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Micro-Research on Identifying the Public Perception of the Quality and Performance of the Local Police Public Service in Scheia Commune, Suceava County

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JEL classification: H10, H83

Abstract: *In this article, we aim to analyze the public perception of the local community in Şcheia commune, Suceava county, regarding the quality and performance of the public police service. The study includes a qualitative assessment of the local community's general satisfaction level with the quality and performance of the Local Police in Şcheia commune, Suceava county, through a questionnaire administered to 100 respondents between November 2023 and February 2024. The research, using qualitative and quantitative methods, explores the level of satisfaction, information sources, perception of police authority, and aspects requiring improvement. The results indicate general satisfaction but highlight the need for improvements in equipment, professional training, and communication. The conclusion emphasizes the necessity of the service but suggests reforms for optimal performance. Although there is general satisfaction with local police activity, citizens believe improvements are needed in conduct, language, weapons equipment, professional training, logistical base, and the perceived authority of police officers. Crime prevention through patrolling, considering the specific nature of Şcheia commune, is seen as essential, and professionalism and integrity are the most appreciated values of local police officers.*

Keywords: *Local Police Service; public services; local community; quality and performance of the Local Police public Service.*

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Introduction

The sociological survey conducted among the Şcheia local community regarding the public perception of the quality and performance of the Local Police service aims to analyze this service in relation to the efficiency of activities performed by local police officers. At the beginning of 2017, the first actions were initiated to establish a local police service in Şcheia Commune. This initiative was approved by a decision of the deliberative authority of the ATU, aiming to satisfy the identified needs in the field of local community safety and protection (Law on Local Police No. 155/2010). The creation of this public service became necessary in the context of a high level of crime recorded in the commune.

Methodological Aspects

The general objective of this research is to conduct a qualitative assessment of the local community's general satisfaction level regarding the activity carried out by the officials within the Local Police service in Şcheia commune (Organization Chart of Şcheia Commune Town Hall). Regarding secondary objectives, we aimed to observe the degree of interaction between citizens and the officials within this service, and based on this, to be able to assess the truth value of other related objectives, concerning finding aspects that need improvement in the analyzed service, as well as the conduct of officials.

Regarding the research hypotheses, these are as follows:

I. The Local Police Service is a necessary service, desired by the citizens of Şcheia locality, established to reduce the crime rate within the commune.

II. The professional training of the Local Police service personnel in Şcheia commune is at a high level, meeting citizens' expectations.

And, as Sorin Dan Şondor also argued (Şondor, 2020), once we know what we want to measure, we will translate the indicators into a series of questions that appear in the applied questionnaire.

For measuring citizens' satisfaction level regarding service quality, the Questionnaire proves to be one of the most frequently used techniques in social-human sciences (Chelcea, 2001).

The applied questionnaire was formulated based on the above hypotheses, aiming to confirm or refute them. 100 people responded to the survey, completing the questionnaire during the period of 20.11.2023-03.05.2024. Following the analysis and interpretation of data obtained from

respondents, the characteristics of respondents were obtained, including age, gender, professional status, and their education level. The analysis of the local community's perception of the quality and performance of the Local Police public service was conducted using both qualitative and quantitative techniques, specifically through an opinion survey based on a questionnaire.

Interpretation of Demographic Statistical Data for Subject Identification

The sample is non-probabilistic and more opportunistic, considering that the ultimate purpose of this report is to provide directions for improvement and enhance the performance of public institutions and authorities involved in the project. However, criteria for representativeness, such as age, gender, and education level, were considered.

The respondents to this questionnaire are 53% female and 47% male. Regarding age distribution, 16% are aged between 18–26 years, 28% between 26–35 years, 44% between 35–55 years, and 12% are over 60 years old.

In terms of education level, there is a balance between respondents with secondary education and those with higher education, with only a small difference of 5% in favor of the latter. Additionally, 3% of respondents have postgraduate studies.

Of the total respondents, 8% are students, nearly three-quarters are employed (73%), 4% are unemployed, 10% are retirees, and 5% have other professional statuses.

General Overview of the Results

Although the number of questions addressed to the citizens of Şcheia commune was higher, we present below a series of questions that we consider relevant for validating or invalidating the hypotheses.

The answers to the first question aim to measure the level of awareness among citizens regarding the activity of the Şcheia local police service.

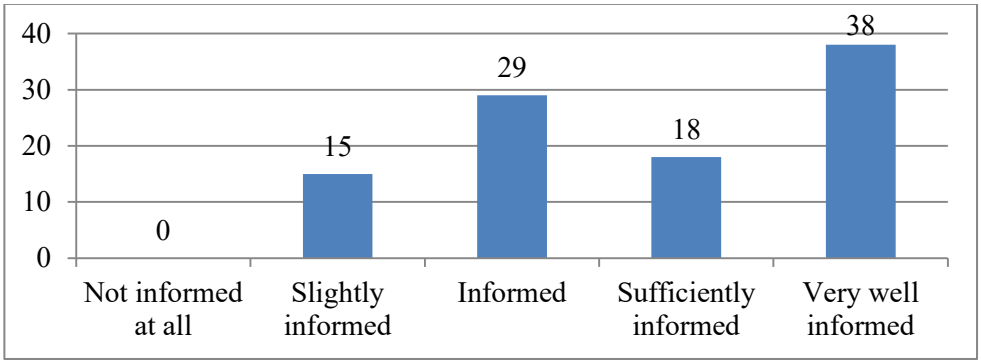


Figure no. 1 Informing Citizens About the Activity of the Local Police Service in Şcheia

This is an important question that helps evaluate the level of awareness and engagement of citizens regarding the activities carried out by this service. The community's level of information reflects not only the efficiency of the communication channels used by the local police but also the general perception of its role in maintaining public safety. Based on the responses to this question, 15% of respondents reported being poorly informed, 29% informed, 18% sufficiently informed, while 38% stated they are very well informed about the activities of the local police service in their locality.

Question no. 2 refers to the sources of information used by citizens regarding the activities of the local police in the locality.

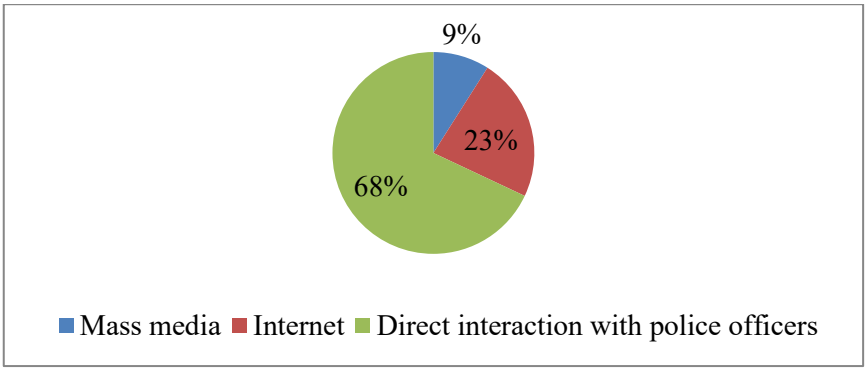


Figure no. 2 Sources of Information Regarding the Activity of the Local Police

Sources of information play a crucial role in establishing an effective connection between the Local Police Service and the local community in Şcheia. The responses to this question somewhat reinforce the findings of the previous question. Based on the data, 68% of respondents indicated that

direct interaction with police officers is their personal source of information, while 23% rely on the internet, and 9% obtain information from mass media regarding the local police service in the area.

Although the primary source of information is direct interaction with local police officers, more emphasis should be placed on the institution's official channels, such as its website or social media platforms. These channels should periodically publish activity reports, updated information about events, safety measures, and details regarding ongoing campaigns.

The next question asked the citizens of Şcheia how they perceive the level of authority of police officers in relation to the public.

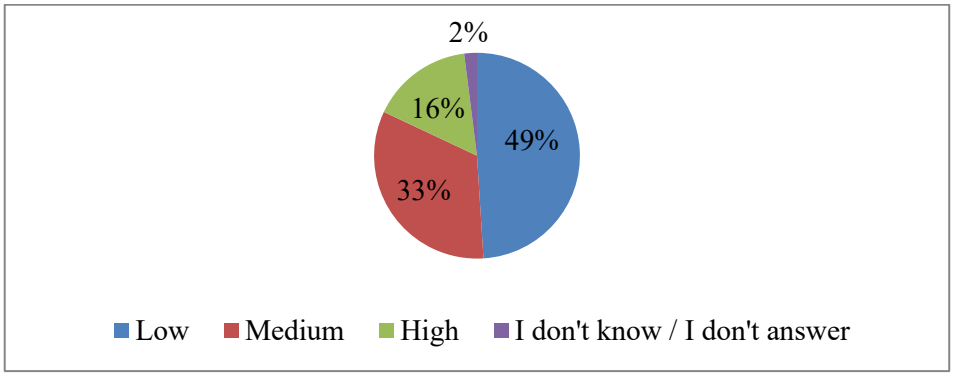


Figure no. 3 Level of Authority of Police Officers in Relation to Citizens

The level of authority of police officers in relation to citizens is an essential component of an efficient and credible local police service. The responses to this question are somewhat balanced, reflecting two opposing categories. After analyzing the data, it was observed that one group of respondents considers the level of authority of police officers to be positive, with 33% describing it as medium and 16% as high. On the other hand, a second group of respondents has a negative perspective, with 49% rating it as low, while 2% did not know or chose not to answer.

The level of authority of police officers in relation to citizens must strike a balance between adherence to legislation, professional competence, and community trust.

The responses to the question, "In your opinion, do you consider that local police officers have an adequate understanding of the relevant legislation?" are presented in the figure below.

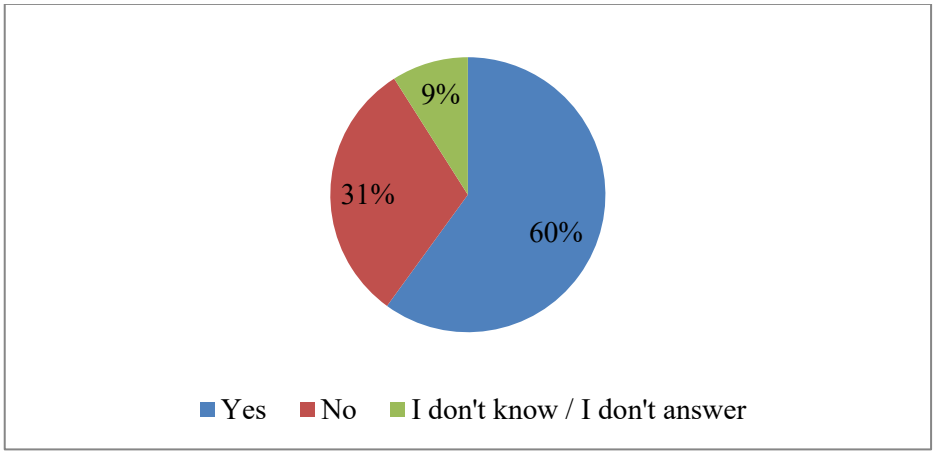


Figure no. 4 Knowledge of Legislation by Local Police Officers

The ability to correctly interpret and apply the law not only impacts the performance of local police officers but also shapes public perception of the institution. Regarding the responses to this question, 60% of participants believed that the local police service's knowledge of relevant legislation is at an adequate level. Meanwhile, 9% did not know or chose not to answer, and 31% expressed a negative perception regarding the local police officers' understanding of the law.

It is noteworthy that the question referred to an adequate level of knowledge. Thus, based on the data analysis, we can conclude that citizens generally hold an optimistic view regarding the theoretical preparedness of local police officers.

The purpose of the next question, "What aspects bother you the most regarding the activity of local police officers?" was to identify areas that need improvement in the activity of the local police service in the locality.

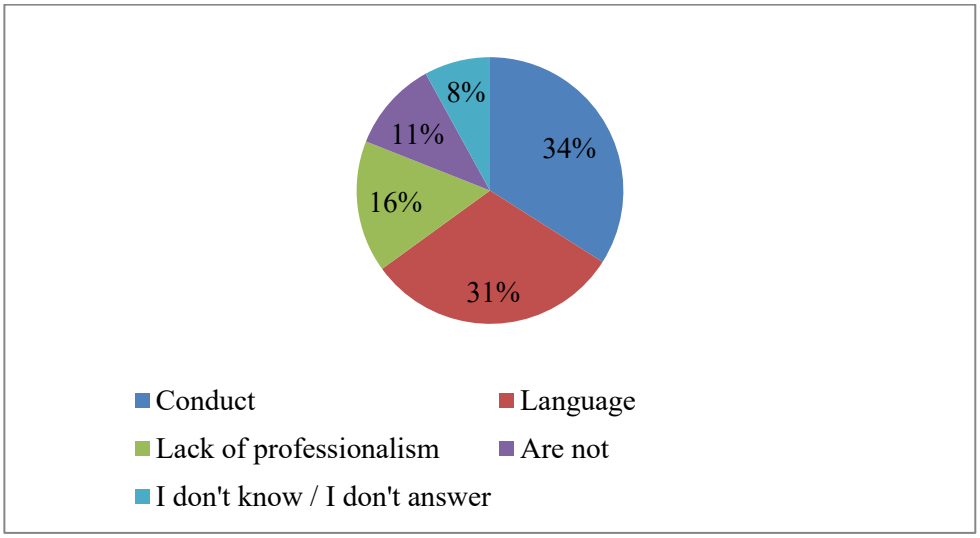


Figure no. 5 Negative Aspects Regarding the Activity of Local Police Officers

Opinions were divided on this matter, with 34% of respondents indicating conduct as a troubling aspect, 31% pointing to language, and 16% citing a lack of professionalism. Meanwhile, 11% of respondents stated that there are no aspects that bother them, and 8% did not know or chose not to respond.

Through the question, "In your opinion, what is the most desirable quality for a local police officer in their professional activity?" we aimed to highlight the main qualities expected of a local police officer.

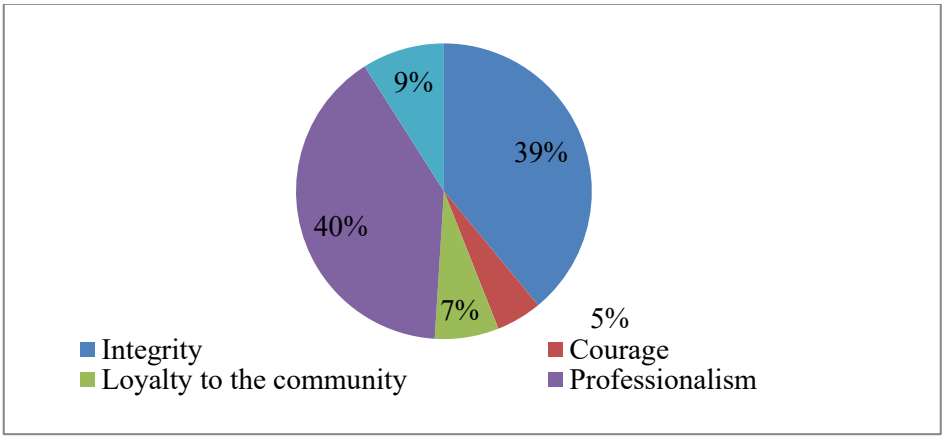


Figure no. 6 Qualities of Local Police Officers in Professional Activity

Regarding the responses to this question, professionalism and integrity were the main qualities chosen by citizens, with 40% and 39% of total responses, respectively. Responsibility was selected by 9% of respondents, loyalty to the community by 7%, and courage by only 5%. Indeed, these two aspects—professionalism and integrity—which received the highest percentages, are crucial not only for the proper execution of police duties but also for strengthening the trust relationship between the police and the community.

The results for the question, "In your opinion, which of the following activities should be a priority for local police officers in their work?" are presented in the next figure.

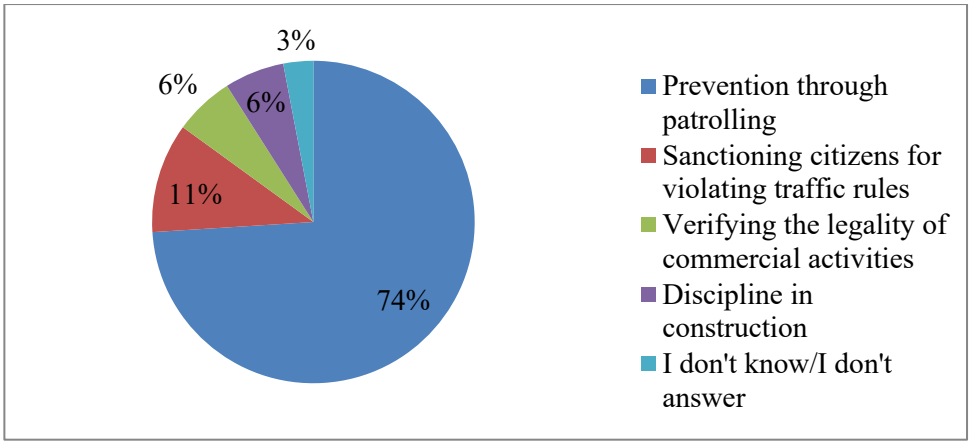


Figure no. 7 Priority Activities for Local Police Officers

The primary goal of establishing the local police service was to reduce the number of crimes in the locality by ensuring the presence of local police officers within the administrative-territorial unit (UAT) to deter both contraventional and criminal acts, especially the latter, which have caused frustration, dissatisfaction, and vocal complaints among the members of the Şcheia local community.

The data obtained from processing this question confirm the necessity of this service, with the importance of combating criminal phenomena being reflected in the citizens' responses. For 74% of respondents, prevention through patrolling should be the main activity of local police officers. 11% consider the sanctioning of citizens for traffic violations to be more important, while 6% of respondents value construction discipline activities**,** and the same percentage was attributed to this aspect, 3% did not know or chose not to answer.

The responses to the question, "Do you consider it necessary for local police officers to have competencies in investigating criminal acts?" are presented in the figure below.

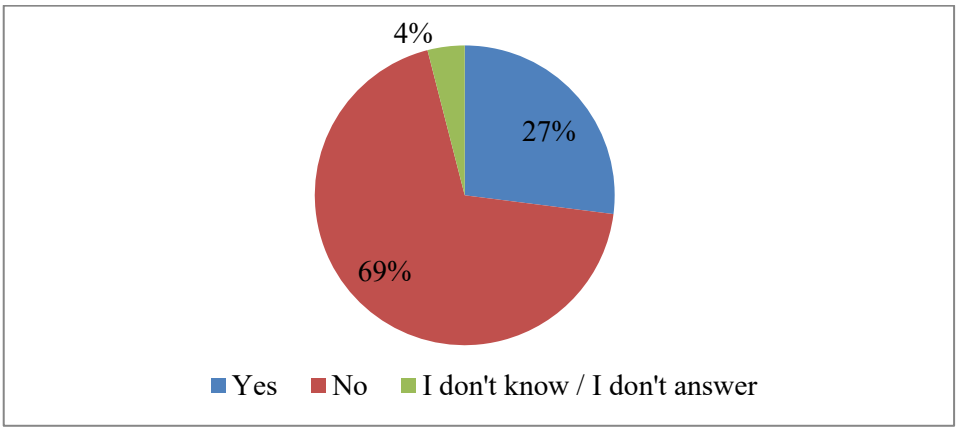


Figure no. 8 Possession of Competencies for Investigating Criminal Acts

The issue of delegating competencies in the field of criminal investigation to local police services has sparked numerous debates in the public sphere, generating both support and opposition, with the latter being the most vocal. The primary argument of those opposing such delegation is the inadequate professional training of local police officers. Investigating criminal acts requires both specialized theoretical knowledge and practical training, which are currently not feasible within the local police services.

In addition to the issue of overlapping responsibilities with the Romanian Police - already overburdened - such a transfer of competencies would create an additional workload for Romanian Police structures, which would need to provide training to local police officers. Furthermore, broadening the competency framework for this local public service would lead to an overload in their activity, affecting other areas where they have competencies and where the Romanian Police does not intervene.

Considering these arguments, the responses to this question were somewhat predictable. More than half of the respondents opposed such an extension of local police competencies, with 69% responding negatively, 27% responding affirmatively, and 4% not knowing or choosing not to answer.

The question, "Do you consider the activity of the local police to be transparent and in the interest of the local community?" aimed to highlight the level of transparency of this service.

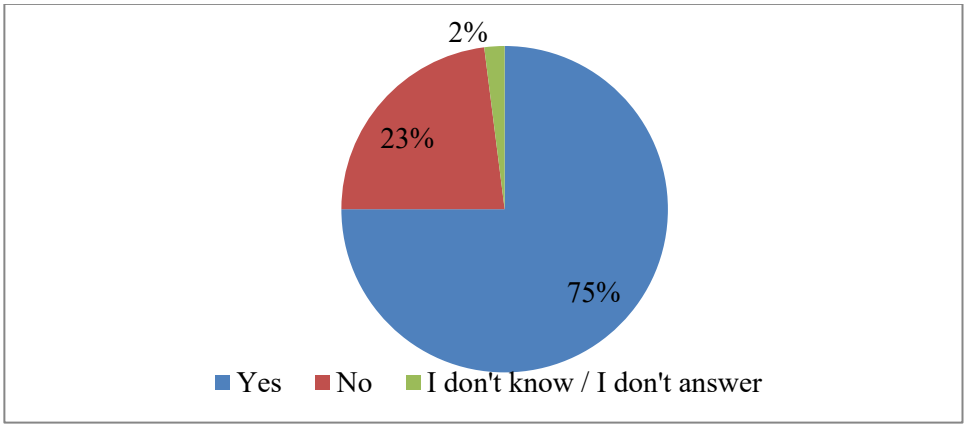


Figure no. 9 Transparency of Local Police Activity

This question aimed to assess citizens' perception of the transparency of the analyzed service's activity. Based on the data, there is a predominantly positive perception: 75% of respondents view the activity of this service's staff as transparent and in the interest of the local community. Meanwhile, 2% indicated that they do not know or cannot assess, and 23% provided a negative response to this question.

The results of the question, "Do you consider the local police service to be necessary for the commune?" confirm that the establishment of this service was indeed necessary.

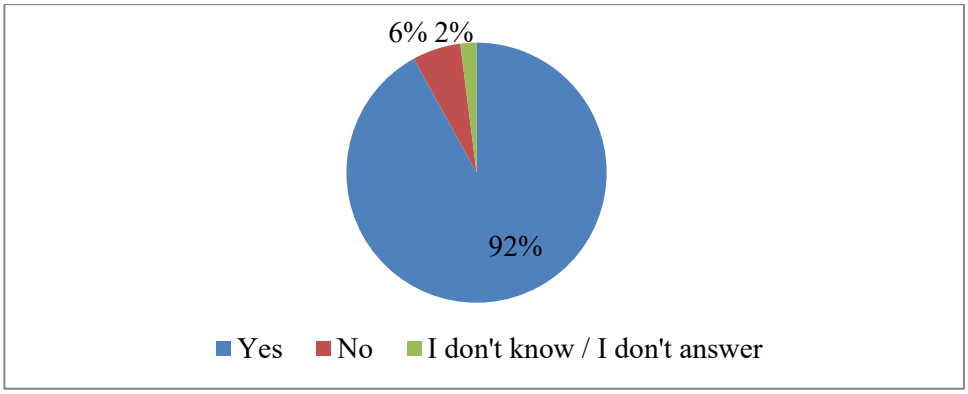


Figure no. 10 The Necessity of the Local Police Service

The establishment and maintenance of such a service required substantial financial effort from the local administration in Şcheia, sparking debates about its long-term sustainability and the impact on the local budget.

This question sought to gauge the citizens' opinion on the necessity of the analyzed service.

The processed responses reveal that affirmative answers are predominant, with 92% of respondents considering the service necessary. Only 6% believe that such a service is not needed, while 2% did not know or chose not to answer**.**

It can be concluded that personal safety, as well as the reduction and prevention of antisocial acts, outweighed concerns about the use of local financial resources.

The citizens' opinions on the question, "Do you think the local police service should be reformed, dissolved, or remain as it is?" are divided.

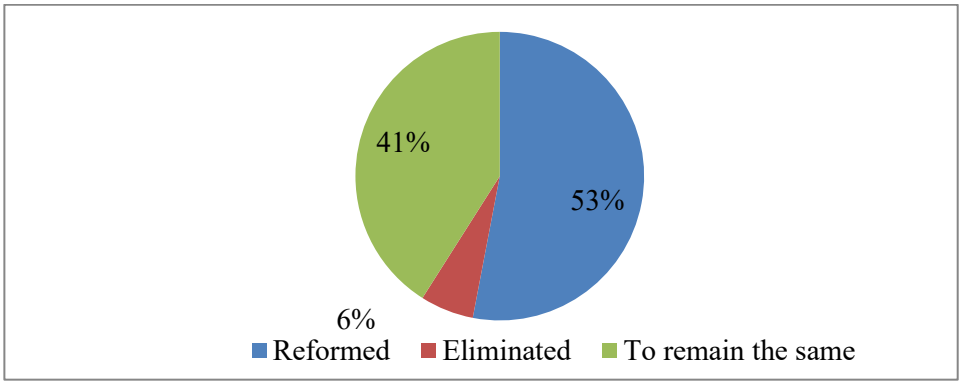


Figure no. 11 The Necessity of Reforming the Local Police Service

The responses to this question reveal two opposing groups. **53% of respondents** believe that the local police service should be reformed, while 6% think it should be dissolved. However, a significant portion of respondents, 41%, believe that the service is functioning at an optimal level and does not require changes, opting for the status quo.

Given that more than half of citizens consider some changes necessary in the service's functioning, the leadership of the local police and the local administration must give special attention to this matter (Emergency Ordinance No. 57 of July 3, 2019). It is essential to identify the necessary measures to ensure that the service's staff have all the resources required at the highest possible standards. This approach would enable continuous, unequivocal, and consistent improvement in the service's activity.

The responses to the question, "What improvements would you bring to the local police service?" are presented in the figure below.

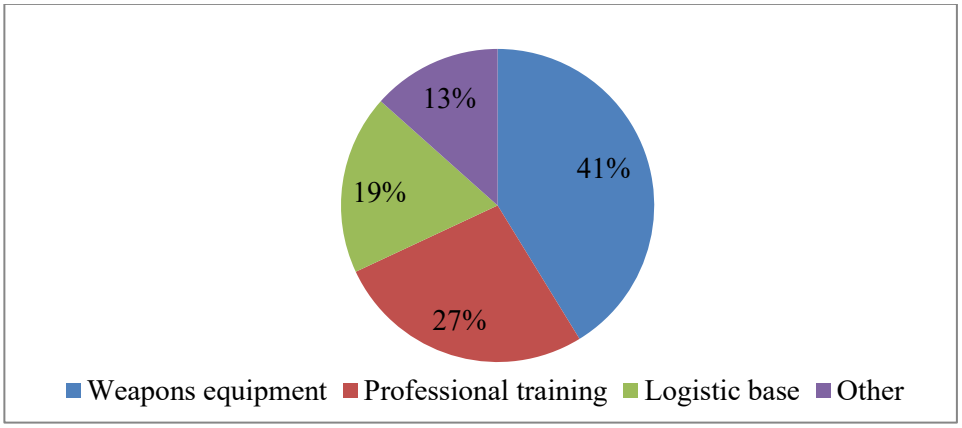


Figure no. 12 Improvements to the Local Police Service

As an open-ended question, out of the 100 participants in the survey, 97 responded to this item. After processing the answers, it is evident that approximately half of the respondents (41%) identified equipping local police officers with firearms as a necessary improvement. This deficiency, also present in the Romanian Police, creates a sense of insecurity among citizens.

In second place, with 27%, respondents highlighted the need for enhanced professional training, indicating a significant demand for further specialization. In third place, with 19%, logistic infrastructure was prioritized. Lastly, 13% opted for other improvements, which are detailed as follows:

Exclusively young staff: Some respondents suggested that the service should be composed only of younger personnel. While integrating younger generations into public services is desirable, the presence of experienced individuals is equally essential for the public's benefit. Apart from the head of service, a former Romanian Police officer with specific training in public safety, the rest of the personnel already meet the younger age requirement mentioned by respondents.

National-level collaboration protocols: Two broader suggestions focused on creating mandatory, unified collaboration protocols between local police structures and institutions responsible for public order, national security, and other regulatory bodies. These protocols would establish and standardize tactical measures and intervention procedures across the country.

Mandatory provision of equipment: Another suggestion was the mandatory obligation for local deliberative and executive authorities supervising local police structures to provide all necessary equipment to ensure the safety and security of both officers and citizens.

The satisfaction level with the services provided by the local police is presented in the next figure.

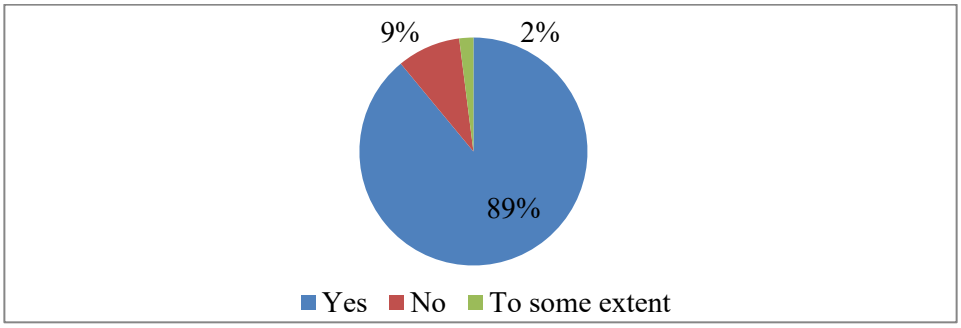


Figure no. 13 Citizens' Satisfaction with the Services Offered by the Local Police in Şcheia

The purpose of this final question was to determine the overall perception of the local police service. When asked whether they are satisfied with the service's overall activity, 89% of respondents answered affirmatively, while 9% expressed dissatisfaction. Additionally, 2% indicated that they are somewhat satisfied with the service's performance.

These results reflect a predominantly positive assessment of the local police's activities, demonstrating a strong level of community support and satisfaction.

Conclusions of the Opinion Survey

The local police service represents an essential component of the administrative and social framework of a commune, playing a fundamental role in maintaining public order, safety, and the quality of life for its citizens. The objective of this micro-research was to identify public perception regarding the performance and quality of the analyzed service. The focus was primarily on understanding citizens' opinions about the professional training of the service's personnel, as well as their activities as perceived through interactions with the service staff.

The leadership of the service, entrusted to a retired military officer—a colonel with over 20 years of experience in the military—has significantly influenced the conduct and performance of the service personnel. This was evident in the data collected from respondents, who overwhelmingly provided affirmative responses regarding the aforementioned aspects, confirming the positive trajectory of the service and their support for the local administration's initiative to address issues related to public order and safety.

Undoubtedly, there is room for improvement, particularly in terms of logistics and equipment, including armament. However, overall, the service is on the right track and enjoys the support of the local community.

The results obtained from the questionnaire addressed to the citizens of Şcheia highlight a general level of satisfaction with the quality of public services, the resolution of requests, and the attitude of the institution's personnel. Additionally, considering the specific needs of the locality, key areas requiring improvement to enhance service quality and efficiency were identified. The priority areas include crime prevention, parking management, oversight of commercial activities, and construction discipline. Both hypotheses posed at the beginning of the research were confirmed by the survey responses.

The necessity of a local police service in the commune was affirmed by the respondents. The local community supports the initiative of the local public administration to address public order and safety issues. The primary objective of the service should be the prevention of actions that disturb public peace and order within the locality, leaving the investigation of criminal acts to the Romanian Police.

The citizens of the administrative-territorial unit (ATU) value the legal knowledge demonstrated by the service personnel but note the need for improvements in conduct and language in fulfilling their duties. Integrity, transparency, and professionalism are considered extremely important values by respondents. Improvements in armament and logistical support were also highlighted as necessary.

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