documents regulating the conduct of members of the CUTA and of the support services;
- by the judicial authorities<sup>14</sup>:
  - a copy of judgements and rulings relating to crimes and offences committed by members of the police and of the CUTA;
  - when an information procedure or an investigation for a crime or offence is opened against a member of a police force;

(3) Standing Committee P and Investigation Department P may convene to grant a hearing to any individual for whom they deem this necessary. Members of the police, of the CUTA and of the support services must respond to any written summons they receive and may give evidence on matters covered by professional secrecy.

The Chairman of Committee P may use bailiffs to have police officials called as witnesses.

.....  
<sup>11</sup> Article 14*bis*, paras 1 and 2 and Article 14*ter* of the Organic Law of 18 July 1991.

<sup>12</sup> Article 14*bis*, paras 1 and 2 and Article 14*ter* of the Organic Law of 18 July 1991.

<sup>13</sup> Article 9, para. 2 of the Organic Law of 18 July 1991.

<sup>14</sup> Article 14, paras 1 and 2 of the Organic Law of 18 July 1991.

Such individuals are required to give evidence on oath; if they refuse to do so, they are liable to criminal prosecution. They are required to divulge to Committee P any confidential information to which they may be privy, except information pertaining to a criminal investigation. If the police official feels that he or she should not disclose the confidential information on the grounds that to do so would put somebody's safety at risk, the matter will be referred to the Chairman of Committee P (for members of the police) or to the Chairmen of Committees P and I (for members of the CUTA or of a support service).

Standing Committee P and Investigation Department P may request the assistance of experts or interpreters.

The members of Investigation Department P have the power to conduct searches in locations where members of staff of a police force within the meaning of Article 3 of the Organic Law of 18 July 1991 (i.e. the Federal Police, the Local Police and any entity whose members hold the capacity of judicial police officer or agent), of the CUTA or of the support services perform their duties and seize any items or documents relevant to the investigation, except those relating to an ongoing criminal investigation, and may request the assistance of the law enforcement authorities to this effect.

Standing Committee P and the Director-General of Investigation Department P may also impose binding response times on the police.

(4) Furthermore, members of the police or the General Inspectorate of the Federal and Local Police are required to prepare an information report if a crime or an offence is found to have been committed by a police official. This report must be sent to the Director-General of Investigation Department P<sup>15</sup>.

The following are submitted at Committee P's request:

- a copy of the deeds or documents, or information relating to criminal proceedings against members of the police and of the CUTA for crimes or offences committed while performing their duties<sup>16</sup>;
- any other texts or documents Committee P deems necessary to accomplish its mission<sup>17</sup>.

.....  
<sup>15</sup> Article 26 of the Organic Law of 18 July 1991.

<sup>16</sup> Article 14, para. 3 of the Organic Law of 18 July 1991.

<sup>17</sup> Article 9, para. 2 of the Organic Law of 18 July 1991.

The 'proactive' component relates in particular to:

- (1) frequent visits to police stations or police posts;
- (2) observations on the ground during specific policing activities;
- (3) inspection inquiries (inspections of other monitoring bodies or thematic inquiries) aimed, for example, at checking police officials' respect for fundamental rights and freedoms or at ensuring optimal coordination of police operations and the efficiency of policing in general;
- (4) carefully reading open sources on police- and security-related matters which are not necessarily the subject of a complaint or a report of police misconduct to Committee P.

To promote exchange of information, cooperation and consultation, mechanisms for passing on information have been introduced through agreements entered into with the Federal Police, the local police zones and the General Inspectorate of the Federal and Local Police.

Other information-sharing and cooperation agreements have also been signed with organisations such as Unia and Myria.

### **8.3 Committee P inspections of other monitoring bodies**

As well as requests for a second opinion, Committee P provides general monitoring of the quality of handling of complaints and reports of police misconduct. This external oversight of the handling of complaints and reports of police misconduct helps ensure a rigorous, thorough examination of such complaints and reports by the police forces in question. Committee P is committed to promoting the application in this regard of a number of criteria and standards and sees to it that these are met.

Providing this type of monitoring in an effective manner necessarily requires Committee P to be aware of any complaints affecting police forces and handled at another level (General Inspectorate of the Federal and Local Police or specifically internal monitoring bodies).

## 9. Inspection inquiries

### 9.1 What is an inspection inquiry?

The performance of inspection inquiries is Standing Committee P's most significant core responsibility. Every year, some 15 inspection inquiries are performed on the Committee's initiative or at the request of Parliament or of one of the administrative or judicial authorities.

Standing Committee P or, in certain cases, Investigation Department P may open such an inquiry at any time.

Standing Committee P may decide to take such action:

- on its own initiative;
- at the request of the Chamber of Representatives;
- at the request of a (judicial or administrative) police authority;
- at the request of any competent (federal or regional) minister;
- at the request of any other competent authority;
- in response to a complaint or report of police misconduct by anybody.

Meanwhile, Investigation Department P may take action:

- at the request of Standing Committee P;
- on its own initiative, in which case it will immediately inform Standing Committee P, which will decide whether the investigation should be pursued and if so, what form it should take.

During such inquiries, Investigation Department P, under the authority and acting on the orders of Standing Committee P, will go beyond the level of a one-off complaint to assess more general issues at a broader, more systematic level.

These inquiries by their very nature are not judicial, administrative or disciplinary. Ultimately, they are entirely *sui generis* as they are conducted only by and under the supervision of Standing Committee P.

They may cover a very wide variety of issues and relate to the operation of an entire police corps (e.g. the X Police Zone), a unit of a police corps (e.g. a local investigation team or a unit of the Federal Police's traffic police) or of a force (e.g. Customs' investigation team, the Directorate-General for Supervision of Social Legislation). They may also be more thematic, e.g. investigating how police forces are using their powers to conduct body searches or make arrests, the organisation and operation of information management in the integrated police or some of its constituent parts, diversity policy and anti-racism policy in the police, how the police forces treat the mentally ill, driving of police vehicles and traffic accidents involving them, the wearing of symbols in the police, and the approach to financial and economic investigations in the federal judicial police.

Overall, while it is true to say that these inspection inquiries may relate to a very wide range of police and security issues, they all retain a link with Committee P's *raison d'être*, namely monitoring of the respect for and/or the active promotion of human rights and effectiveness, efficiency and coordination in the police forces.

The purpose of these inspection inquiries is always to draw up a number of conclusions and recommendations for the police authorities and forces.

On its own initiative or at the request of the special committee charged with providing parliamentary support for the Standing Police Monitoring Committee and the Standing Intelligence Agencies Review Committee, Committee P also follows up on its previous recommendations periodically or on an ad-hoc basis. In this connection, it conducts special follow-up inquiries.

## 9.2 Disclosure of investigation reports

All inspection inquiries culminate in a report submitted to Parliament. This report sets out in general terms the investigations or checks carried out and includes the conclusions relating to the texts, activities or methods liable to compromise the respect for citizens' fundamental freedoms and constitutional rights and the effectiveness of the police.

When drafting reports, the adversarial principle is also applied wherever possible during inspection inquiries.

If the investigation was launched at the request of the competent minister or authority, a copy of the report will be submitted to this minister or authority. This will remain confidential until it is discussed in the Chamber of Representatives' special committee charged with providing parliamentary support for the Standing Police Monitoring Committee and the Standing Intelligence Agencies Review Committee. The competent minister or authority may also be informed by a general or specific report, following a complaint or report of police misconduct or a set of complaints or reports of such misconduct.

The competent minister or authority may confer with Committee P regarding a specific report or several inquiry reports and their conclusions. The Committee may also propose such an exchange of views itself. In addition, the competent minister or authority will inform Committee P, within a reasonable time frame, of the steps taken in response to its conclusions.

After any opinion received from the competent minister or authority, Committee P may decide to publicly disclose all or some of its reports and conclusions, in the manner that it deems fit in accordance with its internal rules of procedure. Due to their confidential nature (for privacy reasons or due to the secrecy of an ongoing pre-trial investigation or to protect the physical integrity of certain individuals), some investigations will be made public only after a number of years, if at all. These reports are of course always submitted to Parliament.

## 10. How are complaints and reports of police misconduct investigated?

### 10.1 Complaints and reports of police misconduct

Any citizen may lodge a complaint, submit a report of police misconduct or communicate information to Committee P regarding the operation or conduct of an intervention by a police force or one of its officials<sup>18</sup>. This information may relate to personal behaviour running counter to police ethics (rudeness, improper behaviour, late intervention, etc.) or organisational or structural problems, i.e. related to the structure of the police force, its organisation or operation.

Any police official has an equal right to lodge a complaint and need not request the authorisation of their superiors, nor may they be disciplined for doing so.

In certain cases, if the informant makes a specific request accordingly, Committee P may protect his or her anonymity, taking all the appropriate measures to this end. His or her identity will then be known only to Standing Committee P and Investigation Department P.

Committee P examines more specifically complaints and reports of police misconduct relating to an organisational failing or a serious failing, fault or negligence by an individual.

### 10.2 Notification and motivation on closure of an investigation

At the end of an investigation, Committee P will draw up its conclusions and will also give its opinion on whether or not the complaint or allegations is/are justified. In some instances, recommendations are drafted and sent to the police chief, the head of a particular service and/or the police authority in question.

The complainant or informant is notified, in general terms, of the findings of the investigation.

However, Committee P may also decide to (temporarily or permanently) close a case relating to a complaint or a report of police misconduct or to close it without taking any further action.

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<sup>18</sup> A more detailed description of the procedure as well as the form can be found on the Committee P website: [www.comitep.be](http://www.comitep.be).

This will apply in particular if:

- Committee P is not competent *ratione materiae* or *ratione personae*<sup>19</sup>;
- the complaint or report of misconduct is clearly unfounded<sup>20</sup> or irrelevant<sup>21</sup>; is insufficiently substantiated<sup>22</sup> or not backed up by any hard evidence<sup>23</sup>;
- the complainant or informant cannot be tracked down, refuses to cooperate or drops the complaint;
- the General Inspectorate of the Federal and Local Police, a specifically internal monitoring body or any other ad-hoc specific institution or service is already examining the case.

The decision to close a case or take no further action must also be communicated and justified to the complainant or the informant. However, where relevant or useful, some details from such cases may be passed on, for information purposes, to the police force in question.

### 10.3 Investigation of a criminal offence

If allegations constituting a criminal offence are reported, they will be disclosed to the judicial authority, which has exclusive competence in this regard. This does not preclude opening an inspection case at the same time, relating to the aspects of the allegations that do not constitute a criminal offence.

In certain circumstances, the relevant judicial authority may ask Investigation Department P to carry out the ensuing criminal investigation.

### 10.4 Transfer of powers<sup>24</sup>

Committee P examines some of these complaints and reports of police misconduct itself (sometimes calling on the assistance of Investigation Department P) but leaves most of them to the police corps.

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<sup>19</sup> Committee P's non-competence is either *ratione personae* (where the complaint does not relate to a police force or a police official), *ratione materiae* (most often where the case is examined by the judicial authorities or where the subject of the complaint falls outside the scope of police operations).

<sup>20</sup> These are complaints that unreasonably challenge police officials' authority to make an intervention despite its legal basis. One example in the field of road traffic would be where the complainant disputes a fine or a test which is legally sound.

<sup>21</sup> These are often complaints formulated in general terms and expressing general dissatisfaction with society or democratic institutions.

<sup>22</sup> These are complaints relating to a specific police intervention, which may be justified but do not include sufficient details to substantiate the disputed police intervention (e.g. information on the place, time, those in attendance, circumstances, consequences, etc.).

<sup>23</sup> These are complaints which are vaguely or unclearly formulated, most often based on unrealistic expectations of the police forces in question.

<sup>24</sup> Article 10, para. 4 of the Organic Law of 18 July 1991.

Standing Committee P may decide, if it considers that the allegations reported to it do not relate to organisational problems or serious personal errors, problems or negligence, to transfer the power for handling these allegations to the relevant police official, namely the General Commissioner of the Federal Police, a local police chief or the head of the other police forces referred to in Article 3 of the Organic Law of 18 July 1991.

In case of such a transfer of powers, the police forces handle these complaints and reports either entirely by themselves or under the supervision of Committee P.

In this way a substantial proportion of complaints and reports are handled by the forces themselves, helping boost the public's trust in the police, which was one of the reasons for establishing Committee P in the first place.

Under Ministerial Circular CP3 of 29 March 2011 concerning the internal monitoring system in the two-tiered integrated police<sup>25</sup>, it is the responsibility of the entity to which the complaint or report has been transferred to notify the complainant or the informant accordingly.

When closing the case, this entity notifies Committee P of the conclusions of its investigation and the measures taken.

## **10.5 Possibility of obtaining a second opinion from Committee P<sup>26</sup>**

If handling powers are transferred, the notification to the complainant or the informant will indicate that if the latter has an objection to the conclusions of the investigation communicated by the police force when closing the case, they may ask Committee P to reconsider their complaint or report of police misconduct.

This is not a right to appeal per se but an opinion based on additional information Committee P may request from the police forces involved so that it can decide on its position on how the investigation was conducted.

This makes Committee P the ultimate guarantor for the effective handling of complaints, including those examined by the internal monitoring bodies and the General Inspectorate of the Federal and Local Police.

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<sup>25</sup> *Belgian Official Gazette* of 21 April 2011 (in Dutch and French).

<sup>26</sup> Article 10, para. 4 of the Organic Law of 18 July 1991.

## 10.6 Disciplinary procedures

Under Article 26 of the Act of 13 May 1999 establishing the disciplinary status of police personnel<sup>27</sup>, the Chairman of Committee P has a binding right to issue instructions to the disciplinary authorities. In other words, if the Chairman of Committee P informs the disciplinary authority of allegations which may constitute a disciplinary offence, this authority must investigate whether to actually launch disciplinary proceedings for the actions in question. The disciplinary authority must also keep the Chairman of Committee P informed of the follow-up to this request. This does not mean that it has to initiate disciplinary proceedings. In simple terms, it must check whether the actions justify such proceedings and then communicate its decision<sup>28</sup>. Against this backdrop, we should stress that Committee P itself has no disciplinary powers and cannot impose such sanctions on members of the police.

Similarly, under Article 23 of the Organic Law of 18 July 1991, if during an investigation a member of Investigation Department P finds evidence of behaviour that could constitute disciplinary misconduct, the Director-General of Investigation Department P must immediately inform the relevant disciplinary authority.

## 10.7 Mediation

Finally, it is worth pointing out that Committee P does not have a mediation role but the General Inspectorate of the Federal and Local Police can perform such a function.

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<sup>27</sup> Article 23 of the Organic Law of 18 July 1991.

<sup>28</sup> Pyl, G. and Liners, A., *Discipline, Manuel pour les fonctionnaires de police dirigeants [Discipline: Handbook for senior police officials]* (in French), Brussels, Politeia, 2005, p. IV/4.

## 11. Suspected breaches of integrity

Since 17 June 2019, the procedure for reporting a suspected breach of integrity within a federal administrative authority by a member of its staff<sup>29</sup> has applied to integrated police staff members<sup>30</sup>.

The powers this legislation confers on the Federal Ombudsmen are exercised by Standing Committee P when a suspected breach of integrity is reported by a police official (or a former police official who left the police less than two years prior to the report).

This special procedure is carried out in two phases. The first phase involves obtaining a preliminary opinion. Only if this goes their way can the complainant actually make the report (second phase), prompting Standing Committee P to launch a full investigation.

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<sup>29</sup> This was enshrined by the Act of 15 September 2013, as amended by the Act of 8 May 2019.

<sup>30</sup> A more detailed description of the procedure as well as the form can be found on the Committee P website: [www.comitep.be](http://www.comitep.be).

## 12. Contact details

Rue de Louvain, 48/7, BE-1000 Brussels

Tel.: +32 (0)2 286 28 11

Fax: +32 (0)2 286 28 99

info@comitep.be

[www.comitep.be](http://www.comitep.be)

## 13. Imprint

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