

# The Use of Crowd and Riot Control Squads in Modern Police Operations

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**Abstract.** Within the structure of the Polish Police, as a formation statutorily responsible for the protection of health, life and property of citizens, there are crowd and riot control squads (Pol. *pododdziały zwarte*). These are police organisational units<sup>1</sup>, also referred to as riot police units (Pol. *OPP* — *Oddziały Prewencji Policji*) and independent riot police subunits (Pol. *SPPP* — *Samodzielne Pododdziały Prewencji Policji*). Their main advantage is the possibility of deploying several thousand police officers to respond to various events in a relatively short period of time and, if necessary, to broadly understood threats to the security of citizens. This is achieved by the use of appropriate mechanisms for maintaining readiness to act and achieving higher levels of readiness, as well as due to an organisational structure based on the military model, mobility based on available means of transport, a system of specialist trainings and modularity and compatibility with other police squads. Quite a wide range of opportunities to act in situations of existing threats to people and the environment raises the question of the quality and possibilities for the development of this structure, its strengths, as well as difficulties that emerge, both in terms of a direct involvement in various forms of police action, as well as those relating to the real condition of the structure, in the context of forces and measures available to the squads in question. At this point, it is necessary to mention other police structures referred to as police squads which include officers who daily perform different prevention activities (e.g. they occupy the posts of patrol and responding officers at county and municipal police headquarters). These are so-called irregular riot police units (Pol. *NOP* — *Nieetatowe Oddziały Prewencji*) and irregular riot police subunits (Pol. *NPP* — *Nieetatowe Pododdziały Prewencji*); however, their role and operational rules<sup>2</sup> are not the subject matter, and the main issue under consideration is so-called regular units, whose officers remain in the structures of riot police units and independent riot police subunits.

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## Tasks, objectives and operational contexts of crowd and riot control squads

Riot police units are based in Białystok, Bydgoszcz, Gdańsk, Katowice, Kielce, Cracow, Lublin, Łódź, Olsztyn, Poznań, Rzeszów, Szczecin, Warsaw and Wrocław. Independent riot police subunits are based in Bielsko-Biała, Częstochowa, Gorzów

<sup>1</sup> „Police organisational unit — (...) National Police Headquarters, Police Central Bureau of Investigation, regional police headquarters, county police headquarters, police station, specialist police station, Police Academy in Szczytno, police school, Central Forensic Laboratory, riot police unit, independent riot police subunit, independent counter terrorist squad and police training centre”, [in:] Zarządzenie No. 1041 Komendanta Głównego Policji z dnia 28 września 2007 r. w sprawie szczegółowych zasad organizacji i zakresu działania komend, komisariatów i innych jednostek organizacyjnych Policji (Dz. Urz. KGP of 2013, art. 50 with later amendments).

<sup>2</sup> Operation of irregular riot police units and subunits have been defined in: Zarządzenie 715 Komendanta Głównego Policji z dnia 22 grudnia 2003 r. w sprawie szczegółowych zasad organizacji i zakresu działania nieetatowych pododdziałów i oddziałów prewencji Policji (Dz. Urz. KGP of 2003, No. 22, art. 127 with later amendments).

Wielkopolski, Legnica, Opole, Płock and Radom. The number of personnel in a particular police unit varies from 120 to 1193 officers, and the total number of police posts is 6801<sup>3</sup>. The difference in the number of posts in particular units and subunits refers to, among others, the local needs for security in given urban agglomerations, intensity of police activities, crime rate and local conditions.

To talk about a structure referred to as a riot police unit, it must have at least 240 police posts. Below this number, there is a structure called an independent riot police subunit. Crowd and riot control squads are organised according to the military model — a riot police unit as a company, an independent riot police subunit as a platoon, with the smallest command structure — a team, which consists of 7 officers including the commander.

Each team has its own vehicle, which is also used to transport specialist equipment. Three teams form a platoon. This is a total of 22 officers including the commander (3x7+1). Out of four platoons a company of 94 officers is formed, including the commander and the deputy commander and 88 officers in 4 platoons as well as 4 officers from their own logistic base. (22x4+2+4). Depending on the needs, the companies are combined into tactical units to ensure that they are able to implement the adopted assumptions and deal with an operational situation when performing their activities.

Crowd and riot control squads are at the National Police Chief's disposal who can deploy them to perform their duties in different parts of Poland. For day-to-day operation and optimal readiness for action responsible are regional police chiefs on whose area such police units are seated. This means that regional police chiefs are those who bear the responsibility for:

1. Maintaining an optimal condition of technical equipment available to riot police units and subunits, i.e. officers' personal protective equipment (helmets with visors, body and limb protectors), firearms and use of force tools (smooth-bore rifles of calibre 12, manual and backpack pepper throwers, manual and automatic tear grenade launchers, dazzling searchlights, water cannons) and vehicles such as medical vehicles with medical teams and special vehicles — armoured vehicles.
2. Providing a minimum of 90 per cent of the level of employment in these units (maximum of 10 per cent of vacant posts, so-called vacancies) together with maintaining the potential at the level of 75 per cent of the personnel of a particular crowd and riot control squad ready to take action (i.e. monitoring the personnel status in terms of sick leaves, days off, participation in courses and trainings in other police departments).
3. Providing an appropriate level of training as regards police formations<sup>4</sup>, crowd and riot techniques to confront violent crowds, unblock government administration facilities, cooperate with other police entities (e.g. criminal service, counter terrorist squads), improving operational procedures in cri-

<sup>3</sup> Decyzja No. 12 Komendanta Głównego Policji z dnia 22 stycznia 2016 r. w sprawie utworzenia, struktury organizacyjnej i etatowej oddziałów prewencji Policji oraz samodzielnych pododdziałów prewencji Policji (Dz. Urz. KGP of 2016, art. 2 with later amendments).

<sup>4</sup> Zarządzenie No. 1114 Komendanta Głównego Policji z 19 grudnia 2006 r. w sprawie szyków, ugrupowań oraz przemieszczania oddziałów i pododdziałów Policji (Dz. Urz. KGP of 2007, No. 1, art. 1 with amendments).

sis situations, offering trainings on use of force and firearms, developing skills in operational tactics in urbanised, open and forest areas, knowledge of topography, providing first aid and others.

It goes without saying that regional police chiefs assign the aforementioned tasks to their subordinate crowd and riot control squads' commanders, who if needed ask the chiefs for assistance when performing the assigned tasks. It needs to be emphasised that riot police units and subunits' commanders are highly dependent on regional police headquarters departments, as they have financial resources for the purchase of fixed assets, redecorations and repairs, financial remunerations for officers, and those benefits are provided by provisions department, finance department, transport department, personnel and training department at particular regional headquarters. Crowd and riot control squads' commanders cannot carry out recruitment procedures for the units they are in charge of. It is the personnel and training department at a particular regional police headquarters that is responsible for the recruitment procedure for crowd and riot control squads. Specific conditions of the service in such units result from the following:

- a military-based structure and rules of command, which results in a higher level of police discipline when compared to other police structures;
- a unique availability of police officers on duty in such units, requiring from them dedication and readiness to take action even if it has not been scheduled in their shift rota for a given month (monthly officers can have 21 shifts, each 8 hours long, which is 168 hours in total);
- selection for the service in crowd and riot control squads well-built and physically fit officers with psychophysical determinants allowing them to maintain optimal readiness to act in life threatening situations;
- a direct contact with violent crowds, an extended time of being on duty up to 12–14 hours.

Crowd and riot control squads are units of high mobility and their officers perform a wide range of police tasks, which are as follows:

1. Carrying out **police operations** in public order and safety threatening situations (e.g. when based on the received information and risk assessment there is a fear of life threatening events — e.g. a demonstration of two extremely negative radical organisations in one place at the same time).
2. Involvement in a high-speed chase to catch a violent criminal (e.g. to arrest an armed fugitive from prison, a serious crime offender — a murderer who after committing the crime is hiding in the forest, to search for a perpetrator of a terrorist attack).
3. Protection of public order during statutorily defined events such as **emergencies, natural disasters and technical failures** (e.g. activities involving assistance in evacuation of people who are injured or at risk, creation of buffer zones, protection and organisation of communications and command for the needs of rescue operations conducted by other services — e.g. Water Voluntary Rescue Service, National Fire Service, Voluntary Fire service and others).
4. Protection of public order and safety during visits of foreign representatives (securing transport routes and places where public meetings and speeches are held, cooperating with State Protection Service officers).

5. Protection of public order and safety during legal public gatherings and during mass events and protests (securing routes of marches and demonstrations, providing medical assistance, monitoring possible threats to the participants of these events, preventing violations of the law).
6. Restoring public order in cases of collective law violation (e.g. pseudo-fans' disorderly behaviour, suppression of hooligan riots, vandalising public houses, seats of government agencies, etc.)
7. Supporting police units in patrolling and patrol-intervention activities, i.e. police interventions as foot patrols and with the use of means of transport (so-called "motorised patrols") — at the disposal of municipal and county police headquarters — both in the framework of planned preventive measures and in case of a particular intensification of negative criminal behaviours, e.g. supporting the unit in the patrol service due to numerous burglaries and thefts
8. Organizing and conducting professional training for police officers and employees of a unit or subunit — as an element influencing the quality of police operations, the effectiveness of interventions, improving the ability of the use of force, knowledge of the law and police procedures, etc.)
9. Performing tasks in the area of safety of service and work, fire protection and occupational health care — as a task of taking care of and improving the quality of service through the application of legal and practical solutions improving the quality of service in order for it to be performed in a safe manner ensuring care for the health of officers and optimal conditions for its performance.

## Police crowd and riot control squads as an element of police operation.

The priority action resulting, inter alia, from the potential of the crowd and riot control squads refers to their participation in activities known as **police operation**. This is one of the four forms of police activities — namely police intervention<sup>5</sup>, prevention activity<sup>6</sup>, police action<sup>7</sup> and the already mentioned police operation.

<sup>5</sup> intervention — *'immediate involvement of a police officer or police officers in the course of an event which is a crime, an offence, a threat or any other fact significant for the state of public order and security, aiming at determining the nature, type and circumstances of the resulting event and projects aimed at restoring the violated public order and security'*, [in:] Zarządzenie No. 23 Komendanta Głównego Policji z dnia 24 września 2014 r. w sprawie metod i form przygotowania i realizacji działań Policji w związku ze zdarzeniami kryzysowymi, §2, ust. 1. pkt. 12. (Dz. Urz. KGP of 2014, art. 65 with later amendments).

<sup>6</sup> *'A set of organizational actions at the intervention level undertaken in order to prevent the events violating legal norms in a situation where the analysis of threats shows that their occurrence is possible or there is a high probability of a crisis event'*, [in:] Zarządzenie No. 23 Komendanta Głównego Policji z dnia 24 września 2014 r. (...) §2, ust. 1. pkt. 14.

<sup>7</sup> *'A set of organizational, tactical, material and technical actions undertaken in order to prevent or eliminate a crisis event, from the type of which as well as accompanying circumstances results that it is not possible to take effective actions using forces and means currently at the disposal of the police department territorially competent for the place of the crisis event'*, [in:] Zarządzenie No. 23 Komendanta Głównego Policji z dnia 24 września 2014 r. (...), §2, ust. 1. pkt. 15.

Police operation, the most complicated and complex form of conducted activities, is carried out either in cases of an emergency event (e.g. flood, construction disaster, traffic catastrophe, terrorist attack, social protests, massive violation of security, traffic routes blockade), or the ones that can be prepared for in the long term (e.g. UN Climate Summit, World Youth Day, Independence Day celebrations, securing mass sports events). Police operation should be understood as 'a set of organisational, tactical and material-technical measures undertaken in order to prevent or eliminate a **crisis event**<sup>8</sup>, if it covers the area of more than one county or regional police HQ or in a situation of conducting activities which are prolonged in time or which need to be supported by riot police units and riot police subunits or counter-terrorist squads outside the police department territorially competent for the place of a crisis event of the regional police headquarters'.<sup>9</sup>

The Directive No. 36 of 14 November 2017 of the National Police Chief on the tasks performed by the Police in crisis situations<sup>10</sup> included a direct reference to the definition of a phenomenon referred to as 'a crisis situation' taken directly from the Crisis Management Act<sup>11</sup> as 'the activity of public administration bodies as an element of national security management, which consists in preventing crisis situations, preparing to take control over them by way of planned actions, responding to the event of crisis situations, removing their effects and restoring resources and critical infrastructure'.<sup>12</sup> In the aforementioned Directive No. 36, the catalogue of crisis situations and the procedure to be implemented by the heads of police units in the response phase were specified. In each of these procedures the leading entity in the implementation phase was determined (Police, Fire Department, Border Guard, Mountain Volunteer Search and Rescue, Tatra Volunteer Search and Rescue, Water Volunteer Search and Rescue, Prison Service, Office for Foreigners, State Sanitary Inspection and others), moreover, the purpose of actions was described (e.g. apprehension of perpetrators, release of hostages, isolation of the place of an event, securing disaster sites, etc.). Possible threats were also identified in procedures concerning crisis situation (e.g. threat to human life and health, panic in the place of the event, obstacles on communication routes, destruction of property, significant material losses, possibility of the perpetrator escape, causing fire or explosion, etc.). Tasks of the Police have been defined in procedures concerning police actions in cases of:

1. Threat of a terrorist incident.
2. Information about an explosive device.
3. Seizure of a building with hostages.

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<sup>8</sup> crisis event — 'an event caused by illegal attacks which may bring danger to life or health of people or property, characterized by the possibility of loss of control by the entity responsible for the security and public order at the place of the event or escalation of the threat to the extent that it requires the use of police officers organized into crowd and riot control units and subunits for the protection of security and public order', [in:] Zarządzenie No. 23 Komendanta Głównego Policji z dnia 24 września 2014 r. w sprawie metod i form przygotowania i realizacji działań Policji w związku ze zdarzeniami kryzysowymi, §2, ust. 1. pkt. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Zarządzenie No. 23 Komendanta Głównego Policji z 24 września 2014 r. (...), § 1, ust. 1, pkt. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Dz. Urz. KGP of 2017, art. 73.

<sup>11</sup> Ustawa z dnia 26 kwietnia 2007 r. o zarządzaniu kryzysowym (Dz. U. of 2018, art. 1401 with later amendments).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 3, sec. 1.

4. Holding hostages.
5. Obtaining information about a person possessing a weapon or other dangerous tool, whose action is aimed at depriving many people of life or health in a public place (active shooter, amok).
6. Disclosure of an unidentified consignment.
7. Disclosure of materials, explosive devices, including those using chemical, biological, radioactive and nuclear (CBRN) agents and particularly dangerous ammunition.
8. Occupation and blockade of objects.
9. Blockades of the road routes.
10. Blockades of the railway routes.
11. Prolonged lack of fuel and electricity supply.
12. Disturbances in the functioning of ICT systems in use.
13. Fire.
14. Flood.
15. Construction catastrophes.
16. Aircraft disasters.
17. Release of a hazardous chemical substance.
18. Dangerous weather phenomena.
19. Landslide.
20. Intensified illegal crossing of the Polish border.
21. Mass migration of foreigners to Poland.
22. Threats or compromise of security of an organisational unit of the Prison Service.
23. Threats of an outbreak or the fight against an contagious disease of people, animals or plants — annex.
24. Biological contamination.
25. Radiation incident.

In addition, two supporting procedures have been defined for the use of police aircrafts and for activities prolonged in time. It should be clearly stated that proper performance of actions in case of an incident or crisis situation in most cases requires the use of police actions implemented in the form of a police operation. Such actions are then led by the National Police Chief or the County Police Chief or a commissioned officer that possesses predisposition, experience and relevant training.<sup>13</sup>

In cases where a police operation is implemented with the possibility of prior planning of forces and resources necessary for its proper implementation — the planning process may be preceded by a written concept, which has to be approved by the superior and constitutes (e.g. the National Police Chief approves the concepts of the Regional Police Chiefs, the Regional Police Chief — respectively for subordinate Municipal Police Chiefs and County Police Chiefs) and contains general objectives and goals of activities, sources and resources needed in the opinion of the concept creator for their proper implementation. It is precisely the moment

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<sup>13</sup> Specialist course for commanders of police actions and operations. The curriculum, organisational and programme principles as well as the content of the course conducted at the Police Academy in Szczytno have been specified in Decyzja No. 173 Komendanta Głównego Policji z dnia 22 maja 2015 r. w sprawie programu nauczania na kursie specjalistycznym dla dowódców akcji i operacji policyjnych (Dz. Urz. KGP of 2015, art. 35).

when the police operation commander can and should request police forces outside their own unit for the tasks completion within the planned operation. Major police operations are divided into actions for which the leader of the action is determined. Thus, within the framework of a police operation several actions can be performed. In practice, such actions are given their own names with reference to the tasks performed. These may be:

- 'road' (ensuring pedestrian and vehicle traffic continuity before, during and after operations, VIP transfers, ensuring that roads and traffic routes are passable for emergency services, etc.);
- 'counter' — concerning the broadly understood implementation of anti- and counter-terrorist measures also in cooperation with other responsible for safety entities;
- 'identification' — gathering, coordinating and analysing all available information affecting the safety of an operation;
- 'logistics' — ensuring the supply of materials, current repairs of equipment, food, social facilities, accommodation, etc. for the needs of the forces and resources involved in the entire operation;
- 'reserve' — officers forming crowd and riot control squads — both from the resources of a given unit (e.g. the Metropolitan Police Headquarters) and the forces assigned to operations from other regional headquarters, depending on the needs defined in the concept of police operation.

The use of crowd and riot control squads in modern police operations (in response to emergencies and those that can be planned well in advance) is a necessary element without which their proper implementation would not be possible. Concentration of large forces of crowd and riot control squads in the area of operations allows for:

- prompt response to any attempts of public order violation by causing riots, vandalising property, attacking other people and police forces;
- support for other police divisions within the framework of actions — e.g. road traffic officers on the routes of police activities, and other formations — e.g. State Protection Service on the access roads and places of delivering speech by persons under special protection, Railway Protection Service during travel on railway routes and others;
- security of the incident place in order to prevent unauthorized persons, isolation of the area for the needs of legal proceedings;
- participation in detention of persons who break the law or are aggressive, batter, vandalise, block the possibility of free use of communication routes and government administration buildings;
- co-changeability of individual squads resulting from the nationally uniform scope of training, uniform commands, procedures, uniform tactics, which in practice allows for commanding one or more companies by a commander, who manages a squad in a different city on a daily basis.

Within the framework of the police operation, the post of deputy commander shall be designated for tactical operations. This will be the commander — at operation level, as a rule, the commander of the riot police units unit (OPP) — or the commander of the independent riot police subunits (SPP), the commander of a riot police company separated from the riot police unit, irregular riot police unit



commander or their deputies. Commanders for tactics can be directly involved in the implementation of operations with crowd and riot control squad, and in the case of large police operations they remain in the command and control centre, where they command technically the forces of the crowd and riot control squads being at their disposal. Part of the squads can be then used for a direct participation in the operation, some may be used for dynamic support and moving to locations which are temporarily particularly at risk. Another part of the squad stands in reserve as a force for possible support in special situations — e.g. depletion of a squad headcount in case of injuries sustained from an aggressive crowd, or for instance, in case of the need to loosen and replace squads — when the actions are prolonged in time and their nature causes high physical and mental stress to officers. The commander plays a particularly important role in the performance of tasks within the police operation. In practice, these are very experienced officers, most often working in the squads from the beginning of their service. Their behaviour and decisions are often crucial for the successful performance, and their personal qualities and skills must allow to make the right decisions in case of danger.

## Conclusions

Police operations, especially those carried out over a longer period of time (e.g. up to two to seven days), with the participation of several thousand police officers carrying out various tasks in the area of crime, investigation, prevention or logistics, require cooperation in order to conduct activities in an optimal and, above all, safe manner. The use of such a large potential and the implementation of a large and effectively managed police operation is impossible without the participation of an element such as crowd and riot control squads. It should be noted and mentioned that the squads, due to the nature of the service, are only a transitional stage for the police officers serving in them and hardly any remains there for more than 5 years. The author's observation shows that the main shortcoming of service in the squads is a very high availability and a very frequent change of dates for performing official tasks (which results from the squads engagement to strengthen the potential of other police units in connection with unforeseen situations and crisis events). This has an impact on family relationships and the lack of free time. In addition, police officers in squads belong to the lowest salary groups in the Police structure, which results in a natural willingness to move to other police departments. This may cause frustration — especially when it comes to the hardships of service in squads in relation to the received salaries. The attempts to introduce central solutions allowing to increase the role of police officers of squads are conditioned by and connected with incurring huge financial costs by the state budget. However, in the perspective of time it seems necessary to look for ways to increase the attractiveness of the service in the squads — both financial and non-financial ones. The author's intention was to indicate the role of squads in the implementation of police operations, taking into account various levels of involvement of these units — at the same time hoping that in a limited form it will evoke the interest of the recipient — and the latter will refer to literature with the intention of deepening the knowledge in the area presented.

*(aa, aj, al)*



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**Streszczenie.** W strukturach Policji, jako formacji ustawowo odpowiedzialnej za ochronę zdrowia, życia oraz mienia obywateli — umiejscowione są pododdziały zwarte Policji. Są to jednostki organizacyjne Policji określane mianem Oddziałów Prewencji Policji (OPP) i Samodzielnych Pododdziałów Prewencji Policji (SPPP). Podstawowym ich atutem jest możliwość skierowanie do działań kilku tysięcy policjantów w stosunkowo krótkim czasie — w razie potrzeby reakcji na szeroko rozumiane zagrożenia bezpieczeństwa obywateli. Dzieje się tak poprzez zastosowanie odpowiednich mechanizmów utrzymania gotowości do działań i osiągania wyższych stanów gotowości, strukturze organizacyjnej opartej o model wojskowy, mobilności w oparciu o posiadane na wyposażeniu środki transportu, systemu szkoleń specjalistycznych, modułowość i kompatybilność z innymi pododdziałami Policji. Dość szerokie spektrum możliwości działania w sytuacjach występujących zagrożeń dla ludzi i środowiska — rodzi pytanie o jakość i możliwości rozwoju tej struktury, jej mocne strony, jak również o ujawniające się trudności — zarówno te dotyczące bezpośredniego udziału w różnych formach działań policyjnych, jak i tych dotyczących rzeczywistej kondycji tej struktury — w kontekście sił i środków wchodzących w skład pododdziałów. Oczywiście w tym miejscu należy wspomnieć o innych strukturach Policji również zaliczanych

do poddziałów zwartych jednak formowanych na bazie funkcjonariuszy, którzy na co dzień realizują inne zadania prewencyjne (np. pozostają na etatach ogniw patrolowo-interwencyjnych komend powiatowych i miejskich Policji). Są to tzw. Nieetatowe Oddziały Prewencji (NOP) i Nieetatowe Pododdziały Prewencji (NPP), jednak ich rola i zasady funkcjonowania zostaną tu pominięte, a głównym obiektem rozważań pozostaną jednostki tzw. „etatowe”, których funkcjonariusze pozostają w strukturach OPP i SPPP.

**Резюме.** В структуре полиции, форменной службы, отвечающей согласно закону за охрану здоровья, жизни и имущества граждан, выделяются специальные подразделения полиции. Это полицейские организационные подразделения — Полицейские отряды по охране общественного порядка (ПОПОП) и Самостоятельные отряды по охране общественного порядка (СОПОП). Основным их плюсом является возможность направления нескольких тысяч сотрудников полиции в относительно короткий срок для обеспечения безопасности граждан. Это достигается за счет применения соответствующих механизмов поддержки готовности к проведению мероприятий и достижения более высокого уровня этой готовности, а также в связи с организационной структурой, постароенной по военной модели, мобильностью, которая возможна в связи с наличием транспортной техники, системой подготовки специалистов, модульностью и сотрудничеством с другими подразделениями полиции. Довольно широкий спектр возможностей проведения операции в случае возникновения опасности для общества и окружающей среды ставит вопрос о качестве и возможностях развития данных подразделений, их сильных сторон, а также о возникающих затруднениях как непосредственно связанных с участием в различных формах деятельности полиции, так и касающихся их фактического состояния с учетом сил и средств. Следует также отметить, что в состав подразделений полиции входят и другие полицейские структуры, которые формируются из сотрудников ежедневно выполняющих различные профилактические задачи (например, работающих в патрульных и оперативных подразделениях районных и городских управлений полиции). Это Внештатные подразделения по охране общественного порядка (ВГПОП) и Внештатные группы по охране общественного порядка (ВГПОП). Однако этим подразделениям автор не уделяет много внимания. В основном в статье описываются так называемые «штатные» подразделения, сотрудники которых остаются в структуре ПОПОП и СОПОП.

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