

INTERVIEW WITH JANIS GEDUSEVS CHIEF, RIGA (LATVIA) MUNICIPAL POLICE

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CG: *Could you please tell me about your career in policing?*

JG: I began my career with the State Police and was a serious crime investigator. Then I was an officer in the security service that provided I was involved in providing security for the President and the Parliament. After 12 years, I applied in the competition and was appointed the head of the police.

It must have been very exciting times when Latvia gained its independence from the Soviet Union in the early 1990s.

Yes. There have been many changes that have taken place. I had worked in the policing field for many years and I wanted to start something new and use my experience.

It seems that so much has developed so quickly in Latvia over the past decade.

There is no time to wait. Things must be done quickly.

Can you tell me about the role of the municipal police in Riga?

Our role is to ensure public order. We are responsible primarily for enforcing by-laws, such as parking and for providing search and rescue services in the harbor and in the rivers.

Who is responsible for providing policing services in the harbor to combat smuggling and contraband?

This is the responsibility of the harbor police. and for public order it is the municipal police.

I understand that in some municipalities in Latvia, the State police and the municipal police often work together in the same patrol car.

This happens only in small town where there are transportation problems. It is different in Riga.

How long is the training for new officers?

There is 3 months compulsory training; they have exams and those who do not pass the exam come next time. There are a lot of officers who come to the municipal police from the State police. I came to the municipal police from the State police.

I would like to speak with you about the issues and challenges that you face as a police leader in Latvia.

There are two kinds of policing in Riga, the State Police and the Municipal Police.

How many municipal police officers are there in Riga?

About 700.

How is jurisdiction divided between the State Police and the Municipal Police?

The municipal police work in close cooperation with the State Police. There is a joint communication centre where the public can call for assistance. It is then decided whether the call falls within the jurisdiction of the State Police or the Municipal Police and, depending upon this, the State Police or the Municipal Police will respond. Speaking generally about the role of the Municipal Police, it is first of all the implementation and enforcement of the regulations of the Riga City Council. It is also generally the regulation of public order.

How old is the Municipal Police service?

It is thirteen years old.

Before this, was there just State Police?

During Soviet times, there was only one police. As an alternative, municipal police were created in the regions in 1990.

Can you tell me what some of the challenges were in creating a new police force after Soviet times?

The Municipal Police were created in 1990 in order to fulfill to enforce the regulations that were issued by the local governments in the region. In a broader sense, it was a force that was against the existing Soviet system.

Did you have to set up a new way to recruit and train officers?

In the beginning, those persons who did not want to serve their military service in the Soviet forces were recruited into the local police.

Did many of these officers stay and become municipal police officers?

Yes. In the 1990s there were municipal police forces that were designed to go against the established Soviet order peacefully.

As you began your new police force, did you seek advice or assistance from other countries or other police forces for ideas?

At that time it was not possible due to the political situation. It was mostly created based on the patriotic feelings.

Since that time, what kinds of contact do you have with other countries and other police forces?

We are actively involved in cooperation with other countries. The closest cooperation is with Sweden and the United States. And I go to meetings with police leaders, most recently in Prague. We also have cooperation with Germany and with France.

Would you say that the police in Riga enjoy a high level of public support, or are people still somewhat suspicious of police because of the role of the police in Soviet times?

The level of public trust in the police has increased in recent years. If we look at the statistics, we can see that the number of complaints and papers that have been submitted by people have increased by 30% and so people are not afraid to come with their problems to the police and they are seeking help from the police. This means that the people have trust in the police because they come and speak with us.

Is this in part due to better training for your officers in terms of relating to the public?

Yes, this is one of the main reasons. The police are working for the inhabitants of Riga and what is important is to have normal contact with people.

What would you say are the major challenges that you face today as a police leader?

One is that which is a global problem – a lack of money and resources. The Riga City Council has increased the police budget in recent years and is willing to help as much as they can.

Do you have difficulty recruiting qualified candidates for the police force?

No. Of the 700 officers on the police force, there are 140 who have higher levels of education and about 100 are studying in university.

What are the major issues that you see in terms of crime and social problems in Riga?

The biggest problem is one which is throughout the world – the drug problem. With drugs come other problems, such as dealers, and people committing crime to buy drugs, and so on.

When Latvia enters the European Union, do you think that this will result in more challenges for police? With such issues as the open borders?

Yes. When the borders are open, there will be more people coming and there will be more possibilities for illegal trafficking of drugs. I think the first phase will be difficult.

Do Riga municipal police and the State Police do joint investigations and undercover operations?

We support the State Police in their operations. If there are a lot of complaints from one region, then they work together with the State Police to solve the problems. We do have the joint communication centre with the State Police where all of the calls and information come into. In cases that involve crimes and investigation, this is done by the State police.

Would you say that the Riga municipal police has much closer relations with the community than the State Police?

It is hard to say, because after independence, the State Police have also changed. They are not something from the Soviet Union any more. But the municipal police do work much more with the inhabitants, while the State Police are more focused on crime and investigations. A person goes to the State police when a crime has been committed and they come to the municipal police when they are having a disagreement with their neighbors. The people bring their social problems to the municipal police.

Does the State Police move officers around the country?

Yes, that is possible. But for the municipal police is not possible for them to move from one municipality to another. They would have to quit their position and then apply to the other municipal department.

In Canada, there are many positions available in policing due to the large number of offenders who are retiring. And this often results in police departments trying to recruit officers from other departments. Even those who are already on the job.

I think that this is going on everywhere. We are trying to recruit the best persons from other law enforcement agencies.

When you go to police conferences, like the one you recently attended in Zagreb, do you find that many of the issues are the same for police leaders?

Yes, I think we are all dealing with many of the same problems.

Thank you.