Liverpool John Moores University

How do Structural, Cultural, and Trust-Related Factors Influence the Effectiveness of Police Liaison Officer Systems and Information-Sharing Practices in Europe, and What Lessons Can Be Drawn from Regional and Institutional Models for Future EU-Wide Cooperation?

by

Alexander S. K. Neumueller, MMSc

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Abbreviations

AES	Advanced Encryption Standard
AI	Artificial Intelligence
BENELUX	Economic union of Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg
BPLO	Benelux Police Liaison Officers
BREXIT	United Kingdom leaving the European Union
CCIC	Cross-Channel Intelligence Conference
CENcomm	Customs Enforcement Network Communication Platform
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
DB	Database
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid
EIXM	European Information Exchange Model
EMLO	European Migration Liaison Officer
ENU	EUROPOL National Unit
EU MEP	Members of the European Parliament
EU MS	The EU Member States
EU	European Union
EUCARIS	European Car and Driving Licence Information System
EUCI	European Union Classified Information
EUROPOL	European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation
EIXM	European Information Exchange Model
FLOC	Foreign Police Liaison Officer Community
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
ICOTA	Internet Organised Crime Threat Assessment
ICPC	International Criminal Police Organisation
ILO	Immigration Liaison Officer
INTERPOL	International Criminal Police Organisation
IT	Information Technology

JIT	Joint Investigation Team
LO	Liaison Officer
MHQ	Main Headquarters
MLO	Migration Liaison Officer
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NCB	National Contact Bureau
NPCC	Nordic Police and Customs Cooperation
OSINT	Open Source Intelligence
PLO	Police Liaison Officer
PTN	Nordic Police and Customs Cooperation
RPLO	Regional Police Liaison Officer
SIENA	Secure Information Exchange Network Application
SIREN	Supplementary Information Request at the National Entry
SIS	Schengen Information System
SOCTA	Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment
SPOC	Single Point of Contact
TE-SAT	EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report
TREVI	Terrorism Radicalism Extremism Violence International
UMF	Universal Message Format
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America
USNCB	United States National Central Bureau
VTSMs	Violent transnational social movements
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II

Abstract

This PhD thesis investigates, via an in-depth comparative analysis, two regional European Union (EU) Police Liaison Officer (PLO) systems, focusing on their organisational and operational structures and information management. It critically examines differences in implemented structures and practices, as well as the relational dynamics underpinning cross-border police cooperation within the context of transnational crime, for potential applicability to a future EU-wide LO system. This thesis contributes to the growing body of knowledge on EU regional Police Liaison Officer systems and highlights the importance of various factors responsible for efficient and successful cross-border information exchange.

The thesis addresses the research question: 'How do structural, cultural, and trust-related factors influence the effectiveness of Police Liaison Officer systems and information-sharing practices in Europe, and what lessons can be drawn from regional and institutional models for future EU-wide cooperation?' Data collection for this research involved conducting interviews with practitioners from both regional PLO systems, including support office employees and PLOs operating in the field.

The researcher conducted an in-depth literature review covering bureaucratic aspects, transnational information sharing, European police structures, cultural dimensions, the role of trust in information-sharing processes, and institutionalised mechanisms. Data collected from interviews within both systems were analysed, and the two regional systems were subsequently compared.

Key findings from the comparison between the Benelux and Nordic systems reveal several critical insights for the broader field of transnational policing. Other findings of the study indicate pragmatic pathways for progress towards achieving an EU-wide PLO system.

The study contributes to understanding the complex challenges of transnational policing cooperation and reveals that institutional frameworks and legal agreements form the necessary foundation for such collaboration. However, for an effective cross-border policing model, human factors such as trust, cultural understanding, operational flexibility, and professional adaptability are indispensable.

This research provides insights for policymakers and practitioners in the form of a roadmap to strengthen transnational policing cooperation through the everyday practices of trust, adaptability, and relational work. It further argues that the future of cross-border

police cooperation in Europe does not solely rely on technocratic solutions or legalistic harmonisation.

The thesis advocates for incorporating dynamic, relational, and negotiated practices in international policing strategies, with an acknowledgment of the centrality of human agency, professional judgement, and adaptive governance to address the complex challenges of transnational crime and security.

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Introduction

Information sharing among police entities from different countries has become increasingly important in the fight against transnational crime. It can occur at various levels and through different mechanisms, and there are multiple possibilities for how such sharing can be achieved. Institutionalised information-sharing platforms such as INTERPOL and EUROPOL, along with EU-established systems like the Schengen Information System and the Supplementary Information Request at the National Entries (SIREN), were specifically developed to foster the exchange of information among police entities in different countries. However, such organised exchange mechanisms also have disadvantages and, in some cases, may hinder objectives due to distrust, misuse, over-formalisation of requests, or other factors. Police Liaison Officers (PLOs) worldwide address gaps in the information exchange process between sending and host country police authorities by applying tailored processes that create suitable environments for fostering information exchange.

Most Police Liaison Officers are deployed bilaterally, based on mutual agreements between sending and host countries, and typically serve the national interests of the sending country. However, in bilateral PLO arrangements, the information gathered is not automatically shared with a wider audience and is therefore usually limited to the police authorities of the sending country. Furthermore, information gathered by individual PLOs may be lost if there is little or no cooperation within the PLO network in the same host country. In addition to bilateral PLOs, two regional PLO systems also exist within the EU. While extensive studies have been conducted on bilateral Police Liaison Officers globally, regional PLO (RPLO) systems such as the Benelux and Nordic models—subject of this study—remain significantly under-researched. According to Zanders (2013), although some academic work has addressed regional LO systems, a lack of holistic and in-depth research persists.

The author of this thesis served as a Police Liaison Officer for the Austrian Ministry of the Interior for eight years in Georgia and one year in Iraq. During this time, the idea for researching regional Police Liaison Officer systems in depth emerged, aiming to understand the information-sharing process involving multiple entities and associated subjects, as well as exploring the feasibility of establishing a unified, EU-controlled Police Liaison Officer system.

This work contributes to the academic discourse on Regional PLO systems by conducting case studies of two EU RPLO systems—the Nordic and the Benelux—to

address the research question: ‘How do structural, cultural, and trust-related factors influence the effectiveness of Police Liaison Officer systems and information-sharing practices in Europe, and what lessons can be drawn from regional and institutional models for future EU-wide cooperation?’

For the research, a critical review of existing literature was conducted alongside an examination of the current structures and processes of regional police liaison systems and their relationships with the EU. Case studies of the Nordic Liaison Officer system and the Benelux Liaison Officer system were carried out to understand the real-world experiences of international police liaison work from the perspective of practitioners. This was achieved through 28 qualitative interviews with staff from eight different countries involved in both regional PLO systems. Following a thorough analysis of the research data, a comparative evaluation of the two systems was developed. The findings were then used to discuss the feasibility of creating and implementing a European Liaison Officer system, in which all EU member states could be represented in host countries by EU Police Liaison Officers (EU PLOs) through a unified European Liaison Officer framework.

Literature Review

Police Liaison Officers are key facilitators of information exchange in the fight against transnational crime, and the number of EU PLOs continues to grow. While most PLO systems are based on bilateral implementation, the Benelux and Nordic systems are notable exceptions, with PLOs representing more than one country. The aim of this literature review is to critically examine existing academic work related to EU Police Liaison Officer systems in general, and EU regional PLO systems in particular, as well as PLO information-sharing mechanisms and related subjects. The review assesses whether a European Union-wide Police Liaison Officer system—where one or more EU LOs could represent all EU countries—can be created and implemented.

To gain a clearer understanding of the EU Police Liaison systems, the literature review focuses on EU police structures and established information-sharing processes, which are critically evaluated. The topic of Police Liaison Officer systems is not a standalone field but is interconnected with several specialist domains, which are also critically assessed.

The literature review of this thesis is divided into two chapters. The first chapter provides a historical overview and examines the current practice of police cooperation in Europe. A critical review was undertaken of the police cooperation mechanisms of the 19th century and of police cooperation initiatives before and during World War I (WWI) and World War II (WWII). Subsequently, the evolution of police cooperation after WWII, regional initiatives in Europe, and resulting cooperation such as the Benelux treaty, the Nordic Police and Customs Cooperation agreement, and various EU agreements including the Schengen cooperation agreements are critically analysed. The literature review continues with a critical examination of the establishment of Police Liaison Officer (PLO) systems in individual EU Member States, the failed attempt by the EU to establish an EU-controlled Police Liaison Officer system, as well as the failed attempts by the EU to control Police Liaison Officers of EU Member States. Additionally, this section reviews the establishment of Immigration Liaison Officers (ILOs) by EU Member States and the EU's unsuccessful attempt to coordinate them, along with the creation of an EU-controlled Migration Liaison Officer network. The first part of the literature review proceeds with a critical assessment of the tasks and challenges of Police Liaison Officers, and an in-depth examination of academic literature relevant to the Benelux and Nordic Police Liaison Officer systems. The following section of the literature review focuses on the different roles of Police Liaison Officers in host countries. The conclusion of the first part of the literature review provides a critical analysis of law enforcement information-sharing

processes within the EU, including information-sharing principles, strategies, and the legal foundations of such practices, as well as the benefits and challenges associated with information sharing in the context of law enforcement.

The second chapter of the literature review addresses the theoretical aspects of information sharing and begins with an analytical review of academic literature concerning bureaucratic implications and motivational factors within bureaucratic systems, in connection with PLO systems. The review then examines the challenges of measuring outcomes in bureaucratic systems generally, and in regional PLO systems specifically, along with motivational aspects for individuals operating within bureaucracies, and the implications of bureaucratisation and globalisation. The second chapter also analyses the topic of cultural considerations by critically reviewing various cultural dimensions such as high- and low-context communication styles and their respective coping mechanisms. The literature review continues with analytical research into police culture more broadly and the culture of police cooperation more specifically. The impact of police culture on police behaviour is beyond the scope of this research (Amagnya, 2023). The second chapter proceeds with a critical analysis of the role of trust in information-sharing processes, including different stages of trust, trust-building measures, risks and benefits of trust, factors contributing to distrust and the erosion of trust, and trust-related indicators in cross-border information sharing. Subsequently, the chapter examines academic literature relevant to the creation of a PLO environment and the application of social exchange and information exchange theory. The chapter concludes with a comparison of the institutionalised information exchange agencies INTERPOL and EUROPOL, their cooperation tools, and the identified strengths and limitations of each, followed by a brief summary of the literature reviewed.

Historical overview and current practice of police cooperation in Europe

Police Cooperation – the beginnings

The Austro-Hungarian Empire played an important role in the early development of European police cooperation in the nineteenth century, identifying the need for a centralised, Europe-wide police system. Chancellor Klemens von Metternich made several attempts to establish such a system, including one effort following an assassination attempt on a Russian chancellor in Germany. The Austrian Chancellor aimed to bring together police authorities from various nation states to cooperate (Liang, 1992). One of the main difficulties encountered in this process was the divergent orientations of the police institutions in different countries. In this context, Liang (1992) states that Germany held

the view that each country was sovereign, with wartime outcomes determining inter-state relations. Meanwhile, police in Russia acted solely in the interests of their emperor and the Russian Empire. In contrast, Austrian police operated with broader European interests in mind, which led Metternich to seek cooperation with ideologically aligned allies (Aliprantis, 2023b). This latter element is still recognised today as vital for international police cooperation (Liang, 1992). However, the Chancellor's vision for a European-wide police system collapsed following the 1848 revolution, as tensions between the great powers of Europe escalated. During this period, European nation states increasingly prioritised their own national interests (Liang, 1992). Overall, police cooperation during the time period under review was largely secretive and ad hoc, primarily aimed at countering radical elements intent on disrupting the existing political order (Aliprantis, 2023a). While not limited to political offences, most police cooperation of the era focused on monitoring and controlling political adversaries through covert operations conducted in foreign countries (Deflem, 2002).

> Police action across borders was mostly related to so-called 'political offences' and many covert operations in foreign countries at the time were not even genuinely cooperative in nature but rather operated as unilateral espionage operations (Hufnagel, 2013a, p.39).

According to Deflem (2002), the beginning of modern European policing can be traced to the year 1848, when two distinct forms of international policing emerged. The first was that autocratic systems in European countries changed into a conservative form, with the aim of abolishing further threats to the establishment by reorganising and reinforcing police institutions. According to the author, the move to a conservative policing form was accompanied by a standardisation and harmonisation of European police organisations in terms of strengthened control and centralisation, which resulted in a rapprochement between European police organisations that had not existed before (Liang, 1992; Deflem, 2002).

The second development was an increased engagement in more international police activities and cooperation to achieve the main goal of fighting liberal-democratic movements in Europe. Many covert police activities were conducted unilaterally, without the knowledge of local authorities, and took the form of espionage conducted to gather information and spy on political suspects in foreign countries (Deflem, 2002).

Police cooperation in the 19th century witnessed the initiation of actions such as dispatching police officers to spy on fellow countrymen in foreign countries or to exchange information about criminals or political events. These activities triggered increased

cooperation between police institutions in different European countries, with common goal of exercising political suppression (Deflem, 2002). Hufnagel (2013) claims that police cooperation started in an informal way because no legal cooperation base had been established, and there was an absence of specific cooperation laws or arrangements. The author further explains that police cooperation in the 19th century was based on informal cooperation practiced at different levels on a multilateral or regional basis between different police entities including cooperation between police agencies of different European countries and regions or between police personnel of different countries. The advantage of informal cooperation was that state authorities had no official responsibility for ongoing cooperation, and there was also no need to develop formal international cooperation agreements (Hufnagel, 2013a). Informal police cooperation was mainly built on trust between the cooperating parties and based on initiatives of individual police chiefs or police officers in border regions. Cooperation at the time was not intended to establish a future cooperation model for participating parties, but rather consisted of ad hoc actions between individuals based on situational circumstances e.g. information exchange between British police and French Police about political enemies of France residing in Great Britain (Hufnagel, 2013a).

Police cooperation on a multilateral basis in the 19th century was difficult to achieve due to various obstacles. In preparations for the British International Industrial Exhibition in London in 1851, Richard Mayne, Chief of the London Metropolitan Police at the time, invited police experts from different European countries to London to join an international police cooperation effort. Within police circles, it was believed that the event, which displayed the achievements of successful capitalist trade, would attract many participants from liberal, social democrat, and communist factions from across Europe (Deflem, 2002). Although some thirty-five foreign police representatives accepted the invitation from the London Metropolitan Police and participated in the police cooperation, Deflem (2002) believes that most acceptances were due more to the initiatives of individual police representatives than to the official mandates of foreign police authorities.

In addition, police cooperation proved difficult due to divergences in political ideologies and policing practices. For example, the Prussian police representative, Head of the Berlin Criminal Police Wilhelm Stieber, who was personally appointed by King Friedrich Wilhelm and aimed to cooperate closely with British police to monitor German and foreign communist activists at the London exhibition, encountered strong resistance from the British police (Deflem, 2002). The British police cited constitutional restrictions in domestic law relating to police practices, which made cooperation with foreign police

services difficult. German police representatives, on the other hand, refused to use German dissidents residing in Britain as translators. In other words, cooperation was hindered by differences in policing practices and a lack of political willingness to collaborate on police matters (Deflem, 2002). As has been shown, some of the earliest models of police cooperation in Europe can be traced back to the year 1848. One of the main concerns of states at the time was the potential loss of national sovereignty through participation in international police cooperation. Nonetheless, cooperation did occur:

> Unilaterally conducted transnational policing on foreign soil had to be conducted secretively because it readily violated jurisdictional restraints, but agreed upon international police plans, too, were kept confidential. Bilateral police activities were typically not based on formal international agreements between states, while multilateral cooperation efforts were likewise not legally sanctioned. (Deflem, 2002, p.10).

Police cooperation during this period, therefore, was based on trust and conducted between police personnel or institutions. According to Deflem (2002), police systems at the time were structured to circumvent international law restrictions on cooperation, particularly in the areas of jurisdiction and extradition. The reason behind this was the lengthy process required for information exchange. To comply with international law at the time, a police request for information had to be sent first to the requesting Ministry of the Interior and from there to the Ministry of the Exterior. From there, the request was forwarded to the embassy of the country in which the information was being sought. The next step was to transmit the request to the Ministry of the Exterior of that country, then to its Ministry of the Interior, and finally to the appropriate police agency. The same procedure applied when answering a request from a foreign country (Deflem, 2002). With the development of special police structures, police organisations gained the ability to exchange information more efficiently and directly through police-to-police contacts.

The German Police Union construct was no exception in this regard, and one of the first instances of international police cooperation was implemented on the basis of shared political interests among different states (Aliprantis, 2020; Christensen, 2022). The Police Union was established in 1851, comprising the independent states of Austria and Baden and the German principalities of Prussia, Sachsen, Hannover, Bavaria, and Württemberg. Participating states were loosely united, and members recognised each other’s political independence (Deflem, 2002). The objective of the Police Union was to establish direct police communications and facilitate the exchange of information regarding political movements in the German states and the surveillance of known dissidents residing within them (Deflem, 1996). To achieve the common goal of suppressing revolutionary political

resistance, the Police Union organised annual meetings, exchanged confiscated political publications, and shared information about wanted dissidents and criminals. The Austrian police disseminated weekly reports to thirty-one police headquarters throughout the Austro-Hungarian Empire. For example, Vienna produced a report once every two weeks between the 1850s and 1860s, which included information about wanted individuals, while in Berlin a weekly police report was produced and disseminated (Deflem, 1996). The focus of the Police Union was not limited to Germany or European states alone; it extended its reach to monitor dissidents in countries as distant as the United States of America (USA). Information gathering focused on various separatist groups, from extremists of different political orientations to moderate social democrats. The Police Union not only covered political groups and activists, it also gathered information about religious groups and exchanged information in regard to press releases. Within the Union, Prussia and Austria were the dominant power, due to their considerable resources in police intelligence. Furthermore, these states adapted and enhanced their intelligence systems, as well as their information spreading systems across borders, which benefited the entire Police Union (Deflem, 1996). Political circumstances and increasing tensions between Austria and Prussia influenced the Police Union and their activities from 1860 onwards. According to Deflem (2002), another main concern during the entire existence of the cooperation of the Police Union of Germany was the fear of participating countries losing their autonomy while being tied into international police cooperation. The end of the German Police Union was marked and accompanied by external circumstances, which led to a gradual reduction of activities against political dissidents within the Police Union. The end of the German Police Union was marked by external circumstances, including the outbreak of the Seven Weeks' War in 1866, which led to the dissolution of the Union and brought one of the first models of modern European police cooperation to a close (Deflem, 1996).

Critically examining the implementation of the Police Union and the first European cooperation model, it is evident that the primary motivation for this cooperation was to uphold the established political systems of participating countries. Nineteenth-century police institutions were not primarily concerned with the cross-border apprehension of criminals or the exchange of police knowledge. Unlike modern police cooperation, there was no observable trend of broad-spectrum collaboration to combat crime or develop joint policing strategies. Rather, the focus of the time was self-interested: cooperation served the domestic political objectives of individual states. The Police Union's main purpose was to control dissidents and suppress opposition to autocratic regimes, thereby preserving the political status quo. Regarding the harmonisation of policing styles across Europe, this was

neither systematically implemented nor uniformly structured. Harmonisation occurred either as a natural adaptation by individual states to prevailing political conditions or was forcibly imposed through occupation. Prussia, for instance, adopted a new policing system immediately following the 1848 crisis. France, under Napoleon, introduced a comparable system in 1851. Following the French occupation of parts of Europe, the French policing model spread further and was imposed upon occupied territories (Deflem, 1996). The influence of the German Police Union should not be underestimated. Throughout its existence, a discernible trend emerged towards a centralised, federal policing model applicable across all participating states, although the systems proposed by Austria and Prussia were never officially ratified. With this in mind, Deflem (2002) argues that, because of the relative independence of police institutions in the Union, a shared police culture emerged—one that was distinct from the political systems of the participating countries.

Police cooperation at the beginning of the 20th century

From the beginning of the 20th century up to WWI, increased international police cooperation, especially in Europe, is recognisable. For example, the USA organised the Opium Conference in The Hague in 1909, an international police meeting in Madrid in 1909, and the International Esperanto Society of Police Officials meeting in Antwerp in 1911 (Deflem, 2004). In the 19th century up to WWI, police cooperation existed among some European countries, but this cooperation was based primarily on informal contacts. Cooperation was predominantly limited to a personal level, and deepened international police cooperation on a broad scale between state entities was not achieved before WWI (Hufnagel, 2013b). According to Gerspacher (2008), the theft of the Austrian crown jewels in 1913 was one of the triggers of trans-border police cooperation. Although the crown jewels were found a couple of weeks after the theft in another European capital, due to missing interstate transaction regulations regarding the extradition of perpetrators or stolen goods, there were no procedures in place for handling this case. This high-profile case demonstrated the dilemma caused by the lack of police cooperation regulations at the time. Initiatives were undertaken to commence cross-border police cooperation at a police chief meeting in Monaco in 1914, which eventually led to the creation of the International Criminal Police Organisation. The upcoming WWI prevented the evolution of the Monaco agreement, and police cooperation stalled during this time.

Important for cross-border cooperation are also the organisational settings of the different police institutions. The First World War brought many organisational changes and, in this regard, the German police institutions were brought under the control of the

German military. These circumstances also influenced the scope of duties for German police officers, which shifted from civilian police tasks to military-oriented tasks, including the investigation of espionage and the protection of important infrastructure within the country (Deflem, 2004; Hufnagel, 2013a). During this period, police had undergone changes that were maintained after WWI. Germany, for example, established more uniformed police officers and centralised police units with their headquarters in the German capital. Russia, as well as Germany, implemented similar centralised policing models and spread them to other European countries under their influence (Hufnagel, 2013a).

After WWI, police authorities in European countries recognised new criminal trends in Europe, as well as the fact that these criminals used newly established mobility between European countries to commit cross-border crimes. The fear of threats in the form of challenges to established regimes of European countries after WWI motivated the start of cross-border police cooperation. A central motivation for police cooperation after WWI was, among others, the internationalism of Bolshevik movements in Europe. European police institutions began to exchange information about communist movements. According to Hufnagel (2013a), Switzerland exchanged information about the local communist movement with France and Germany. France, in contrast, allowed British and American agents, stationed at the time at their embassies in Paris, to observe the French communist presence, and Austria again used the established central system to gather information about communist movements in countries belonging to the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the time. The Bolshevik movement was not the only inspiration for cross-border police cooperation in Europe. Another was the suppression of socialist and left-wing groups. Although the main initiator for cross-border cooperation was politically motivated, a recognisable trend also focused on cross-border criminality. Noteworthy in this context was the Vienna Congress, held in 1919. Based on reports and statistics, the organiser noted a recognisable increase in money and cheque forgery, passport forgery, railway and hotel theft, human trafficking, and drug smuggling. The empirical value of those reports is questionable; however, the outcome of the report presentation and discussion was a recognisable increase in cross-border police cooperation. It was further pointed out that the police cooperation existing at the time, which was preoccupied with political issues, prevented a more intensified cross-border police cooperation in the field of criminal policing (Deflem, 2004; Hufnagel, 2013a). The enhancement of cross-border cooperation was made possible because police organisations in Europe used changed structural conditions in their institutions to participate in cross-border cooperation with police organisations from other

European countries. Noteworthy in this context is a meeting of 24 European police representatives in 1920 in Munich. This conference aimed to structure established cross-border police cooperation, and participating countries consented to exchange information in an agreed format, which included personal data of suspects, a photo, and fingerprints where possible (Hufnagel, 2013a). Although little police cooperation occurred before WWI, and cooperation was reduced to a minimum during WWI, the idea of international police cooperation was revived in 1923. One achievement of police cooperation at the time, although not a direct bilateral police cooperation between nation states, was the establishment of the International Criminal Police Organisation (ICPC) in 1923, based in Vienna, later rebranded as International Police (INTERPOL) (Gerspacher, 2008; Hufnagel, 2013a; Paul, 2022; Jäger, 2023). At this time, a trend, which still holds today among European police organisations, was recognisable, insofar as police cooperation had to be performed in a way that ensured national sovereignty was always maintained (Hufnagel, 2013a).

Before and during WWII, police cooperation was not maintained and did not appear feasible between hostile European countries. For European countries that were occupied or annexed at this time, police cooperation was imposed mostly by occupying forces, but the main focus was not on contributing to cross-border cooperation in the context of criminal activities. Rather, it was set up to achieve political goals (Gerspacher, 2008). According to Hufnagel (2013b), the Nazification of ICPC before and during WWII resulted in the cessation of ICPC activities in its previous form, due to a lack of trust between member countries and the newly founded ICPC headquarters in Berlin. Shortly after WWII, police organisations in Europe recognised an increase in criminal activities, especially by criminals operating in different countries and jurisdictions. This knowledge was the primary motivation for reviving old police cooperation initiatives such as ICPC in 1946, and implementing new ones, of which the most important and influential are described in this chapter (Deflem, 2004). ICPC was revived in 1946 following the war, with the organisation returning to its original core task of exchanging information on international criminal activities, which was considered a beneficial tool for cross-border police cooperation (Deflem, 2004). According to Deflem (2004), the successful re-establishment of ICPC was seen as an important task by police officials involved in the process, due to the accomplishments of ICPC before WWII. The Nazification of ICPC was not discussed and was viewed as a temporary loss of control by the participating Member States. Also helpful in this regard were the increasingly recognisable efforts of ICPC to deal with international criminal activities towards the end of WWII. Continued engagement helped

at the time to immediately reinstate and resume cross-border police cooperation after WW II (Deflem, 2004; Hufnagel, 2013a). According to Hufnagel (2013b) International Criminal Police (INTERPOL) was the first established police cooperation between independent nation states. The author further argues that the success in implementing this specific coordinated police cooperation organisation occurred because the informal INTERPOL institution at the time was structured as a rather loose organisation, and member entities were not bound by a legal cooperation framework (Deflem, 2004). INTERPOL started as an initiative to foster multinational cooperation among police practitioners within the legal frameworks of the participating countries. It was implemented out of the need to enhance police cooperation in the context of cross-border criminal investigations. INTERPOL can be seen as a compensatory strategy, established based on a practical police cooperation initiative on the one hand, and a means of reassuring participating countries of their national independence on the other, to overcome existing cooperation obstacles (Hufnagel, 2013b). In general, it can be stated that INTERPOL can be seen as a successful information-sharing institution fostering cross-border police information flow and, according to Gerspacher (2008), ICPC can be regarded as a successful police cooperation initiative that remains in operation today.

Police cooperation after WWII

Hufnagel (2013b) argues that the impact of WWI and WWII influenced practical police cooperation in Europe. The cooperation undertakings after WWII, and the resumption of cross-border cooperation established before WWI and WWII, were overshadowed by the strong principle among European countries of maintaining national independence. The resurrection of cross-border cooperation was based on separating existing political arrangements from the practical task of fighting crime. Another important cornerstone was the mutual recognition of professional expertise regarding the means and objectives of cooperating police organisations. The development of technical know-how for controlling crime, as well as the development of administrative methods and information sharing, played a key role in establishing successful cooperation between police organisations in different European countries after WWII (Hufnagel, 2013a). Police systems changed from former political policing into formalised police cooperation, in an attempt to create a more stable European environment. Aydinli (2010) argues that after WWII, the threat landscape for countries changed in such a way that traditional threats shifted from national to transnational (Vormbaum, 2020). The author believes that a government's duty is to provide security for the people as well as to control the country’s territory. With the rise of new threat profiles, old governmental structures were superseded,

and new structures were created to adapt to transnational terrorist and organised crime threats. Cross-border criminal activities influenced the changes in policing, but other factors such as social changes, in the form of demands from the European population for stability, and political-ideological motivations after WWII were also important elements. Newburn (2008) argues that since WWII, the role of police in general, and the image of police in particular, along with the relationship between the police and policing entities such as local and minority communities and the relationship between police and government, has undergone tremendous changes. New policing challenges, including criminal mobility, growing criminal networks, adapting police systems to social changes, and long-established policing models, all contributed to building the foundation of the police cooperation landscape after WWII (James, 2005).

The re-establishment of INTERPOL after WWII in 1946 in Paris demonstrates that European nation states valued the possibility of multinational cooperation, as does the establishment of the Council of Europe (CoE) in 1949, long before the EU was founded. The CoE has EU-overlapping legislative competences, especially in the context of human rights and criminal investigation. The CoE influenced the establishment of a legal base for police cooperation, specifically legally binding instruments, including the European Extradition Convention and the Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters Convention in 1959. This can be seen as one of the first steps after WWII towards harmonising an EU-wide legal framework for police cooperation among European countries. The CoE was also instrumental for police cooperation in that these legally binding instruments, together with later developments such as the Schengen Agreement and other EU police cooperation initiatives, created the basis for enhanced police cooperation within the EU (Hufnagel, 2013b; Weissensteiner, 2021). However, the speed of cooperation after WWII increased moderately and steadily until 1970. Occurrences such as terrorism and other events after 1970 led to a dramatic increase in police cooperation in Europe and enabled large-scale cooperation on various police topics during this period, including the establishment of the Terrorism, Radicalism, Extremism, Violence, International (TREVI) Group in 1975, the Schengen Agreement in 1985, the European Police Office (EUROPOL) in 1992, and many more (Deflem, 2004; Andreas, 2008). EUROPOL, for example, was founded as a platform for European countries to exchange information on serious and organised crime, as well as sensitive data related to criminal investigations. EUROPOL differs from INTERPOL not only in the focus of information exchange but also in the narrower geographical area of participating countries, as EUROPOL was originally limited to European countries only, although it has recently opened to neighbouring countries. EUROPOL can be seen as a

mechanism to overcome police cooperation shortcomings within the EU (Hufnagel, 2013b). A critical comparison of the institutionalised information-sharing platforms of INTERPOL and EUROPOL is conducted in the second part of this literature review.

The legal basis for police cooperation in law enforcement and criminal law is created in the nation states of the EU, as well as by the EU itself. This means that those competencies overlap in some regards. In short, the subsidiarity principle, as defined in the EU treaty, gives priority in law enforcement and criminal law regulation to the nation states of the EU (Zoumpoulakis, 2020). The intention of this regulation is that decisions should be made as close as possible to the individuals subject to the law, and that constant checks and balances should ensure EU regulations in this regard are enacted only where absolutely necessary, or where EU-level regulation is more effective than national action by EU Member States (Hufnagel, 2013b). With this in mind, and with the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, the EU Parliament now has the power to decide whether or not an EU Member State has failed to implement directives and regulations related to EU policies. Lisbon instruments are relatively new EU tools and, according to (Hufnagel, 2013b), these tools remain relatively untested in areas of EU competencies, such as the European Arrest Warrant or the European Evidence Warrant.

Although EU-wide cooperation steadily increased after WWII, there were also instances of region-specific, cross-border issues. Such regional phenomena were not always equally important for all EU countries or did not occur in all EU countries to the same extent, and therefore regional solutions were usually targeted at specific areas (Fabbrini, 2022). However, regional initiatives can influence the development of EU-wide regulations. Mutual legal assistance regulations and regional information exchange initiatives, whether formal or informal, between EU Member States, for example, influenced the toolset of the Schengen Information System, which now includes an instrument for information exchange among member states under EU-wide regulations (Hufnagel, 2013b).

Regional police practitioner cooperation initiative

A typical regional police practitioner initiative was the establishment of an information-sharing institution in the Maas-Rhine (NeBeDeAgPol) area in 1969 between the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany (Buiskool and van Lakerveld, 2021). The established cross-border cooperation system can be seen as a result of compensatory cooperation strategies, namely education and network building. Although the first attempt to install an official cooperation system in this region, based on existing legislation, failed,

the implementation of a practitioner's idea—namely, the establishment of a non-profit law enforcement association with members from police organisations in these specific EU border regions—was successful and, according to Hufnagel (2013b), had an impact on regional legislation. While informal information exchange arrangements can foster cross-border police cooperation and are built on trust and personal networks, they are not based on a harmonised process of police cooperation regulations. However, successful practitioner initiatives can influence harmonisation processes when redefining legal police cooperation with neighbouring countries, as demonstrated by the NeBeDeAgPol initiative (Hufnagel, 2013b).

Another practitioner-led regional cooperation initiative, although more formalised, which influenced later EU legislation, is the Cross-Channel Intelligence Conference (CCIC). This police cooperation was implemented in 1968 and established between France, Great Britain, Belgium, and the Netherlands. The trigger for enhanced police cooperation was the increase in passenger traffic between the ports of the participating countries. According to Hufnagel (2013b), this cooperation demonstrated that international police collaboration can be achieved through the initiative of dedicated individuals—in this case, the Chief Constable of the Kent Police—and not solely through agency-to-agency agreements. CCIC is an example of practitioner initiatives that were born out of necessity and formed the basis for the later implementation of formal police cooperation. One disadvantage of creating a legal framework to embed already existing police cooperation, in this specific case, was the highly complex and region-specific nature of the police cooperation legislation. According to Hufnagel (2013b), the CCIC legal police cooperation framework did not contribute to overall EU-wide police cooperation harmonisation because the CCIC represents a specific solution for one region in the EU, and its legal complexity did not result in a harmonisation process.

Another example in this regard is, according to Hufnagel (2013a), the general incompatibility of the Russian policing system with regions within the EU bordering Russian policing systems. The author argues further that the Russian model in former Soviet countries was not able, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, to establish sufficient working police cooperation with democratic nations, and they had to create their own compensatory measures to overcome cooperation obstacles. These circumstances led to the implementation of specific regional cooperation systems to support former Soviet countries to join the European Union, for example, the organised crime task force in the Baltic Sea. The spread of the French model, on the one hand, where a separation between police forces within a country is established, can be used as a base for police cooperation

with other countries with the same or similar policing models, such as Spain, Italy, or Belgium (de Maillard and Skogan, 2020). Similarities of systems can positively influence and foster police cooperation due to the understanding of the systems of cooperating police counterparts (Hufnagel, 2013a). On the other hand, the French model supports only regional cooperation between similar policing models and does not participate in an EU-wide police cooperation system between EU Member States with different policing systems in place.

Another example of an EU- and region-wide cooperation obstacle, according to Hufnagel (2013a), is the lack of trust towards Germany. Not only the historically based distrust, but also German attitudes of appearing overly ambitious or impatient towards implementing processes, contribute negatively to the overall German policing model (Kuhlmann and Wollmann, 2021). The refusal to take German cooperation mechanisms into consideration is a hindrance to implementing enhanced EU police cooperation, because Germany, as a major driver of EU police cooperation, and the refusal from some EU Member States to engage, has far-reaching consequences for cooperation mechanisms within the EU (Hufnagel, 2013a).

Other established regional cooperation mechanisms include the Benelux treaty, which was implemented in 1962 and intended to regulate cross-border cooperation between the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg. The regulations developed from existing bi- and multilateral agreements and, over time, adapted to the changing environment and needs of police cooperation in this specific region. According to (Hufnagel, 2013b), the legal framework of the Benelux system was developed by the participating states, but the development of harmonised regional practices came about through the efforts of police practitioners. Another regional cooperation mechanism is the Nordic Police and Customs Cooperation (NPCC) system, which was developed, according to Hufnagel (2013b), between five European countries – Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland – in 1957. This system evolved from a cooperation idea of European neighbouring countries, which was based on existing bi- and multilateral cooperation agreements between individual participating countries (Heinikoski and Hyttinen, 2022). The NPCC system represents a regional compensatory strategy of European countries and was implemented before the EU adopted the Schengen cooperation agreement. The NPCC developed and adapted according to changes in society, which influenced and changed cooperation between national and international police institutions, and in 1962 a more sophisticated regional police and judicial cooperation framework was implemented among the five participating countries (Hufnagel, 2013b). In 1984, the Nordic system incorporated

a joint liaison network for Police and Customs Liaison Officers in third countries, as well as a common intelligence exchange and policing strategy. According to Hufnagel (2013b), the legal framework of the NPCC system was developed by the participating states, but the implementation of harmonised regional practices was carried out by police practitioners. Hufnagel (2013b) states that in the context of Benelux or Nordic countries in general, concerns for national authority or sovereignty are not significant issues in the context of police cooperation on all levels. For the rest of the European Member States, the author recognised that national authority concerns raise fewer challenges than previously when it comes to practical, day-to-day police cooperation in regions. However, Hufnagel (2013a) also states that in the context of an EU-wide police force, the issue of national authority or sovereignty of EU Member States is one of the biggest obstacles. A comprehensive and critical literature review of the two regional Liaison Officer systems is undertaken later in the first part of this literature review.

The Schengen police cooperation, established by the EU, was the initiator of different cooperation interventions after 1999 between EU Member States, for instance, the German–French Police and Customs Cooperation, which was implemented to coordinate police and customs collaboration in the region between these two countries (Hufnagel, 2013b). In general, it can be stated that different regional police cooperation systems in the EU are based on individual bi- and multilateral agreements between participating EU countries, and these agreements are based on the individual needs of a specific region. It is observed that the foundation for those regional police cooperation instruments established after 1999 is fostered by the EU Schengen Convention. Although there is a recognisable improvement in regional police cooperation in the EU, mostly those cooperation agreements are individual regional agreements tailored to the needs and geographical circumstances of their implementers. It can be concluded that the EU tool of the Schengen Convention functions as an initiator of individual regional police cooperation, but it has failed as a tool to harmonise EU cross-border cooperation in general. In general, it can be stated that some regional police cooperation initiatives have had an influence on a broader scale in terms of influencing EU regulations in the context of police cooperation (Bellanova and Glouftsios, 2022). Overcoming regional police cooperation obstacles is addressed in the EU Schengen Convention and, therefore, it has shown that regional strategies can be influential and serve as a guideline for EU-wide harmonisation regulations. Those police cooperation examples mentioned in this thesis have also shown that the involvement of practitioners in the process of elaborating police cooperation regulations is essential for successful implementation (Hufnagel, 2013b).

Mobility and freedom of movement, continuously evolving since modern police systems were established, bring challenges for police forces in the context of police cooperation, as well as combating cross-border crime (Di Fabio, 2022).

> There is no doubt that a range of violent transnational social movements (VTSMs) has been substantially changing the security picture across the developed world in an accelerating fashion in recent years (Richards, 2021a).

With the disappearance of borders within the EU and the associated mobility of people as well as criminals, law enforcement departments must adapt and change long-established procedures and practices (Legrand, 2021). Committing a crime in a country other than the resident country of the criminal can be an advantage for criminals, who can quickly disappear from the crime scene and continue travelling into another country. There is also an observed trend that criminals use foreign countries as safe havens; perpetrators exploit alien legal systems to hide from prosecution and use legal shields to conceal their illegal operations (Nadelmann, 1993). To tackle these occurrences, fill gaps in information-sharing shortcomings with foreign countries, and improve information sharing across borders, EU Member States established Police Liaison Officer networks. EU Member States began to set up national Liaison Officer networks dating back to the 1960s, long before the EU was established. Since then, it has become common practice for Liaison Officers belonging to an EU Member State police force to be sent to either other EU countries or countries of interest to the sending authorities (Benyon, 1994). Creating a network consisting of Liaison Officers from different EU Member State police agencies, stationed in and outside the EU, was a response to a changing environment and also reflected the awareness of police agencies in EU Member States of the need to bring cross-border crime under control (Bigo, 2000).

Police Liaison Officers of EU MS as information exchange implementer

Global developments and specific developments in the European Union (EU) in the 1990s and 2000s, including those aimed at creating a society without borders in the EU, were accompanied by increases in international and transnational threats. This led the EU to focus, inter alia, on strengthening police cooperation (Russel, 2013). Police Liaison Officers (PLOs) from EU Member States (EU MS), make an important contribution to facilitating direct information exchange between the EU and third-country police agencies (Bigo, 2000). Bayer (2013) states in this context that the advantage of Police Liaison Officers is their ability to establish peer-to-peer networks at various levels within law enforcement agencies in host countries. Anderson et al. (1995) argues that EU MS Police Liaison Officers are crucial for international police cooperation, and Block and Den Boer

(2013) state that EU MS Liaison Officers are vital in the fight against organised crime. The approach of law enforcement agencies to establish PLOs in host countries is supported by both policymakers and practitioners due to the positive results gained from this arrangement (Block, 2013). Police Liaison Officers play an important role in the international police cooperation within the EU and with third countries (Bulletin of the European Communities, 1986).

> […] liaison officers are a significant factor in police cooperation, both within the EU and in contacts with third countries, especially given that, apart from liaison officers, EUROPOL staff and the staff of the Police and Customs Cooperation Centres, only a small number of police officers in Europe engage full time in transnational cooperation (Block, 2013, p. 107).

The academic literature on international policing provides a large quantity of international policing publications and less academic literature on the Police Liaison Officer topic. Block (2013) argues in this context that there is a lack of academic research in the field of practical Police Liaison Officer work and that this specific field of law enforcement activity is under-researched.

Governments that send Police Liaison Officers to foreign countries have certain motivations, interests, and ideas regarding why and how to establish a Police Liaison Officer abroad. Interests can include wanting to have close cooperation with host country authorities because citizens of the host country may have a negative impact on the crime or asylum rate of the sending country, and therefore information sharing is seen as essential in those cases (Nadelmann, 1993; Block, 2013). Motivational aspects could be driven by good intergovernmental relations between the sending and the host country, with the establishment of a Police Liaison Officer by the sending country showing support for the host country (Nadelmann, 1993; Block, 2010; Hashimoto, 2012). Other additional factors in this construct include the decision on whether to send high-ranking Police Liaison Officers focusing on strategic cooperation or Police Liaison Officers focusing more on operational cooperation. Another distinction in this regard can be made in terms of the skills of a Police Liaison Officer. Some countries decide to send a specialist, mostly a Police Liaison Officer who has expertise in specific fields such as drug-related, terrorism-related, or human trafficking-related crimes. Other countries decide to send more generalist Police Liaison Officers who are able to cover a broader spectrum of activities across the entire law enforcement agency (Bowling and Sheptycki, 2012). The decision on whether to send a specialist or a generalist also depends on the structure of the sending law enforcement agency in terms of resources and institutional responsibilities. For example, in relation to drug-related crimes, if such crime is the responsibility of one specialised federal

agency in a country, then there is a likelihood that the sending country will deploy a specialist rather than a generalist to the host country. Also to be taken into consideration in this regard is whether the law enforcement institution in the sending country is organised as one federal entity or consists of different national independent agencies. For instance, in a federal organisation, a Police Liaison Officer can represent the entire law enforcement agency and, therefore, multiple branches of the federal institution of the sending country, whereas in a nationally organised system, a Police Liaison Officer primarily represents only a specific agency or national part of the law enforcement organisation of the sending country.

In Europe, there are different Police Liaison Officer systems implemented. Germany, for example, does not send generalists as Police Liaison Officers due to its law enforcement organisational structure. Germany has state and federal police forces, but only federal police forces are entitled to send Police Liaison Officers to host countries. The federal police forces in Germany are specialised in specific fields. The Bundespolizei (Federal Police) is responsible for railway security, border control issues, aviation security, and the fight against crime (German Federal Police, 2020). The Bundeskriminalamt (Federal Criminal Police) is responsible for combating crime, counter-terrorism, and has a leading role in cross-border cooperation (German Federal Criminal Police, 2020). The Bundesnachrichtendienst (Federal Intelligence Service) is responsible for gathering intelligence, international cooperation, cyber security, international terrorism and other matters (German Federal Intelligence Service, 2020). If Germany decides to send Liaison Officers to a host country, they can send up to three different specialist police officers to cover various crime-related areas. Germany is able to send a specialist from the Federal Police in relation to border issues, a specialist from the Federal Criminal Police for organised crime, and a specialist from the Federal Intelligence Service for terrorist-related matters. The disadvantage of having one or more specialists as a Police Liaison Officer in a host country is the risk of insufficient information exchange, which may arise from various circumstances, such as lack of trust between agencies or the individuals involved. Another disadvantage is that a specialist Liaison Officer generally represents a specific organisation, and contacts with other departments within the law enforcement institutions in the host country may be limited. The advantage of having a specialist as a Liaison Officer is that this person is competent and experienced in the specific field of work in the host country. This means the Liaison Officer has extensive experience with relevant tasks and also the backing of the sending specialised authority to support host country colleagues in various situations related to that field of work. Another advantage is the ability of the

Liaison Officer to utilise international networks of their sending authority to gather further information in specific cases.

Law enforcement agencies in Austria are under a federal umbrella. Every Austrian police officer is a federal employee, and there are no state police agencies in Austria. Although there are decentralised law enforcement state departments within each of the nine states in Austria, those departments fall under the command of the federal department with respect to work-related matters and under the command of personnel-related topics. For example, Federal Criminal Police, Federal Intelligence Service (Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior, 2020a). The structure responsible for selecting and sending Liaison Officers is the Department V/A/3/d of the Federal Ministry of the Interior. Every employee of the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior can apply for a Police Liaison Officer position, including both civilian and executive employees (Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior, 2020b). The Austrian Police Liaison Officer system is based on sending generalists to host countries, with the capacity to represent the entire Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior and all its responsibilities. The advantage is that a generalist Liaison Officer can handle cross-cutting requests from host countries, since they represent the entire ministry, and can connect host country agencies with various sub-agencies in different areas of the sending authority. Another advantage is that the information flow is centralised through the office of the Police Liaison Officer, which minimises information loss. A disadvantage of having a generalist Liaison Officer in a host country is that, in specialised cases like Cybercrime or Violent Transnational Social Movement cases (Richards, 2021b), the knowledge and experience of the Liaison Officer may not be sufficient, and support may require additional information gathering from the sending country. This may lead to delays in responding to requests or result in incomplete answers because the request was not fully understood by the Liaison Officer.

Another aspect regarding the role of a Liaison Officer is the general purpose of the sending authorities and the intentions they have in mind when they deploy a representative of their organisation. In general, a distinction can be made between a diplomatic or strategic position and an operational support and practically orientated role. Bayer (2013) states that academics belonging to the trans-governmental faction argue that the most efficient method of cooperation on an international level is achieved by implementing a peer-to-peer network. In this context, Police Liaison Officers are considered mid-level representatives of their sending agency which, according to the author, translates in diplomatic circles as the equivalent of an embassy employee in the rank of a political or consular officer.

> A genuine, internationally recognised diplomatic track would serve the purpose of fostering legitimacy and accountability through diplomacy while maintaining the flexibility and efficiencies presented by transnational networks. In this manner, international policing networks can be made both more efficient and more accountable through officially recognised channels that are backed and supported by conventions and treaties (Bayer, 2013, p.120).

The advantage of such a role for a Police Liaison Officer is that cooperation agreements negotiated can enhance overall cooperation between countries in terms of general information exchange on agreed terms. On the other hand, not every Police Liaison Officer is capable of fulfilling such a position, as a certain rank, position, and experience in legal matters within the host authorities is a prerequisite to be accepted by the host country. A medium-ranked police officer, such as a sergeant from the criminal police, might have difficulties initiating and negotiating legally binding contracts with the host country. For example, in the case of a readmission agreement of negatively judged asylum seekers, the Police Liaison Officer might not have the backing power of their agency or the legal expertise to agree to certain terms in the contract. A disadvantage of a diplomatic role can be that, due to the status and rank of the Liaison Officer, counterparts on lower levels in the host country police hierarchy might be reluctant to contact and exchange information, which can lead to reduced information flow at lower levels.

Liaison Officers, in general, are not equipped with executive power in host countries and therefore do not have any state authority in the host country. As Nadelmann (1993) states in his research, Liaison Officers from the USA equipped with executive powers are the exception. Bigo (2000) argues that, because of social change and the associated dynamics in the fight against crime in recent years, as well as the upswing in free trade and free movement, Police Liaison Officers have been given a key role in European policing due to their ability to manage the flow of information between disparate agencies in different countries. The author further states that a Police Liaison Officer is a key management post for creating information networks between cooperating police agencies. Police Liaison Officers' tasks include creating a basis of trust, facilitating information exchange on different levels, collecting and administering information, as well as sharing national, EU, and EC policy practices and laws with the host country's authorities (Bigo, 2000). The author adds that the creation of new agents, so-called Liaison Officers, who work in alignment with the Europeanisation of crime control, was the most significant achievement in this context.

> As residents in a country not their own, these liaison officers, or liaison civil servants as they are sometimes called, play a key role as the human interface

> between the various national police forces, establishing and maintaining the flow of data between each force repository (Bigo, 2000, p.74).

Police Liaison Officers working on a more practical side to enhance cross-border operations between sending and host countries are also bound to adhere to established legal frameworks in the context of information sharing, and these can vary between host countries. While some host countries permit only relations with so-called central points of contact within their administration, other host countries support a multilevel cooperation approach between foreign Liaison Officers and various host law enforcement departments. The difference is that central points of contact in host countries forward requests from a Police Liaison Officer to the appropriate entities in the system to answer the request. The answer, in turn, is sent to the central point of contact and forwarded to the Police Liaison Officer. In this case, the Police Liaison Officer cannot establish direct contact with agencies responsible for operational information. This procedure can take some time, and a personal trust relationship between the Police Liaison Officer and host law enforcement agencies at the operational level is difficult to establish, as they do not normally meet or have direct contact (Block, 2010). The advantage of a central point of contact system is that all requested information passes through one department. In cases where similar information is requested from different entities, an answer can be given in a relatively short time, and the information is registered and archived (EU Presidency, 2016).

Some host countries provide foreign Police Liaison Officers with direct contact access to their responsible law enforcement departments to answer requests. Direct contact systems are the opposite of single point of contact systems in foreign administrations and have the advantage of building personal trust between interacting entities. Another advantage is that additional questions to already issued inquiries can be addressed in a relatively short time, and the delay between filing and receiving a response to the request can be minimal. Disadvantages of this system include the potential loss of information if requests are not properly registered and archived centrally, because normally host country departments only deal with requests addressed directly to them. Departments are generally unaware of what requests other departments have received within the same system (Gallagher, 2002). The system can also be misused if a Liaison Officer submits the same request to multiple departments simultaneously. The intention in such cases may be to receive a faster response from certain departments or to obtain different pieces of information from departments with varying access to sources. In a direct contact system, multilevel requests can produce differing outputs. Various departments may work on the same request independently, unaware that other departments have received the same

request. This creates additional work for the host administration and may result in the Liaison Officer receiving inconsistent or duplicated answers, depending on the focus of the different departments responding. Therefore, multilevel requests from Liaison Officers in a direct contact system require stricter coordination in order to receive a consolidated response from the host administration.

Between the two cooperation systems mentioned, there are also numerous hybrid systems with variations. Established systems depend primarily on the intentions of host countries regarding how much and how deep cooperation is desired, as well as the intentions of sending countries in defining the role their Police Liaison Officer should fulfil abroad. Research has shown that the overall role of Police Liaison Officers is to facilitate cooperation between the sending and host countries. However, the specific role of a Police Liaison Officer assigned to host countries is multifaceted and varies depending on different circumstances. Conditions for cooperation vary from country to country and depend on the motivation, needs, and intentions of both the host and sending country (Neumueller, 2015). Important in this context is the willingness of both the host and sending country to cooperate and the desired level of cooperation. Another important factor is the legal framework within which the Police Liaison Officer can act in order to meet the expectations of both parties. The role of a Police Liaison Officer also depends on the individual officer and on how personal trust can be built and maintained to establish successful cross-border networks. To research explicitly the role of a Police Liaison Officer in a host country, sending authorities can be consulted to clarify details of the specific role and work of the Police Liaison Officer, as well as the details of cooperation possibilities established by the host country, which is outside the scope of this thesis.

The research of this thesis into Police Liaison Officer standards shows that there are no unified standards of tasks or roles for EU Police Liaison Officers in place. The challenges for Police Liaison Officers depend on various circumstances, such as the interest of the sending country, willingness to cooperate, as well as the background of the EU Police Liaison Officer themselves. The challenges can vary from maintaining contacts at the highest possible level in the host country within the law enforcement agency and in diplomatic circles, to gathering information, supporting cross-border crime-fighting operations, and hosting meetings between criminal investigators (Block, 2013). In general, it can be stated that there are no universally valid connections regarding tasks and challenges established among different Police Liaison Officer systems because tasks and challenges depend on different circumstances, and they are individually and destination-orientated. However, Block (2013) states that although there are no unified tasks and

challenges, most Police Liaison Officers' daily duties also include supporting their home embassies with their police expertise. Noteworthy in this context is that the work of a Police Liaison Officer is determined by the legal regulations of the sending country under the framework of the host country. Liaison Officers are bound by the legal regulations of their home country and enjoy diplomatic protection in the host country. Cooperation between Police Liaison Officers and host law enforcement agencies can be based on EU regulations, as well as bilateral cooperation agreements within the EU. Outside the EU, bilaterally binding legal contracts enable cooperation with the host country. In this context, it is crucial that assigning tasks to Police Liaison Officers must always be based on relevant backing (Block, 2013). Police Liaison Officers are seen as information exchange facilitators, and the general and overarching task of Police Liaison Officers is to foster cross-border cooperation between law enforcement entities.

The need for better cooperation and for fighting transnational crime arose for the EU in the 1980s, also in light of the Schengen Accord (Council of the European Union and General Secretariat of the Council, 2022). Among other factors, a main driver was the mutual interest backed by a political belief in the need to consolidate European progress on removing internal frontier controls and permitting free movement of goods and people. The idea was to create a European policing infrastructure of communications and operational procedures. As a result, the Terrorism, Radicalism, Extremism and Violence Internationally (TREVI) Group was established (König and Trauner, 2021). Working Group III was instrumental in fighting transnational crime in Europe, which included organised crime, computer crime, environmental crime, vehicle crime, trafficking in stolen antiques and works of art, and money laundering. A proposal from former German Chancellor Kohl to create a European Criminal Police Office (EUROPOL) was adopted by the TREVI Working Group III in 1991. This was also a signal from the EU towards harmonisation and the central management of transnational security. The proposal also included setting up a Police Liaison Officer network in the fight against drugs. The idea of pooling Police Liaison Officers to create an EU Police Liaison Officer system, as suggested in the TREVI Working Group III proposal, was rejected by Member States due to financial, legal, practical, and linguistic reasons (Block, 2011). Important in this context is that, in the analysis of TREVI Working Group III Police Liaison Officer policy, there is a significant lack of consideration for the practical aspects of the work of EU MS Police Liaison Officers. This means the decision to set up a Police Liaison Officer network was based on political and legal rationality, without taking into account the practical side relevant to the work of Police Liaison Officers, such as the legal, organisational, and

cultural differences between police systems in the Member States (Nadelmann, 1993; Block, 2010). Because no agreement could be reached on an EU controlled PLO system, EU MS continued to deploy national PLOs. The number and destinations of individual EU Member State Liaison Officers were based on the national interests of the sending EU MS, related to political, crime, or asylum motivations. Economic factors also influenced Police Liaison Officer destinations, with the consequence that EU Member States sent PLOs only to destinations which served their national interests. Police Liaison Officers are recognised as an asset for their police agencies in their home countries and they also play an important role in the EU-wide international strategy (Block, 2010).

Attempts of the EU to coordinate EU MS Police Liaison Officers

After the failed attempt to set up an EU Police Liaison Officer system, the EU made several attempts to identify potential cooperation possibilities and initiated steps to coordinate EU Member States' Police Liaison Officers centrally. At a 1998 EU Council meeting in Vienna, representatives of the Kingdom of Denmark initiated the adoption of a resolution on the common use of Police Liaison Officers of EU Member States posted abroad. This initiative included a coordination role for EUROPOL with EU Member States' Police Liaison Officers, as well as an attempt to harmonise EU Police Liaison Officers' tasks throughout the different national Police Liaison Officer networks (EU Council, 2002). An EU Council decision on a strategy to 'identify areas for action and procedures for possible shared use of the networks of liaison Officers' (Block, 2011, p.209) was rejected under the leadership of Germany. Another EU Council decision in 2003, concerning the regulation of the posting and tasks of EU MS Police Liaison Officers to align national Police Liaison Officers with EU interests, was also rejected (Block, 2011). The intention of the EU in this context was to provide access to collected information from Member States' Police Liaison Officers in foreign countries to all EU Member States through an established central point of contact within each Member State's internal ministry. The EU Council regulation also put forward a coordination plan between Police Liaison Officers from different EU Member States posted to the same foreign country and suggested a common EU Member States Police Liaison Officer training format (EU Council, 2002; Block, 2013). Although the majority of EU MS Police Liaison Officers are based outside the EU, there are still a significant number based within different EU Member States, despite the availability of various police cooperation tools to share cross-border police information within the EU. The capacity of the EU to coordinate EU Member State Police Liaison Officers is, at best, rudimentary. One of the reasons so little has been achieved in the coordination of the duties and output of these officers rests

in the fact that the EU has lacked consideration for the practical side of an EU-wide Police Liaison Officer network in terms of procedure, standards, and unification of criminal laws. However, Block (2010) believes that there are possibilities to improve political instruments within the EU to create a common use of Police Liaison Officers for all EU MS. Such a common EU Police Liaison Officer:

> […] might require reconciliation of the different standards and practices in the EU Member States with regard to police cooperation in general, and concerning liaison officers in particular, but in any case increasing the practicality of the instruments by giving due consideration to professional rationality in the policy-making (Block, 2010, p.207).

EU controlled Liaison Officer network

An example of establishing an EU-controlled Police Liaison Officer network can be seen in the reasons for the EU to establish an EU-controlled Immigration and Migration Liaison Officers network. Due to the resistance of EU Member States to shared access to their Immigration Liaison Officers (ILO) and other obstacles to professional cooperation, an evaluation of the EU Council regulation on Immigration Liaison Officers concluded with the decision to implement EU Migration Liaison Officers (EU Council, 2004; European Parliament and European Council, 2019). Events in the recent past, including an EU-wide migration crisis in 2015 which significantly impacted EU Member States, led to a rethinking of resource consolidation, specifically regarding EU Member States' Liaison Officers in general and Immigration Liaison Officers in particular. During the 2015 migration crisis in the EU, the enhanced pressure of illegal immigration into the EU led to new EU policies and impacted the work of EU MS Immigration Liaison Officers. The portfolio of EU ILOs expanded, and tasks concerning the reintegration of migrants in their countries of origin became increasingly important (Ostrand, 2022). This led to a revision of the 2004 Council regulation on the creation of an EU ILO network. The intent of this regulation was to combine resources and coordinate the actions of EU MS ILOs in a third country or particular region, with the possibility of exchanging information and best practices. Despite the fact that EU MS ILOs are bilateral Liaison Officers, the intention of the EU was to implement a stronger European dimension to their work, respecting the principle of subsidiarity. The EU MS ILO network is similar to the EU MS PLO network, as EU MS ILOs are part of individual EU MS authorities, and strict and efficient management by the EU has proven difficult and ineffective due to several factors. These include the chain of command remaining with the individual Member States and not being transferred to the EU, diverging interests between the EU and the individual Member States, and others. A distinct difference between EU MS ILOs and EU MS PLOs is that EU ILOs deal with one subject exclusively—migration—and do not manage the broad

portfolio of a Police Liaison Officer, who must deal with multiple and often diverse criminal phenomena. An evaluation conducted by the EU of the ILO Network Regulation produced mixed results regarding its relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and EU added value (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2004). The findings of the evaluation, as well as the pressure of the migration crisis, prompted the EU in 2018 to establish a new Immigration Liaison Officer network with Liaison Officers directly deployed by EU agencies, namely Liaison Officers of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency and European Migration Liaison Officers (EMLOs). Those Liaison Officers are coordinated and controlled by the EU:

> […] to maximize the impact of Union action on migration in third countries and enhance the engagement of key countries of origin and transit, as well as to step up coordination and cooperation with ILOs (European Commission, 2018, p.1).

Because EU Migration Liaison Officers are under EU control in terms of selection, financing, and information sharing, they are beneficial to all EU Member States in equal measure (EU Council, 2017).

The next section of the literature review is concerned with the tasks, challenges, legal background, and benefits of Police Liaison Officers. The day-to-day tasks of Police Liaison Officers can be very extensive, far-reaching, and multifaceted, depending on the requests of their sending and host countries. To be able to fulfil cooperation requirements, a Police Liaison Officer must have extensive knowledge of the legal systems of both the home and host countries. Specifically, knowledge about laws concerning cooperation, information exchange, police organisational structures, policing, and crime-fighting responsibilities in the host country is required. Additionally, a Police Liaison Officer must be organised, act professionally, and be capable of establishing networks (Nadelmann, 1993). Police Liaison Officers:

> […] often find their days crowded with fielding inquiries from U.S.-based agents, transmitting requests for information and other assistance between local police agencies and U.S.-based law enforcement agencies, serving as hosts for fellow agents flown in on specific investigations, arranging reservations and programs for visiting politicians and high-level officials, dealing with the media, giving speeches, and attending assorted social functions (Nadelmann, 1993, p.110).

Police Liaison Officers daily work in host destinations

Depending on the work focus of a Police Liaison Officer, tasks can vary from gathering information for specific criminal cases to collecting tactical, operational, and strategic intelligence to support the investigation of drug cartels (Nadelmann, 1993). An

often-touted advantage in the academic literature regarding Police Liaison Officers is the possibility to gain information on different levels, from different law enforcement agencies, and in different forms, to answer requests from their home law enforcement agencies (Nadelmann, 1993; Andreas, 2008). According to (Block, 2013), Police Liaison Officers can exchange information informally on a horizontal level—from one police officer to another—as well as formally on a vertical level through the appropriate channels, utilising the law enforcement agency of the host country. The research of academic literature in the context of Police Liaison Officer standards shows that there are no unified standards for tasks or education for EU MS Police Liaison Officers. The tasks and challenges for Police Liaison Officers depend on various circumstances, such as the interest of the sending country, willingness to cooperate, and the background of the EU MS Police Liaison Officer. The challenges can vary from maintaining contacts at the highest possible level in the host country within the law enforcement agency and in diplomatic circles, to gathering information and supporting cross-border crime-fighting operations, as well as hosting meetings between criminal investigators (Block, 2013). In general, it can be stated that there are no standardised tasks and challenges established among Police Liaison Officer systems, as they are circumstance-dependent, individually based, and destination-orientated. However, Block (2013) notes that although there are no unified tasks and challenges, most Liaison Officers' daily duties also include supporting their home embassies with their police expertise. Noteworthy in this context is that the work of a Liaison Officer is determined by the legal regulations of the sending country under the framework of the host country.

Challenges and tasks of the Police Liaison Officer post depend heavily on the destination to which they are sent and can vary significantly. In the Austrian Police Liaison Officer system, there are destinations that focus on increased numbers of asylum seekers in the sending country, whereas in other destinations the focus is on the exchange of information concerning host citizens involved in crimes committed in the sending country. This requires a high degree of flexibility and quick familiarisation with legal matters, as well as knowledge of information exchange mechanisms and the customs of the individual host country (Neumueller, 2015). In general, academic research on the challenges related to cooperation between Police Liaison Officers and host countries has shown that these challenges are multifaceted. They range from language barriers, cultural differences, and trust-related issues, to incompatibility of communication systems, politically motivated obstacles, and legal incompatibilities. Nadelmann (1993) states that major challenges and sources of frustration for Police Liaison Officers can stem from legal differences between

host and sending countries. For example: personal data protection laws, criminal law, criminal procedure acts, and others. Obstacles may arise even when the host country is willing to support cooperation, but legal variances, institutional asymmetries, diversity of criminal law procedures, and political differences hinder swift and effective partnership (Nadelmann, 1993). One of the biggest challenges for Police Liaison Officers is adherence to the sovereign authority of the host country. This means Liaison Officers are mostly deployed in strategic diplomatic positions and very seldom hold operational power in a host country (Nadelmann, 1993). Adherence to the sovereignty of the host country in this context means that executive power can only be exercised by host country authorities, and Police Liaison Officers, if at all, have only a monitoring role—meaning that police actions by Police Liaison Officers are generally prohibited. Unilateral Liaison Officer police action in the host country can cause serious tensions in foreign relations and may result in the termination of police cooperation altogether (Nadelmann, 1993).

Other challenges can occur if, although actions could be covered in bilateral agreements with the host country, Police Liaison Officers are tasked by a foreign EU Member State with work that is not covered in the legal framework of the home EU Member State, e.g. handling of informants in the host country while the Police Liaison Officer has no legal backing to do so from their sending EU Member State (Block, 2007). Block argues further that, even if the host country is willing to cooperate with the Police Liaison Officers in this area, differences in legal systems are difficult to manage and present a constant challenge for the Police Liaison Officer in terms of satisfying both parties. Depending on the cooperation and legal agreements in place between the sending and host countries, the Police Liaison Officer must be aware of legal restrictions regarding their work in foreign countries (Nadelmann, 1993). The legal basis for Police Liaison Officers cooperating with host country law enforcement entities within the EU is founded on a number of TREVI and EU Council policy instruments (Block, 2010). Within the EU, direct cooperation between EU law enforcement agencies is supported to reduce the time required for information exchange. Outside the EU, cooperation can be based on framework agreements, such as Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), which define the scope of activities Police Liaison Officers are permitted to undertake in the host country. Depending on the host country and how its authorities perceive the role of a foreign Police Liaison Officer, the role may be generally described as diplomatic or more operational, which in turn defines the work and contact possibilities for foreign Police Liaison Officers. The different roles of a PLO are critically examined later in this section of the literature review.

EU Member States have more than 550 Police Liaison Officers based in countries around the world (Block, 2010). The need to coordinate EU Police Liaison Officers from EU Member States became a particularly important topic for the EU after the 9/11 and London and Madrid terrorist attacks (Den Boer, 2002; Russel, 2013). Aldrich et al. (2011) argue that the phenomenon of globalisation plays a key role in increasing international police cooperation. In an attempt to coordinate the existing Police Liaison Officer systems—composed of various individual EU Member State Police Liaison Officers—the EU further developed existing instruments such as the Terrorism, Radicalism, Extremism and International Violence (TREVI) cooperation groups in the 1980s (Tayfun, 2010). The foundation for such cooperation is found in the EC Joint Action Plan, which provides a common framework for EU Member State initiatives concerning Police Liaison Officers, and in the European Commission (EC) Decision on the Common Use of Police Liaison Officers passed in 2003 (Sheptycki, 2002; Block, 2010). One of the biggest obstacles to coordinating EU MS Police Liaison Officers appears to be the practical challenge of managing a network of EU MS Liaison Officers belonging to different EU MS police agencies.

The resulting problems include, among others, differences in police education, varying philosophies of policing across EU MS, and differing crime investigation priorities. A specific type of crime may be of relevance to one EU MS but not to others. According to Block (2010), EU MS might agree to an EU Council decision in the context of EU policy instruments but may not feel obliged to implement it when it comes to practice. This reluctance is particularly apparent with Police Liaison Officers, as EU MS are hesitant to relinquish control of their PLOs to the EU. As such, the selection of PLO destinations and the practices of Police Liaison Officers remain largely governed by national preferences and the specifics of national police systems. This reflects a lack of trust when it comes to sharing information with other EU Member State law enforcement agencies via centralised platforms.

There is also no unified definition of a Police Liaison Officer, nor of standardised Police Liaison Officer training. EU Member States select their Police Liaison Officers as they see fit, with the human resource pool ranging from administrative employees to criminal investigators and senior managers from respective ministries of the interior or customs. An additional complicating element is that EU-created standards for the common use of Police Liaison Officers by EU Member States are simply not implemented by certain Member States. In other instances, these standards are not followed due to lack of trust, incompatible juridical systems, language and cultural barriers, or divergent policing

and administrative backgrounds (Block and Den Boer, 2013). Another obstacle to an EU Police Liaison Officer network composed of individual Member State officers is the fear that EU Member States will lose control over their Liaison Officers and effectively transfer part of their responsibility to the EU, even though the officers are hired and financed by the individual Member States (Block, 2007; Bayer, 2013; Block, 2013).

In contrast to the challenges mentioned above regarding Police Liaison Officer systems, there are also benefits to a shared information approach. Certain EU regions have found that information sharing in the context of cross-border criminality enhances the overall fight against crime. Important components of an information-sharing strategy are motivation, benefits, and identified needs. According to Adams, Gill and Fitzgerald (2018), managing knowledge within an organisation gives that organisation a competitive advantage and improves work performance. Law enforcement agencies should identify knowledge-sharing areas, which can improve the performance of individual investigators through the resolution of criminal cases. EU Member States need to recognise that active participation in cross-border information exchange can advance their national objective of fighting crime. Information sharing can also be viewed as an economic factor, as it may benefit EU Member States by maximising outcomes with limited national resources.

Cross-border information sharing can help overcome the limitations of a national police force, e.g. personnel or financial constraints, by providing access to valuable information that would otherwise be unavailable if agencies had to rely solely on national resources. Also important is that information sharing must be based on reciprocity (Machado and Granja, 2019). Cooperation in general, and information sharing in particular, must be a reciprocal process: it is not sufficient to receive information without also contributing. EU Member States must actively participate in the collective good by enriching the overall information pool of the EU (Adams, Gill and Fitzgerald, 2018). Information-sharing strategies must also consider that the practice intersects with various legal regimes and carries complex legal implications, both for individual law enforcement agencies and for EU Member States as a whole. Regulations at the level of police departments and units, as well as overall national laws, must align with EU legal requirements for information sharing and comply with legal standards at every level.

Established institutionalised information-sharing achievements like INTERPOL and later EUROPOL are based on historical events as well as reactions to globalisation and the negative impact associated with cross-border crime. Such institutions are useful instruments for exchanging information, creating analysis, and supporting specific crime

cases, although they are often bureaucratic and cumbersome, and receiving answers from these institutions can be time-consuming (Nadelmann, 1993; Block, 2010). However, in general, these institutions can be described as successful international implementations in the context of cross-border information sharing. The disadvantages of institutionalised information sharing and the unsuccessful efforts to create an EU-wide Police Liaison Officer network led to the establishment of bilateral Police Liaison Officers by EU Member States and Regional Police Liaison Officers. Regional Police Liaison Officers abroad represent an alternative to these well-established organisations and reflect an innovative initiative by police organisations to pursue their own interests abroad. Regions within the EU with similar legal systems and shared interests abroad developed joint efforts and created small-scale EU Police Liaison Officer systems, e.g. the Nordic Police and Customs Cooperation and the Benelux cooperation (Nadelmann, 1993; Andreas, 2008). There are two regional LO systems established in the EU: one is the Benelux PLO system, and the second is the Nordic PLO system. The next section presents a thorough and critical review of existing academic literature on the Benelux and Nordic Police Liaison Officer systems, including their creation history and implementation in relation to regional Police Liaison Officer systems. Zanders (2013) states that, although some academic work has been done on the regional PLO systems, there remains a lack of in-depth research conducted in a holistic manner. The Benelux countries already recognised the benefits of joint cooperation on various levels and topics with neighbouring countries by the mid-20th century, resulting in the adoption of various treaties over the years.

The Benelux Customs Union

In 1944, the Benelux Customs Union was created with the goal of ensuring free movement of people, goods, and services. Cooperation between the Benelux countries was enhanced over the years, and in 1953 a joint trade policy was adopted, followed in 1954 by the implementation of the liberalisation of capital movement between Benelux countries (Advisory Council on International Affairs, 2007). In 1958, Benelux countries merged existing treaties and protocols into one legally binding agreement, known as the Benelux Economic Union. This treaty was implemented in 1960 and still forms the basis of Benelux cooperation (Advisory Council on International Affairs, 2007). The Benelux Economic Treaty emerged from a long tradition of regional cooperation in the field of internal security. In 1962, a treaty on mutual legal assistance, which included provisions for close cooperation between the police forces of all three involved countries, was implemented (Governments of Belgium Netherlands Luxembourg, 2008).

According to Hufnagel (2013b), the 1962 Benelux Treaty on police cooperation was instrumental in the later development of harmonised EU law on police cooperation (Verachtert, 2024). Furthermore, the author states that the Benelux police cooperation treaty was an example of how police practitioners can influence police cooperation laws from the bottom up. It also demonstrates how a multilateral agreement between EU Member States can influence EU legislation, as this treaty did in the area of cross-border cooperation (Hufnagel, 2013b). The 1962 Police Cooperation Treaty of the Benelux countries was an advanced instrument that allowed police forces from these countries to cooperate on a level that was unique at the time. For example, the treaty allowed one Benelux country to request police action from another. Among other provisions, the treaty regulated conditional cross-border pursuit and surveillance (Hufnagel, 2013b). In 2004, the Benelux countries implemented a cross-border police intervention agreement.

Among other elements, this agreement includes mutual assistance with regard to public order and security, the possibility of carrying out cross-border interventions in urgent cases, the supply of equipment and materials, and the direct exchange of personal data. Another important point of the cross-border police intervention agreement is the joint use of Police Liaison Officers (Governments of Belgium Netherlands Luxembourg, 2008). The joint use of Police Liaison Officers created the opportunity for a common deployment system that benefitted Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. In the first step of this project, joint Police Liaison Officer contact points and support offices were established in every Benelux country, and then Police Liaison Officers were sent to countries of interest to all Benelux nations. The second step involved the implementation of executive agreements aimed at enhancing the joint or common use of the deployed Police Liaison Officers among all Benelux countries (Governments of Belgium Netherlands Luxembourg, 2008).

Research into the Benelux Police Liaison Officer system shows that there are obstacles to cooperation between joint Benelux Liaison Officers and the sending authorities of the Benelux. Although there is an established willingness to cooperate and some observable common use of Police Liaison Officers within the Benelux system, problems persist in cooperation among the participating Member States. Zanders (2013) states that the successful common use of joint regional Benelux Police Liaison Officers remains anecdotal and fragmentary. The cooperation within this network is based on the personal willingness of individual Liaison Officers and does not represent a well-developed police cooperation system based on bi- or multilateral agreements. Bigo (2000) reached a similar conclusion:

> The BENELUX liaison officer will also be involved in the judicial assistance procedure. To date, the BENELUX cooperation in this field has not been successful and it is dependent on the personalities and the willingness of the officers from both countries to cooperate in the same area (Bigo, 2000, p.40).

Further literature on the Benelux Police Liaison Officer system, from the perspective of the participating countries, highlights that obstacles to cooperation include differences in duties and tasks among joint Liaison Officers (Bigo, 2000). In other words, a joint Police Liaison Officer sent from one of the Benelux countries is subject to the national law of the sending authority, despite representing all Benelux countries. Other obstacles to cooperation identified by Bigo (2000) include the national interests of the sending country of the joint Benelux Police Liaison Officer, language barriers between cooperating Benelux countries, and differences in legal systems within the Benelux region.

The Nordic Police and Customs Cooperation

The second regional Liaison Officer system is the Nordic Police and Customs Cooperation. Since the mid-1950s, citizens of the five Nordic countries—Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, and Norway—have shared a common labour market. This allows citizens to freely move among these countries to work and access the same social security systems as the local population (Takala, 2005). Driven by the economic development of the five Nordic countries, the benefits of close cooperation were recognised (Neergaard, 2021). Similar to the Benelux countries, close cooperation was implemented, though through a different approach. In addition to the agreements, in 1952 the Nordic countries established the Nordic Council. This inter-parliamentary body acts as a tool for cooperation among the participating countries and provides recommendations to the governments of the Member States. In 1971, a Council of Ministers and an inter-Nordic budget were implemented to support cooperation and finance cooperation projects between the Member States (Takala, 2005). The Nordic Council also addressed many criminal law issues and, in this context, proposed the adoption of common guidelines for drafting laws. A special Nordic criminal law committee was established to harmonise legislation on criminal law, resulting in various agreements among the Nordic countries (Takala, 2005).

Nordic police cooperation between Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland has a long history, which began with an agreement at the political level and was then formalised in the early 1970s. The aim of Nordic police cooperation is to facilitate and enhance the day-to-day work of police officers in the five Nordic countries. According to Kleiven (2013), one of the most important achievements of this agreement is the Nordic Police and Customs Cooperation (PTN). Nordic police cooperation began as a gentlemen’s

agreement among the five ministers of the Nordic countries with the aim of enhancing cross-border cooperation (Kleiven, 2013).

The Nordic police cooperation is therefore a bottom-up system, meaning police practitioners implemented a working cooperation structure, which was later formalised into a legally binding police cooperation agreement between all participating countries in 1972. In 1984, the Nordic Ministers of Justice established a common police strategy, which also included a joint Nordic Police Liaison Officer network. Subsequently, in 1987, this cooperation became a permanent structure within Nordic police cooperation (Kleiven, 2013). Nordic Police Liaison Officers work jointly for all Nordic countries regardless of their individual national affiliation or law enforcement agency. Initially, the main task of Nordic Police Liaison Officers focused on drug-related crime. Because of this, Nordic Police Liaison Officers were first dispatched primarily to host countries of interest to the Nordic region in the context of drug production and trafficking.

Since 1996, the mandate of Nordic Police Liaison Officers has been extended, and they are now considered generalist Police Liaison Officers concerned with all cross-border crime, not only drug-related cases. The selection of countries where joint Police Liaison Officers are deployed is based on the security needs of Nordic countries and the estimation that direct contacts with host country law enforcement agencies will benefit cross-border cooperation in fighting crime (Danish Police, 2021). A prerequisite for a Nordic Police Police Liaison Officer posting is that there must be an established diplomatic representation from one of the five Nordic countries (Kleiven, 2013).

Since the mandate of Nordic Police Liaison Officers has expanded, duties now include intelligence collection, supporting direct connections between Nordic law enforcement authorities and host country law enforcement agencies, supporting investigations in specific criminal cases, and many other functions. The general objectives of Nordic Police Liaison Officers are to actively seek cooperation with key host country authorities, collect information related to organised crime, and share this information among the Nordic police cooperation participants. Although Nordic Police Liaison Officers support Nordic countries and host country law enforcement authorities in specific criminal cases, they do not carry out operational tasks (Larsson, 2006).

Research on Nordic police cooperation is generally described in academic literature as a successful example of cross-border police cooperation. Success in this context refers to the effective cooperation between agencies and officers from different Nordic countries, with minimal obstacles. Particularly effective cooperation is noted in the fields of anti-

smuggling and anti-trafficking operations. A key feature of Nordic police cooperation is the deployment of joint Police Liaison Officers in foreign countries (Larsson, 2006; Kleiven, 2013). According to Larsson (2006), Nordic police cooperation can be described as a success:

> A police officer explains: The Nordic police co-operation is so good because we share a common culture, a common understanding of 'what the problems are' a relatively common set of laws and quite similar police organisations (Larsson, 2006, p.460).

Although the Nordic Liaison Officer system is described in academic literature as the best model for the common use of Police Liaison Officers in the EU, problems related to its implementation remain. Challenges exist in establishing better-defined frameworks and in coordinating assigned work tasks (Kleiven, 2013).

Cross-border information sharing is instrumental for police organisations for many reasons, such as solving crimes and cases, identifying criminal trends, and preparing security measures for upcoming events with international participation. This part of the literature review critically analyses law enforcement information-sharing practices and focuses on cross-border EU-established platforms, principles, strategies, and legal foundations. Information is instrumental to police officers in various ways, providing a broader perspective on criminal phenomena and aiding preparation for specific events, such as recognising existing or emerging criminal trends, identifying connections between offences in one or more countries, and pinpointing internationally operating criminal groups. The added value of information sharing at different levels is a recognised discipline within EU police forces, maximising limited resources and supporting both strategic and operational decision-making (Plecas et al., 2011).

Importance of cross-border information sharing

Cross-border information sharing has become an essential aspect of policing in the era of globalisation. Law enforcement agencies have had to develop sophisticated techniques for sharing and accessing information, along with safeguards to ensure constitutionality and the protection of human rights and personal data (Kożuch and Sienkiewicz-Małyjurek, 2015). With the advancement of technology, information is now available more quickly and in larger volumes, which requires improved processing capabilities, system interoperability, and legal alignment among participating law enforcement agencies across different countries. Furthermore, analytical procedures must be enhanced to transform acquired data into meaningful and digestible knowledge that can be used for strategic and operational decision-making (Sheptycki, 2004). Regarding new

information-sharing technologies, this research focuses on established information platforms and processes developed by the EU to ensure swift information exchange for law enforcement authorities in the context of cross-border criminal activities. The ultimate aim is to strengthen national security across EU Member States. Additionally, this chapter discusses problems and risks associated with information sharing. There are numerous possibilities for institutionalised information sharing between various EU Member States' law enforcement agencies, which are often governed by bilateral agreements and available for use by police institutions.

Information sharing can occur at different levels and for various purposes among law enforcement agencies. This thesis addresses information sharing among law enforcement agencies themselves, as well as by Police Liaison Officers who support their sending police organisations and EU law enforcement agencies. The research is focused on the exchange of publicly available information or information gathered in the course of duties by uniformed police and criminal investigation units, both within and outside the European Union. Intelligence information sharing, regardless of classification, falls outside the scope of this thesis. Information sharing, as understood in this thesis, is not limited to data defined under a universal message format (UMF), such as name, surname, date of birth, and residential address. Rather, it is considered more broadly, encompassing all types of information exchanged between law enforcement agencies at different levels, including: police officer observations during patrols, statistics on criminal trends, analytically derived products identifying cross-border patterns, criminal forecasts, and more.

A comprehensive list of all modern EU or inter-EU Member State police information-sharing implementations lies outside the scope of this thesis. Therefore, this literature review focuses on the most common examples. After the 9/11 attacks, followed by attacks in France, Belgium, the United Kingdom, and Germany, a shift occurred within law enforcement agencies. The need for enhanced information sharing and inter-agency cooperation became a high priority across the EU (United States White House Office, 2007; Plecas et al., 2011; EU Council, 2016c).This section examines information-sharing implementations by the EU considered significant for improving police cooperation and information exchange between centralised EU security institutions and Member State law enforcement institutions, as well as information sharing between two or more Member States. INTERPOL, although founded in 1923, continues to play an important role in information sharing between law enforcement agencies in Europe and was, for a long time, the only official centralised information-sharing platform.

An in-depth research into INTERPOL is undertaken at the end of part two of the literature review. In 1975, twelve European countries created a platform with the aim of fighting Terrorism, Radicalism, Extremism and Violence International in Europe, which was then adopted by the European Council. TREVI was used to share information between Member States' interior ministries and security services to coordinate national counterterrorism actions with cross-border implications. In this regard, TREVI set up secure communication lines, fostered the sharing of intelligence on terrorism, organised mutual training, facilitated the sharing of investigative techniques, and more (Sallavaci, 2018). EUROPOL was developed out of TREVI and was founded in 1995, becoming operational in 1999. A comparison between INTERPOL and EUROPOL as institutionalised information-sharing organisations is conducted at the end of chapter two of the literature review.

Another important EU information-sharing concept is the Prüm Decision, which began as a multilateral treaty between seven EU Member States in 2005 (EU Council, 2012). As agreement among all Member States was not initially possible, Prüm began with the Member States willing to implement the platform. Over time, the advantages of this information-sharing tool led to its adoption by all EU Member States through the EU Commission, with the purpose of enhancing police cooperation within the EU (Hufnagel, 2013a). The EU-wide cooperation tool Prüm has far-reaching potential for Member States to share information and enhance police cooperation, for example: joint patrols at common borders, implementation of fast and efficient data exchange, automated DNA search possibilities using a hit/no-hit system, more direct access to national databases related to terrorism and hooliganism, and more (European Commission, 2021). Another established EU information-sharing platform is EUCARIS, which enables the sharing of information related to stolen vehicles (Hufnagel, 2013b).

A significant implementation following Prüm was the Swedish Framework Decision, which forms the basis for effective and swift exchange of criminal intelligence between EU Member States' law enforcement agencies. The Swedish Framework Decision was adopted by the European Union in 2006 and sets out rules for cross-border information exchange. The main advantage of the Swedish Framework Decision is that, under this tool, information exchange between Member States is treated the same as information exchange at the national level. The Framework Decision also includes rules concerning time limits and standard forms for cross-border information exchange. This regulation is intended to ensure the timely exchange of criminal intelligence information between Member States (EU Comission, 2016).

The Lisbon Treaty, implemented in 2007, can be seen as the overarching legal EU instrument in the context of information sharing. The Lisbon Treaty provides the legal foundation to enable timely and accurate up-to-date data sharing between EU Member States (Sallavaci, 2018). The Lisbon Treaty also prompted a review of the implementation of the Prüm Council Decision and the Swedish Framework Decision by the European Commission, which in 2012 led to the establishment of the European Information Exchange Model (EIXM). EIXM reviewed all implemented information exchange platforms and tools in the EU and recommended concrete steps for improving the efficiency of existing information exchange mechanisms to foster and enhance cross-border police cooperation in the EU (EU Comission, 2016).

Information sharing is a flexible undertaking and can be achieved by law enforcement agencies at different levels, with different rules, procedures, and outcomes. Data exchange at the highest level, for example for strategic purposes, is subject to specific rules and procedures that may differ from those for operational data exchange at the working level between police officers. Although various exchange procedures exist, all data exchanges must comply with existing laws and regulations to ensure the legality of the information. For Police Liaison Officers, it is of utmost importance to know the existing legal regulations regarding information sharing to ensure that every data exchange with host country authorities is based on legal grounds. This section outlines general information-sharing processes necessary to achieve legally based information sharing between entities in different governments.

Three aspects of government procedures in the context of information sharing should be applied, according to Wenjing (2011): separation of power, transparency and protection of private rights, and dispute settlement arrangements. Separation of power should be enforced to prevent single authorities within a system from making independent agreements with other entities to share information. The rationale is that individual agencies cannot determine, outside their scope of responsibility, the legality of sharing data with other entities. Therefore, a separation of power is necessary such that only the government can implement legally binding general information-sharing rules applicable across all government agencies. Binding information sharing regulation must also designate an institution responsible for saddling disputes in context with information sharing (Wenjing, 2011).

Other important considerations in the context of information sharing include the availability, reasonableness, and cost efficiency of information. Requesting information

that is perceived by the receiving entity as unreasonable, or acquiring information at a disproportionate cost, can create friction in an otherwise well-functioning police cooperation framework. On the technical side of information sharing, incompatible Information Technology (IT) systems can create difficulties or, in the worst-case scenario, halt the information-sharing process entirely. Therefore, work must be undertaken to ensure interoperability, enabling IT systems of requesting entities to be compatible with those of receiving entities (Wenjing, 2011). Since many languages are used in the EU, and translation errors or misunderstandings can occur, training opportunities for users of information-sharing platforms must be implemented to avoid such issues. The training should include technical IT training as well as instruction in commonly used languages in information-sharing systems and applications. The use of general terms and phrases, in the form of the Universal Message Format (UMF), should be obligatory to facilitate mutual understanding of the nature of the requested information by all users across different EU Member States (Deloitte, 2015).

Information sharing between law enforcement agencies in Europe to support police units in their daily efforts to combat crime dates back to the mid-19th century. Although initial information sharing was mostly bilateral between two countries, it later developed into multilateral information cooperation among neighbouring and other EU countries. The police in Vienna, for example, produced a bi-weekly Central Police Bulletin containing information on wanted or extradited persons and shared it with thirty-one police departments throughout Europe. Prussia also produced a similar product called Weekly Reports for the Interior and shared the information with other police departments in Europe (Deflem, 2004). To enable information sharing among large groups, such as the European Union, which includes different countries, cultures, and languages, the standardisation of methods, processes, and information classification is required to ensure efficiency. For this reason, the European Union developed a handbook for cross-border cooperation and a manual on Law Enforcement Information Exchange (EU Council, 2016a). Information exchange and security cooperation obstacles of European countries which have left the EU, e.g. United Kingdom through BREXIT, are beyond the scope of this thesis (European Parliamentary Research, 2021; Wilson, 2021; Jaffel, 2025).

According to Sheptycki (2004), information flows are structured hierarchically. Using the Dutch police system as an example, the hierarchy of information levels comprises national information at the top, regional information in the middle, and investigation or operational information at the base. The author further states that two principles apply to such systems. The first principle is that information flows upward in the

pyramid from the investigation level to the national level. The second principle concerns multi-agency information flow, which should ensure the flow of information between or across different information pyramids. Information is not homogeneous, and a distinction must be made regarding the category to which a particular piece of information belongs. Chainey (2010) suggests that information should be categorised according to its origin. Publicly available information, gathered via Open Source Intelligence (OSINT), can, according to the author, be shared freely and is not subject to restrictions. Data requiring authorisation for access, such as information stored in internal databases or data from other national authorities accessible via login credentials, should only be shared with counterparts possessing the same level of authorisation as the sharing agency. Specific case-related information, on the other hand, should only be shared with agencies involved in the particular case.

The European Union has a different approach in the context of information sharing and classification, and there are two main pieces of legislation applicable in this regard. The first is the General Data Protection Regulation, which regulates the sharing of personal data at the national level, within the EU, as well as sharing data outside the EU. The General Data Protection Regulation also includes a classification component, which distinguishes between standard personal data—such as first name, surname, date of birth, passport picture, and so on—that can identify a person, and classified data, referred to as sensitive data, which includes religious belief, sexual orientation, medical records, and so on (EU Council, 2016b).

The second regulation is the European Union Classification of Information (EUCI) legislation, which regulates the classification of information based on the degree of harm that unauthorised publication of information can cause to the EU, its Member States, or EU organisations (Kambourakis et al., 2021). The regulation defines four types of classification, ranging from the lowest level of EU Restricted to EU Confidential, EU Secret, and EU Top Secret. While unauthorised disclosure of EUCI Restricted information can be disadvantageous to the EU, its Member States, or EU organisations, unauthorised disclosure of EUCI Top Secret information can result in exceptionally grave prejudice to the essential interests of the EU, its Member States, or EU organisations. The European Union Classification of Information also regulates the handling and sharing of classified information, as well as the access (EU Council, 2013).

Standardised information exchange processes

To standardise and streamline information exchange in the EU, a manual on law enforcement information exchange was developed and issued to EU Member States. The handbook serves as a tool for police officers working in so-called Single Points of Contact (SPOCs) offices in an EU Member State, which are the contact points for EU entities in the context of information sharing for law enforcement purposes (Kemény and Vít, 2022). The main purpose of this manual is to provide a practical guide to facilitate the day-to-day cooperation of law enforcement agencies at the national or international level, and it also serves as a training tool. The manual consists of practical guidelines on how to share information on a daily basis, tables, checklists, and includes national fact sheets with contact details of relevant counterparts of all EU Member States to enhance overall cross-border information sharing based on better informed decisions (EU Council, 2016a).

Essential for a successful information-sharing process are certain implementations such as SPOCs with adequate staffing, the availability of information, and accessibility across borders for other law enforcement agencies, as well as laws ensuring all information exchange is legitimate. SPOCs in EU Member States are important facilities, whose main function is to generate an overview, receive information requests, and distribute them to responsible units or departments within the law enforcement structure of the EU Member State. SPOCs must also keep records and a track log of information requests to ensure timely responses are sent back to the requestors (EU Council, 2016a).

Bypassing SPOCs in Member States through direct information requests to units or departments of other law enforcement agencies of other EU Member States is possible if personal contacts have been established. However, with this information-sharing method, only small groups of people are aware of a specific information request, and potentially relevant information available in other units may not be included in the response. Additionally, information may be lost or only held in specific units because there is no overarching unit or department to collect and coordinate all requests and responses, which prevents the development of a comprehensive overview of exchanged information. Availability and accessibility of information are important in the sense that law enforcement officers of one EU Member State must be able to access and receive necessary information from another EU Member State in a timely manner to continue work on criminal cases. The Swedish Framework Decision enables such exchanges and ensures that information exchange between different EU Member States' law enforcement agencies is treated equally to information exchange between law enforcement agencies at the national level (EU Comission, 2016).

Important components of an information-sharing strategy are motivation, benefits, and sharing needs, which are very similar to the benefits of a general cooperation strategy. According to Adams, Gill and Fitzgerald (2018), knowledge management within an organisation provides a competitive advantage and improves work performance. Law enforcement agencies should identify areas of knowledge sharing which can lead to improved work performance by individual investigators through the resolution of criminal cases. EU Member States must recognise that active participation in cross-border information exchange can benefit their own national objectives in fighting crime. Information sharing can also be seen as an economic factor, offering advantages to EU Member States by maximising outcomes with limited national resources. Cross-border information sharing can help overcome limitations within a national police force, such as personnel or financial constraints, by providing valuable information that would otherwise be unavailable if law enforcement agencies had to rely solely on national resources. Moreover, what is important in this regard is that information sharing must be a reciprocal process. That is, information sharing is a matter of give and take; it is not enough merely to receive information—EU Member States must also actively contribute to the enlargement of the information pool accessible to all Member States (Adams, Gill and Fitzgerald, 2018).

Additionally, information-sharing strategies must take into account that such sharing intersects with various legal frameworks and has complex legal implications for law enforcement agencies as individual entities and for EU Member States as a whole. This means that the regulations governing both police departments and units, as well as national laws, must comply with EU legal requirements concerning information sharing and be consistent with legal obligations at all levels. In this context, it can be difficult for a Member State to implement processes that satisfy national legal requirements, data protection obligations, and the EU directives requiring sufficient access to national police databases for other EU Member States. Therefore, it must be ensured that all information-sharing processes are thoroughly reviewed and tested against existing national and international law to prevent misuse of individuals or organisations in connection with established information-sharing practices.

Theoretical applications of information sharing

The second part of the literature review is concerned with theoretical applications of information sharing and critically reviews academic literature in the context of bureaucratism, cultural applications in information sharing, the importance of trust in

information-sharing processes, and a comparison of the institutionalised information-sharing platforms INTERPOL and EUROPOL (Ilbiz and Kaunert, 2021). This section of the literature review begins with a focus on European Regional Police Liaison Officer systems based in the north and centre of the European Union. The Regional Police Liaison Systems studied are composed of a variety of countries with different backgrounds and administrative systems. Undoubtedly, similarities will be recognisable in the administrative systems of neighbouring countries in both the north and centre of the EU. However, all bureaucratic systems are based on laws and legal frameworks that are developed for specific reasons, or generally, to address administrative challenges. This means that administrative regulations are not necessarily identical across countries, as they are tailored to address specific national needs. This research is concerned with how the bureaucratic systems of different EU countries establish an information-sharing system using a common Police Liaison Officer.

Bureaucratism

Max Weber devoted large parts of his studies to researching organisational systems, their structures, and procedural behaviours, and compared them with other organisational systems of the times. He wrote several articles and book chapters about his empirical research on administration systems. His preferred research method was to focus on individual systems and their applied culture without creating any specific set of rules to govern his social science. According to Chazel (2010), Weber understood bureaucratism as an important expression of rationalising processes by way of increased escalation of methodical utilisation of rules and processes based on formal rationalising. Weber further thought that this approach to implemented rationalising allowed one to anticipate and predict outcomes of processes. Furthermore, Chazel (2010) states that Weber believed rationality comes with knowledge based on experience, while the knowledge comes from people with diplomas gained through passed studies and exams. During his research on bureaucracy, Weber described the ideal characteristics of bureaucracies and offered in his theory an explanation for the historical emergence of bureaucratic institutions. Weber believed that bureaucratism is technically superior to every other type of organisation if the bureaucratic system is fully developed and implemented in the form of a monocratic bureaucratism. Albrow (1970), in contrast, believes that bureaucratism is purely technically superior and that performance of bureaucratism cannot only be reduced to formal rationalising. According to Chazel (2010), Albrow is incorrect in failing to acknowledge that developing formal rationalisation improves performance in a bureaucratic system. Chazel argued that bureaucrats are highly specialised in specific

fields of a bureaucratic system but do not have the ability to recognise the needs of the population in a broader context. Chazel (2010) believes that, in fact, superiority in administration matters comes with the inability to assume political responsibility. The advantage of bureaucratism is that it is built on knowledge; however, the expansion of this system can lead to overspecialisation.

Weber was not satisfied with examining bureaucratism from a single perspective. He used different variants of perspective for his research, thus giving a holistic insight into bureaucratism which cannot be moulded into one single theory. The work of Weber provides an opportunity to extract pieces of his work into standalone parts which are then complementary to explain bureaucratic processes (Chazel, 2010). The findings of Weber's research on bureaucratism were focused on bureaucratic administrations in Prussia and Russia. According to Peirce (1981), those administration organisations need to be considered special cases because both administration systems gained certain political independence which helped them to achieve a dominant position within their governments. The modern bureaucratic systems of the present are structured differently. Most governments in Europe have a politically elected head of administrative resources, and one of their liabilities is to be the person politically responsible for the administration, meaning that bureaucratism is no longer independent from politics. Peirce (1981) states further that Weber found a close link between higher education and bureaucracy. Achieving a higher education seemed to be a guarantee for bureaucrats to be employed, which would mean an assured income in a pensionable position. During Weber's research, higher education was not equally accessible for all layers of the population. Only a small percentage of the population could afford to send their offspring to universities; thus, a high percentage of the population was not equally represented during this time in public administration.

Modern administration systems try to achieve a balance according to the overall education systems present in the country. For example, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior employs personnel for the Austrian Police based on the result of the Austrian Ministry of the Interior's selection test and not only based on former higher education achieved. The goal of this exercise is to have a cross-section and all levels of the population represented within the Austrian Police (Cox and Kirby, 2018). According to the Ministry, the selection test is based not only on education but also on a physiological fitness test, psychiatric test, sport test, physical examination, and suitability interview (Austrian Ministry of the Interior, 2017). In theory, an applicant could rise, after completing mandatory school education, to the highest ranks within the Austrian Ministry of the Interior. The prerequisite for this would be to pass the offered further education

exams within the system. It is arguable whether or not people with higher education have an advantage in passing the entrance exams, which include physiological fitness tests as well as cognitive abilities and German orthography and grammar tests (Cockcroft and Hallenberg, 2022). Higher education in policing and the influencing factors towards police performance and police culture is beyond the scope of this thesis (Hallenberg and Cockcroft, 2017; Turner, 2023).

In this thesis, the term bureaucratic system or administration system is used interchangeably. Furthermore, in this thesis, the word bureaucratic/administration system is used in the sense to describe a system where bureaucrats are employed by the government. The exception may be their respective heads, who are commonly persons who are democratically elected to their jobs. In European terms, this means that leaders of administration systems such as governmental ministries are either elected directly or indirectly and have the political responsibility for the employees of the respective administration that they head. Employees or bureaucrats who work in a hierarchically ordered administration system are employed by the government via a contract which can be terminated only according to terms stipulated in their contract. This fact is seen up to today as a great advantage compared to employee regulations in the free economy.

Public administration employment comes with a certain employment guarantee which can last until their retirement. History shows that there is a constant flux in human society influenced by various factors. Changes can appear on macro or micro levels and result in smaller or larger transformations of society, depending on the impact of influence (Khaw, Qing and Ishak, 2022). Changes in human society can be influenced, among others, by urbanisation, natural factors, technological changes, shifts of power and many more. The same applies for governing institutions with the task of pursuing administrative duties of public affairs. This section of the literature review is concerned with the development of public administration in the context of policing society in Europe.

Over time, and influenced by different factors, public administration developed a civilian servant culture handling public administration. Max Weber, a German socialist, was the first who used and described the term bureaucracy at the end of the 19th century. He believed that bureaucracy is the most efficient system as opposed to those established traditional structures at the time to administer organisations (Mulder, 2017). The German socialist based his statement on his research analysing Prussia’s and Russia’s administration systems. Weber also showed interest in monocratic systems like the USA. Furthermore, he compared the existing Prussian administration system with ancient social

administrative systems of the Roman Empire and the Ptolemaic dynasty to contrast differences between existing European societies at the time with societies from the past to draw his conclusions (Beetham, 1985).

Efficiency of bureaucratic systems

Max Weber stated that bureaucracy has to follow certain rules in order to develop a technically efficient instrument for administration systems. He saw the administration of large companies as such a technical instrument performed in a machine-like handling of processes. According to him, the superiority of these systems was based on the use of experts specially educated and placed according to their strengths in the systems (Beetham, 1985). Bureaucracy was defined by Max Weber as:

> […] an organisational structure that is characterised by many rules, standardised processes, procedures and requirements, number of desks, meticulous division of labour and responsibility, clear hierarchies and professional, almost impersonal interactions between employees (Mulder, 2017, p.1).

He believed that with implementing these rules and strict adherence to these regulations every administration system could be an efficient instrument to handle administration processes in large companies. Another prerequisite he found essential for effective administration systems was the freedom to be able to implement necessary goals without influence from outside the system. Max Weber believed that bureaucracy needed to have a status of its own in society, uninfluenced by political power (Beetham, 1985). Based on his findings, Weber stated that bureaucracy is the most efficient means for administration systems within private companies as well as governmental administration (Chazel, 2010).

Although Max Weber created the definition of bureaucracy at the end of the 19th century, many of his defined regulations are still valid in the present. However, with the change of society over the last century, public administration changed and evolved as well to serve the purpose of administrating public needs. Nowadays, bureaucratism is construed as negative and thought of in conjunction with lengthy processes, indecisive employees, antiquated process management, and impersonal treatment (Finer, 1945; Danet and Hartman, 1972). Some of the complaints might result from the implementation of the bureaucratic theory. Protracted processes may occur when there is a need to divide tasks into simple routine categories on the basis of competencies and functional specialisations. Indecisive employees might result when an employee is confronted with decisions which are not exactly in their job area of expertise. The appearance of impersonal officers was one of the very rules Max Weber suggested in order to keep distance between employees,

avoid nepotism, and give the administrative systems the possibility to arrive at decisions solely on the basis of rational rather than personal factors. Modern administration systems want to appear as service-orientated organisations for their customers (Beetham, 1985; Chazel, 2010). Additionally, more responsibilities and fast-changing challenges within and outside the system demand a revaluation of the entire bureaucratic system. In this light, well-established administration systems need to be reviewed, changed, and upgraded to meet new challenges in the context of their administrative tasks ahead (Finer, 1945; Danet and Hartman, 1972).

Human beings are influenced by a multitude of factors, e.g. cultural background, their own will, ideas and imagination, job satisfaction and many more, which impact on their motivation in general as well as on their choice of decisions for their further life, such as the choice of education or career, working in a private company or in a bureaucratic system (Demirkol, 2021). Choosing to start a bureaucratic career can have different motivational reasons, but it is based on individual personal decisions and can differ from individual to individual. There exist many models trying to find common bases for researching motivational reasons, measuring efficiency in bureaucratic systems, or becoming a bureaucrat. Researching all academically available models in this context is beyond the scope of this thesis. Downs (1967), for example, states in his work *Inside Bureaucracy* that, in his model, he identified five different categories of bureaucrats with various different ambitions in relation to achieving administrative goals. According to the author, all five types differ in how they perform, and they differ as well in regard to their motivation to perform and in the way they approach their workload (Riska and Arninda, 2025). According to Downs (1967), bureaucrats can be divided into climbers, conservers, zealots, advocates, and statesmen. It can be argued that the Downs' categorisations lack testability and empirical prediction. Furthermore, critics argue that Downs' defined motivation in his categories cannot be associated with particular behaviour (Crecine, 1969; Peirce, 1981).

Niskanen (1971), in contract, has a different approach and is not concerned with behaviour within the administration setting. His work focuses on heads of departments and their interests within the administration. The author states that the main interests of heads of agencies are to maximise their own advantage. Niskanen (1971) states further that success depends on impact factors like salary, perquisites of office, public reputation, power, patronage, and output of the bureau. Peirce (1981) argues that testing this model would be hard if all mentioned impact factors are independent. Contrary to these concerns is the argument from Niskanen (1971) that, with the exception of the impact factors of

patronage and output of the bureau, all other impact factors are positively related to the total budget of the bureau. Niskanen (1971) argued that, as bureaucrats have limited information and other restrictions, they will become experts in a very narrow field and this will lead eventually to advocating resources in the public interest. The author also believes that his argument makes it easy to test and prove whether bureaucrats are budget maximisers or not. Not taken into consideration in Niskanen's model are the conserver type who do nothing. Also, there is no consideration of a space in the model for the impact of public interest in this context (Peirce, 1981). Both measuring models provide examples of merits and shortcomings in bureaucratic theories on the one hand and, on the other hand, demonstrate the complexity of the topic. Being aware of the circumstance that diverse models are often developed in the same country, such as the USA, could mean that these models are obsolete in different environmental settings and therefore might not be applicable under disparate and diverse cultural circumstances.

In the private sector, for example, reasons are based on economic factors to measure the efficiency of a company. It is important for a company based on economic principles to be prepared for competition in the open market. Results garnered using measuring tools can be applied to adjust and fine-tune processes to be more competitive with other companies. Control tools are used to ensure that everyone involved in the production and distribution process is mainstreaming toward the proclaimed goal, which is to increase profit (Peirce, 1981). In the public sector, bureaucratic systems also require measuring tools to be in place, though for different reasons than the private economy. Bureaucratic systems are not based solely on economic principles. Public administration is based on implemented legislation but also cannot completely ignore the cost-benefit side of administration. Public administration has responsibility towards public society to utilise resources in an economical and efficient way. Problems accompanied with output measuring tools in public administration can vary depending on the administration system. Failing to implement output measuring tools can be dysfunctional in achieving legislative goals. Putting measuring tools in place can lead to an imbalance of measured activities against unmeasured activities, which then can lead to measured costs or benefits outweighing unmeasured costs or benefits. According to Peirce (1981), it is important in this regard that measuring tools are carefully distributed within the administrative systems to ensure that all important aspects of the administration system are covered.

Failing to implement measuring and controlling tools, and their outcomes, varies between the private sector and public administration. In the private sector, it can lead to bankruptcy and termination of a company, which could mean that employees lose their

jobs, or the company moves to another country to save production costs, and so on. In a bureaucratic system, missing output measuring tools can have a wide spectrum of consequences. In the administrative section, an inefficient or badly set-up system could remain undiscovered for a long time. To avoid badly set-up bureaucratic systems, there is a need for bureaucratic systems that, apart from administrative restructuring, launch inquiries if complaints arise about administrative processes. Furthermore, decisions or decision-makers require that processes look into working outputs, process handling, efficiency of achieved workload, or the foundation of complaints (Huang et al., 2022). Using measuring and controlling tools allows adjustments to be made as soon as benchmarks or work goals set in a control mechanism are not reached. A fine-tuned administrative measuring and control system is able to detect output flaws and irregularities in time and give responsible persons time to react and respectively correct system malfunctions. The latter administrative control system is preferable over an administrative system which is based purely on complaints about administrative outputs (Peirce, 1981).

One problem in bureaucratic systems is to measure output – what checks and balances have to be in place to confirm that a system is successfully implemented, and even if a system is successfully implemented, how can the efficiency or the inefficiency of a system be graded. Peirce (1981) states in this context that this is a particularly difficult topic and that the efficiency coefficient could be measured if the system divides procedures into many smaller intermediate outputs. The author also states that measuring many intermediate outputs is rarely done in bureaucratic systems (Peirce, 1981). The same problem applies to regional Police Liaison Officer information sharing systems. Measuring the success of established Police Liaison Officers depends on many various factors. Counting case files could be one approach but this does not take into consideration the complexity of cases. Some cases only require the Police Liaison Officer to pick up the phone and call their counterparts of the host nation to resolve a case. Other cases might be much more complex with an intensive workload involved, meetings, organising of additional information either from other sources or from sending authorities, consulting of experts, and so on. Police Liaison Officers often attend official events and gather information which can be useful for their home country authorities. This does not necessarily involve a case as a starting point (Nadelmann, 1993). Other countries send Liaison Officers to foreign countries for political reasons to keep connections with authorities of the host country. For example, Russia was sanctioned by the EU because of the Ukrainian crisis and bilateral meetings are suspended for the time being (EU

Commission, 2019). Depending on the interests of a sending country, Police Liaison Officers may return to sending states or they may remain in the host country for the time being to keep open a channel of communication with the host country. Taking into consideration that sanctions are mostly returned from the concerned country, the conclusion could be that there is only very little or no cooperation between involved parties during the time of sanctions. During this time, measuring the effectiveness or profitability of the destination is particularly difficult. According to efficiency measuring methods, the conclusion might lead to a termination of the Police Liaison Officer post in such cases because very little is achieved under these circumstances. Therefore, efficiency measuring tools cannot be the sole instrument to judge the value of a Police Liaison Officer post abroad; there also needs to be consideration of other circumstances and interests of the sending authorities, such as political, strategic, or general support for the host country.

It can be concluded that the number of case files resolved cannot be the sole measuring tool, and other factors have to be taken into consideration when it comes to measuring the success of Police Liaison Officers working abroad. The Austrian Ministry of the Interior, for example, sends out a biannual questionnaire to all departments within the Ministry. This questionnaire gathers information on the variety of contacts with the Police Liaison Officer, including phone contact regarding specific cases or requested information, setting up meetings in the host country with counterparts of the department, or receiving a briefing in context with a specific host country-related topic, and so on. This method can provide an overview, in addition to resolved cases, about the satisfaction with a Liaison Officer in the sending country and can be used as a tool to measure success (Neumueller, 2015). Part of the thesis is to examine both regional PLO systems in regard to established evaluation mechanism of PLO destinations, which in further consequence are compared, and merits and limitations are analysed.

Motivation of governmental employees

Teodoro (2011) states, in regard to the motivation of bureaucratic employees, that these phenomena depend on various different factors like physiology, economic opportunity, employees' ambition, and risk appetite, and these factors differ from system to system. The author states further that innovation arises from bureaucracy if the possibility is given within the system for a career combined with motivation. Innovation can go both ways, and it is not automatically linked to progress. Teodoro (2011) argues that if changes appear in the USA administration, it will be on a mezzo level independent of the bureaucratic system, which could be at the federal, state, or local level. He further

places the mezzo level directly below elected officials, and he believes that people in this position are able to contribute to changes in the bureaucratic system. According to Teodoro (2011), the blurriness of administrative involvement in politics and policymaking can be dangerous to democratic fundamental principles.

Motivation and Efficiency

Peirce (1981) states in this regard that governmental actions require a political decision and an implementation achieved by bureaucrats to be efficient. If administration is set up in this way, then politicians have the freedom to react to needs and changes as they see fit with the relative security that their ideas are implemented by a professional administration apparatus. Police Liaison Officers are working in a foreign country, placed abroad by their sending authorities, and they have to adapt their work circumstances to the host country's requirements, including time differences, different or changing security situations in the host country, changing political situations, differences in police organisational structures, and so on. The research of this thesis is concerned with the question of how Regional Police Liaison Officer Systems motivate their employees who are stationed abroad. What mechanisms are applied in the system to keep Police Liaison Officers motivated, who work most of the time unsupervised, far away and separated from the usual infrastructure of the sending authority?

Organisations follow an established pattern in the sense of streamlined thinking, feeling, and reacting in the same way, and these patterns can be described as organisational culture (Hofstede, 1983). Organisational culture is the way an organisation responds to problems and opportunities (Kregel, Distel and Coners, 2021). It is believed that organisational culture can shape aspects of the performance of an organisation (Westrum, 2004). Parker (2000) states that organisational culture acts as a binding element among employees of an organisation, with shared values and strong adherence to core principles. The author states further that organisational culture in the public sector is important to achieving strategic objectives. Westrum (2004), who researched leadership in a medical unit, states further that there exist three dominant forms of organisational culture: the pathological, the bureaucratic, and the generative culture form.

Organisational culture

Pathological culture appears when the focus is on personal needs; if the focus is on departmental needs, then a bureaucratic style arises; and if the focus is based on mission goals, a generative culture will develop. Organisational culture can apply to an organisation as a whole or only to parts of it. According to Westrum (2004), the type of organisational culture is shaped by the heads of the unit and their ideas, personal interests,

and motivation to lead the unit. Employees then acknowledge the given direction from the heads and create the respective organisational culture. Putnam (1993) researched Italian regional governments and discovered that there are some great differences in organisational culture when it comes to patterns where actions have to be applied. The biggest difference discovered was when the author compared the regional government from the north with the south region of Italy.

Another result of his research was the discovery that, in Italy, the applied organisational culture influences the thought process as well as emotions and actions of bureaucrats. It is important in this context to bear in mind that there are various different cultural forms existing in organisations and that cooperation with different organisations, especially with organisations based abroad in a different cultural and political setting, can create difficulties and requires sensitive cultural empathy from the involved bureaucrats. Organisations differ from each other, and the two Regional Police Liaison Officer systems are made up of government employees from five different countries in the north and three different countries in the south of the EU, with the task to cooperate with employees from organisations in foreign countries abroad. This research is concerned with the question of whether or not there exist different organisational cultures of participating Member States within the Regional Police Liaison Officer system. Another question in this context is about the organisational culture of Regional Police Liaison Officer systems: whether or not one or more participating countries dominate the organisational culture, or the organisational culture is a compromise of all participating Member States' cultures.

Bureaucratism in context with Police Liaison Officer structures cannot be researched in isolation and must be connected with globalisation appearances because of the nature of PLO tasks, which is cross-border information sharing involving two or more countries. The term 'globalisation' is, according to Kettl (2000), poorly defined, and globalisation has different meanings depending on which context the word is used e.g. cultural globalisation, technical globalisation and many other globalisation areas are known. Globalisation in this thesis is used in the sense of mobility of personnel. Mobility of people encompasses issues including border crossing of criminals and involves committing crimes in countries other than their home country. Globalisation in this thesis is also seen as enhanced police cooperation between different countries to fight crime in general and organised crime in particular. Another aspect in this regard is that globalisation for this thesis is also seen as the foundation for police units to set up Police Liaison Officers in foreign countries to foster cooperation and exchange of information with the host country.

Governmental organisation and globalisation

Despite the vague definition of globalisation, with the observable general trend moving closer together in various areas of life including political, technological and cultural levels, this movement represents a great challenge to conservatively organised administration structures. During the time of the Cold War, EU police administrations were mostly concerned with problems within their area of responsibilities, which mostly were the country where the administration was implemented or with their immediate neighbouring countries. Since the end of the Cold War and the rise of an expanding EU, people are more mobile and former borders in the form of border controls of people and goods do not exist anymore within the EU. In addition, freedom of movement allows EU citizens to move and work in different EU countries. Another aspect is the EU visa liberalisation which allows citizens of EU neighbouring countries to travel into and around the EU for a certain period of time without applying for a visa. These new globalisation trends represent huge challenges for administration in general but also for police administration in particular. Well-established police administration systems are suddenly facing more complex problems in terms of cooperation with non-domestic entities in the sharing and exchange of information, preparedness for compatibility with outside administration systems, adapting to mainstream administration and many more. Besides technical challenges, there are also challenges in regard to rights of subjects appearing in a different setting with globalisation, involving rights of foreign citizens e.g. right of residence, right to vote, right of primary care.

These are only a few examples of a multitude of challenges for administrative governmental organisations in context with globalisation. The biggest challenges, according to Kettl (2000), that administration is facing in the 21st century, are globalisation and devolution. The need to adapt and the need to react to customers' needs in the sense of designing public programmes and implementing them efficiently is the purpose of administrations. The challenge is, in a globalised environment with noticeably devolving policy intentions, for administrations to succeed. The new challenges require that administrations elaborate different strategies as well as plan for efficient capacity to succeed in their intentions. Another point in this regard is that political will and vision of efficient administration programmes sometimes collide with well-established traditional structured and staffed organisations. In this regard, political requirements sometimes require restructuring of administration first to be able to fulfil the demands (Kettl, 2000). Not only staffing structures can create obstacles in this regard but also staff itself, including staff motivation issues, willingness to change, or non-willingness, power shifts

within the administration and many more other factors, can be an obstacle for administration to successfully master 21st-century challenges (Geng, Li and others, 2022).

Cultural implications in context with information sharing

Regional PLOs are often based in foreign countries or other parts of the world in a cultural setting which is foreign to PLOs and such cultural differences can influence the work of a PLO. This section of the literature review is critically analysing cultural implications in connection with the work of a PLO. In the Western world, culture means civilisation or refinement of the mind. In a narrow sense, culture's meaning is limited to education, art and literature. However, culture in a broader sense can also be seen as a shaping of a person's mind. The broader sense of culture means also that culture is a collective phenomenon which is at least shared partly among a group of people who live or lived and grew up together.

Culture in this context forms learned patterns of unwritten rules and social behaviour relevant to the social environment of a group of people as they grow into adulthood (Hofstede, 2010). The author of this thesis could not find a single unified definition of culture in the academic literature. Hofstede (1983) defines culture as one group of people's values and behaviours based on their social embossing since childhood to distinguish them from others. Another idea of how to define culture academically is that culture means, among other values, the sharing of beliefs among a specific group of people. Furthermore, culture is based on common beliefs about what is and is not acceptable conduct within that group. In this context, culture is about values of a certain group as well as how members of a specific set behave in a certain situation. Additionally, culture is about expectations that people of a certain group with the same cultural background will behave similarly in specific situations or relationships (Deal and Prince, 2003).

Fandrejewska (2018) takes a different approach and states that culture is the collective achievement of a social group in different fields on a metaphysical, symbolic, material and non-material level. Those achievements influence ideas about values and decision-making as well as the way this specific social group perceives reality. The author states further that these achievements are also the basis for behaviour patterns. The essence of culture is the social group's traditional ideas and related patterns and values which have been developed and learned over time and are not biologically conditioned or inherited. A similar definition is provided by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) in that culture is the basis of behaviour and communication, as well as that culture is influential in decision-making and actions undertaken in certain circumstances for a specific social

group. Culture can be seen as the invisible driving force of people to make certain decisions, behave in certain ways, and have specific values. Culture defines existing specific characteristics lived within a social group and therefore patterns are recognisable and predictable (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997).

Hofstede (2010) states that there is a difference between nations and societies and also between nations and societies' cultural backgrounds. According to the author, societies are historically and organically developed forms of organisations which are not necessarily exclusively located within one nation. Historically formed societies are not bound to geographical national borders, which were initially invented in the mid-twentieth century. Other differences in countries' cultures on various levels are built on different experiences of a country, practical reasons due to geographical realities or historical growth. Cultural differences can be manifested in different administrative institutions based on rules and laws, as well as many aspects of those rules and laws which must be regulated in different countries. Hofstede (2010) states in this aspect that national rules and laws should regulate the general spirit of a nation and that implies that administrative organisations can differ from country to country.

According to Hofstede (2010), a trend can be observed where nations have a strong force towards integration, for example, nations using usually one common main language, having national mass media, education systems, army, sports representations, political system and the use of the same national symbols to represent themselves at different events. A national culture therefore presents a summary of shared values of many individual societies within one nation but does not make allowances for all the disparate societal aspects present in a nation. However, there is still a tendency recognisable within nations that societies try to have their own identity recognised in the areas of linguistic rights, religion or ethnicity. Examples for those societies are Chechens in Russia, Basques in Spain, Kurds in Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey, and many more (Hofstede, 2010). Another example in this context is France as a member of the European Union. According to Simons (2011), France sees itself as distinct in culture and language and wants to maintain these distinctions while being a member of the EU. According to the author, the French government has identified approximately 120,000 English words which are not allowed to be used in an official government document. This is in order to preserve the French language.

A more pragmatic approach to culture is taken by Luthz and Sevgi (2002) in their book about cultural differences, in that the authors define country culture as that which is

the prevalent culture within the geographical borders of a country. The authors deliberately neglect the appearance of regional as well as socially definable subcultures within a country, including youth culture, employment culture and others. In general, it can be assumed that people in a geographical area tend to have the same basic cultural values. However, geographical unity is not a guarantor for like-minded culture. Within a geographic region there can be plenty of cultural subcultures in regions, towns or districts. Other subcultures in the same geographical region can be based on social classes, religion, generation or gender. Even if there are many expressions of subcultures, the general overarching national culture will be recognisable (Hopkins, 2016). Hofstede (1983) confirms the regional theory in the way he states that individuals from a specific region generally share the same values.

A single country does not necessarily have the same culture because the geographic borders can differ from social culture regions, and therefore values can differ. Nations at present are built from different societies which are not equally represented in a nation, and a national culture therefore represents only the dominant societies in a nation. Cultural aspects of minorities are not at all, or only in a very limited way, present in such a national culture. For practical reasons, data collected in this thesis in regard to cultures in the researched nations does not take into consideration the variations of societies present in those countries.

An observed fact is that the culture of countries is not interchangeable as such, and history shows that it is not possible to exchange the culture of one country with the culture of another. Recent history has shown that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, countries that became independent overnight could not immediately change to a Western democratic style. Although many countries of the former Soviet Union, especially those countries based within Europe, received help from well-established democratic EU countries, to change from one system to another not only takes time, but the achievement of transformation depends also on various other factors like the economic situation, mindset of the population of the transformed country, and many more (Hofstede, 2010).

To change a cultural approach of a nation takes time, and the nation goes through a process of learning and adapting to new situations (Modise, 2025b). Changing of culture can also mean changes of political situations, which then changes the lives of people of a nation. During the Soviet Union, education was free, and children went to kindergarten and school and had full-time care. Young kids of former Soviet countries had lessons in music and art, and these subjects were part of the educational system at the time. After the

collapse of the Soviet Union, parents have to pay for their children to receive full-time care or extra-curriculum education, which in turn costs money, which might or might not be available in every family. System changes do not always imply that a situation is changing to a better one, and therefore there can be reluctance among the people in a nation, and processes can be delayed or sabotaged and never be implemented.

Culture itself cannot be seen as a constant in time; it is rather dynamic and changing. Culture is influenced by many discrete factors, and it develops in different regions with different speeds. Factors which can influence cultures in a region can be political pressure, for example the opening of new economic markets in a region e.g. China's economic market opening to the West, or rapid growth of a market in a region. Other cultural influences can be change of the social environment e.g. education is opened to a broader public in a region, or climate change e.g. forced change of agricultural habits due to climate change, or increased unemployment with mass migrations (Hopkins, 2016). Cultures have in common that each culture in general has its own rules which its members follow. Hall (1990) states in this context that influencing factors in every culture are its own rules and internal dynamics in regard to principles, laws written or unwritten, time, and also unique space.

Every individual is shaped by its environment and brought up in different ways. Under this influence, patterns of thinking, feeling and potential acting are developed. Influential in this regard is the family in which a person grows up, neighbourhood, school and youth groups the person has contact with. The individual establishes a certain cultural feeling, which happens in their young years. To change the learned way of cultural thinking in childhood, the individual must first unlearn established patterns to be able to learn different cultural patterns. Because the first shaping of cultural impressions is made in the childhood of an individual, and therefore strongly anchored in the consciousness, it is difficult to unlearn these patterns and learn new ones (Hofstede, 2010). The author states further that a person's behaviour is only partially predetermined and that every individual has the possibility to deviate from learned patterns at any given time. Adapted ways of thinking and acting can manifest in distinct forms like creative reaction, establishing completely new behaviour patterns, which can be constructive or destructive, creativity, as well as unexpected behaviour patterns. Hopkins (2016) argues that culture is constituted of at least three factors, which are surface behaviour, values and perception. The author argues that surface behaviour, among others, contains exchange of greetings, attitude towards punctuality and expressions of emotions. Hopkins believes that most acculturation training is given in this field and that delivered training helps to avoid or reduce social faux

pas. Cultural values, in a simplified way, represent the mindset about what is good, what is bad, and what is important.

Cultural perception, on the other hand, represents how individuals belonging to a specific cultural group see the world with their eyes. Individuals use selective seeing, which is processed by the brain and influenced by values, in other words, what is important for the individual. Hopkins (2016) states that perception is the most important level of the factors because it supports values and surface behaviour in one. A human's cultural shaping can, in a simplified way, be compared with the composition of an onion. Every layer of an onion represents a level of cultural behaviour learned during the lifespan of an individual. Important in this context is that the core of the onion represents values learned in childhood, shaped by parents and the social environment. This specific cultural shaping is hard to change, as it takes a long time to replace these layers with new ones. Core values include the national, gender, and in some cultural circles, the religious layer. The outer layer of an onion, which is acquired later in life, represents learned practices, which are also the visible part of culture. Those layers can be changed faster and more easily than layers of the inner onion e.g. organisational layer (Hofstede, 2010). Studies of the different societies of participating regional EU Police Liaison Officer countries, as well as the study of different societies of the host countries where EU regional Police Liaison Officers are stationed, is outside the scope of this thesis. Furthermore, the participating countries in the Nordic Police Liaison Officer organisation are grouped for this thesis as an EU-specific region and compared to the participating countries of the Benelux Police Liaison Officer organisation, which are also grouped as an EU distinct specific region.

Cultural appearances, associated problems

The next section of this literature review examines different cultural appearances, associated problems, and perceptions of cultural differences and possibilities to approach them. The meaning of an event and the context of an event have different values in different cultures. Information provided about the content of an event to support its meaningfulness is handled differently in different cultures. Japanese, Arabs, and Mediterranean people, who have a high information exchange as well as a close relationship with their family, friends, and colleagues, are culturally labelled as high-context cultures (Broeder, 2021). High-context cultures do not need in-depth information for daily life interactions, nor do they expect such information because they keep themselves informed (Hall, 1990). Americans, Germans, Swiss, and Scandinavians or Northern European countries, on the other hand, have a different cultural approach. Individuals from those countries seal themselves off from personal relationships, work, and

many aspects of day-to-day life, and this cultural approach is labelled as low-context culture (Burmann et al., 2022). Low-context individuals, therefore, need and expect more information for every interaction with others (Hall, 1990). Time and attendance at events also play a different role in high- and low-context cultures. Work-related issues dealt with in low-context cultures are limited to business hours. Time scheduled at certain times of the day, week, months, and years is allocated to specific activities like lunch breaks, spending time with family, off duty, vacation, and celebrating national or religious events. Only in emergency situations, which need special attention, do low-context culture individuals expect duty-related disturbances. In high-context cultures, such a strict separation does not exist, and normal duty-related calls, even if outside of business hours, are common (Hall, 1990). Whereas in high-context cultures important meetings can have a relatively short-notice invitation, the opposite applies to low-context cultures.

In high-context cultures, people expect to participate in an important meeting and deprioritise all other activities. Alternatively, in a low-context culture, individuals tend to plan their meetings in advance with little leeway to shift meetings and commitments. Low-context culture individuals will announce the names of participants at an event after the content of the event and relevant information is given, in order to send the most fitting person for this topic. Expectations of high-context culture individuals for an important event include the participation of certain prestigious individuals, not necessarily experts in this field, to endow the group and its activities with authority and status (Hall, 1990). Hennart and Zeng (2002) state in this regard that perspectives of attendance in a meeting of low- and high-cultural people can differ. Another example is the appreciation and valuing of a lunch meeting. On the one hand, an invitation to a lunch meeting with limited time to talk and interact with the invited person, offered by a low-cultural person, is common among people with the same cultural background. On the other hand, such an event could be seen by a high-cultural person as a lack of interest. Another example is personal space, materialised as an invisible bubble which expands or contracts depending on the surrounding context and situation, for example, the relations of people nearby, the individual’s emotional state, the activity being performed, and many others. Penetrating personal space or mobile territory in general is only allowed for a few people and only for a limited time.

Changes of personal space due to external circumstances, like crowded public transport, crowded lifts, or places in general with a crowd of people and limited space, can make people feel uncomfortable or even aggressive (Hall, 1990). Another difference in this regard between high- and low-context cultural individuals is personal space in the form of

territory, which differs in size between the two cultures. Members of the low-context culture have a relatively big personal space requirement and keep distance from other individuals, which includes the prohibition of touching others. Members of high-context cultures, on the other hand, have smaller personal space bubbles and keep less distance between themselves (Hall, 1990; Fandrejewska, 2018). Although the rules of high- and low-context cultures apply in general, there are many nuances of cultural differences embedded in both groups that must always be considered in the context. In general, high-context culture individuals are well informed and only require a minimum of background information to be able to make a decision. Low-context people are not well informed outside their expertise and therefore require more background information for decisions. If high-context people are given too much information they already know, they can become bored and impatient because of repetition. If low-context individuals are not given appropriate information, they can lose the context or get lost in the subject. If high-context people meet with low-context people, the latter can be intimidated or threatened by standing too close to a person or by entering uninvited into the personal space of the low-context individual. It is important in this regard to know to which general group people from other cultures belong. With this knowledge, mistakes of over- or underfeeding of information can be avoided. People working with those from different cultures need to be aware of existing cultural differences and take those into consideration in their daily work. Such awareness during decision-making processes, respecting participation in important events, as well as being cognisant of not giving the wrong impression of caring or not caring about other individuals in terms of needs or personal boundaries, can increase productivity.

After researching possible differences in culture, the review continues with examining accompanying problems in multicultural environments, which can occur and manifest in many different ways. Depending on the individuals and their specific cultural background, problems can manifest themselves as cultural shock, cultural barriers, and cultural depreciation, among others. Additional indications of problems adapting to cultural changes can be confusion, frustration, anxiety, irritation and miscommunication (Hofstede, 2010). Cultural differences can manifest themselves in unrelated ways. In the world of international industry, where a company is built overseas and therefore in a different cultural area, it can lead to poor performance of the company due to cultural misunderstandings or invisible barriers between management and working-level individuals (Gatignon, 1988). Having to live and work in an environment which is different from the culture an individual is used to, can also be the trigger for ending an

assignment before time. If adaptation to a changed environment is not successful, and the individual feels permanently inharmonious, additional stress is created which can lead to physical illness.

Cultural dissonance

According to Fandrejewska (2018), when individuals from differing cultural backgrounds engage with one another, they may experience what is termed cultural dissonance; a state wherein cultural differences are perceived in ways that distort the observer's sense of reality. This distortion arises from perceptual errors, where observers unconsciously privilege information that aligns with their own cultural norms while disregarding information that does not. As Fandrejewska (2018) explains, it is a common cognitive tendency for individuals to interpret others' behaviours through the lens of their own cultural frameworks; when the observed behaviour deviates from these expectations, errors in perception are likely to occur.

Such distortions can be exacerbated by observation blockades, barriers that limit one's ability to objectively perceive and understand unfamiliar cultural practices, as well as by inherent challenges in interpreting culturally divergent behaviours. Moreover, efforts to simplify or adapt foreign cultural concepts into pre-existing, culturally familiar behavioural patterns often result in the internalisation of inaccurate representations of the other culture. Rather than enhancing intercultural understanding, these strategies tend to intensify miscommunication and generate additional barriers to effective intercultural cooperation (Fandrejewska, 2018)

Almost every individual belongs to different cultural groups and categories at the same time and therefore carries different behaviour patterns that constitute the cultures to which the person adheres. Being part of separate groups simultaneously means that the person has distinct responding mechanisms corresponding to different levels of culture. These levels of culture can include national, gender, generation, social class, organisational culture, and others. Carrying different cultural levels in one person does not mean that these levels are in harmony with each other, e.g.: gender values or social class level can conflict with organisation level; religious level can conflict with generation level, and so on. In this context, it is important to understand that the behaviour of persons with conflicting cultural levels is difficult to predict (Hofstede, 2010). Persons with a distinct cultural background in the day-to-day context are mainly recognised by outer appearances and noticeably different behaviour patterns which shape the impression of the person from a separate culture for an observer. Outer appearances include food the person eats, eating habits, clothes the person wears, general appearance, behaviour during a conversation,

preference for music, and so on. Behaviour patterns and culturally specific dispositions can be deduced from the person's tradition, religion, values, and so on. It is important in this context to realise that cultural dispositions are influencing the behaviour of individuals from other cultures, which allows the observer a certain degree of predictability of actions of the individual in social interaction with no rules, unlike actions during a negotiation process (Luthz and Sevgi, 2002).

Individuals who believe that their culture and views are absolute, with no appreciation of other cultures, tend to develop a negative attitude towards ideas and perspectives of others belonging to different cultural environments. This ethnocentric behaviour can lead to distance from other cultural circles, with isolation and communication problems as well as prejudice, stereotyping, conservatism, and a negative view towards everything which is alien (Fandrejewska, 2018). Cooperation between people with different cultural backgrounds can have complications in terms of working together to solve problems and agreeing on common goals to resolve conflicts (Hofstede, 2010). Hennart and Zeng (2002) argue that people from different countries can have different mother tongues, which can create problems in regard of communication. They argue that verbal communication misunderstandings can manifest themselves either in the form of interpretation or hearing errors. On a personal level, cultural differences can create mental discomfort, with feelings of uncertainty about how to behave appropriately in specific situations, as well as discomfort facing standard situations like meetings which divert from the usual uniform standard experienced situations. Other difficulties are harder to spot because they appear as invisible barriers in the form of values, assumptions, and beliefs. Concepts and behaviour can also create difficulties if a certain mindset is taken for granted, but due to cultural differences those expected patterns are changed and no longer valid (Fandrejewska, 2018).

Hall (1990) believes that the world of communication in context with culture is based on three principles: words, material things, and behaviour. Words are used as the medium for negotiation in business, politics, and diplomacy. Material things primarily represent the status and power of an individual person, and behaviour in this context can be described in general as a feedback mechanism to get information about how other people feel in certain situations. These three principles during a conversation are outside of most people's consciousness and therefore studying these fields can be advantageous in succeeding in negotiations with individuals from other cultures. During communication, not only words spoken during these talks are important, but also cultural communication plays a very important role. Hall (1990) states that during a communication the cultural

communication is more important than the spoken or written word. In this regard, the author believes that the speed of spoken words plays a role in the importance of a message. Also, using the correct speed for the communication to the target audience is crucial for success, meaning that a message spoken at the wrong speed might be understandable for the opponent but might not be received by individuals accustomed to a different speed pattern. Based on a study conducted in 2017 with 153 Polish companies, Fandrejewska (2018) argues that the biggest problems in the context of communication with people of a different cultural circle are poor skills in speaking the language prevalent in the country where the company operates. The second biggest problem was related to difficulties in even understanding the counterparts. Other recognised problems were different management styles and stereotyping. The least problems of all were discovered with interpreting body language and gestures.

Cultural behaviour is up to the observer to interpret, understand, and try to explain based on the observer's own cultural background. Knowing that every individual operates in a cultural comfort zone, behaviour, interactions, and reactions might appear differently, especially if the individual's cultural background differs from the observer's. In this context, it is important to know that cultural appearances might be interpreted differently by people from different cultural backgrounds. Misunderstandings may occur, which can have severe impact on cooperation (Luthz and Sevgi, 2002; Deal and Prince, 2003). In the research of Luthz and Sevgi (2002), regarding cultural differences, the authors state that the focus of observers should primarily pivot on observed differences of foreign nations' cultures compared to their own understanding of culture.

This restriction is further influential in cultural description because a multi-perspective portrayal of cultural differences would be helpful, but according to the authors not feasible because of lack of preconditions of time/space and competence. If members having different cultural backgrounds describe a third culture, the descriptions will always be different from each other and will be influenced by the describer's culture. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that cultural descriptions are limited and mostly influenced from the observer's own cultural perspective (Luthz and Sevgi, 2002).

Cultural intelligence

Cultural intelligence is the craft to adjust to specific cultural changes with the help of identifying, reading, and interpreting cultural differences (Alifuddin, 2022). Cultural intelligence supports the understanding of differences based on cultural backgrounds. It also offers the possibility to adapt to a changed cultural environment, with the result of reducing culturally related problems and helping to circumvent cultural barriers

(Fandrejewska, 2018). Stereotyping of people with different cultural backgrounds to our own is a coping mechanism for human beings to try to understand the complexity of cultural differences by simplifying the differences using a set of ideas easy to understand. In this regard, it can be dangerous if inappropriate stereotyping is applied and facts are neglected, and not taking into consideration that culture changes and culture itself can manifest differently in different regions. With stereotyping, an in-group is created in the mind of human beings encompassing those who have the same cultural background, and an out-group is created for persons with different cultural backgrounds.

This coping mechanism increases the feeling of self-worth and also creates a group which fulfils the purpose of a patsy group (Hopkins, 2016). Elfenbein and Ambady (2003) argue that the recognition of emotions is not learned, rather the capacity to read emotions is based on evolutionary and biological abilities of human beings and is largely universal amongst different cultures. Although in general emotions are universal between different cultures, there exist subtle nuances across cultures which can become a challenge for effective communication between individuals with divergent cultural backgrounds. The authors state further that cultural groups geographically close to each other are capable of reading and interpreting existing nuances, thus have an advantage in avoiding communication misunderstandings. A multicultural environment is a challenge for Police Liaison Officers as well as their backup offices in terms of finding ways to cooperate with counterparts of host countries. Working in a different cultural environment needs a solid understanding of the culture of the host country as well as how to adapt cultural aspects in day-to-day work to be successful in liaising with host counterparts.

Socialists discovered that humans tend to create in-groups, so-called we-groups, and out-groups, so-called they-groups. Human beings have the tendency to classify others into either of these groups. In-groups represent those to which one naturally feels a sense of belonging. Depending on the social background, these in-groups can differ. One of the most common in-groups, for example, is the family group; the out-group, on the other hand, represents in-laws in a family. Other examples of in-groups are groups of soccer fans, members of an organisation or company, or members of the police, and so on (Hofstede, 2010; Charman and Corcoran, 2015). In this context, it is recognised that police, as a social group, developed certain behavioural patterns which are shared within the group of police officers.

Police culture

There is an ongoing debate about police culture in the academic world as to whether police culture exists on its own or whether police culture is only a special form of a subculture of organisational culture (Cockcroft, 2020). To elaborate the difference between organisational culture and police culture is beyond the scope of this thesis. The literature reviewed for this thesis focuses on police culture as a sociological rather than a technical issue Cockcroft (2015), and academic work published in this regard. This research compares the latest studies performed and their outcomes in the context of police culture. Important in this regard is that culture, although a non-tangible concept, can affect behaviour patterns and can have an impact in real life in the form of actions undertaken or attitudes towards individuals who are outside of the cultural circle (Bacon, 2022).

Earlier research publications into police behaviour commenced at the beginning of the 1960s and focused on the police in the United Kingdom and the police in the USA. Only a few of these studies compared behaviour patterns discovered in the two different police systems. Research into police culture at this time was influenced by the labelling theory, which started to become popular, and the focus of these studies was the possibility of police officers to use discretion in interacting with the population they policed (Cockcroft, 2013). Informal police culture is widely understood as the inner world of police behaviour and refers to a specific set of similarities like informal norms, beliefs, and values among police officers, which are used to describe the behaviour of police officers towards people (Loftus, 2008; Ballucci, Gill and Campbell, 2017). Newburn (2008) and Keesman (2023) argue that police culture was seen in earlier classic studies as one singular occurrence or one appearance throughout the police.

Newer studies have shown that police culture is recognised as a phenomenon that is much more diverse and fluctuating, depending on different influencing factors like gender, race, ethnicity, the workplace as well as practices and attitudes, the area of operation within the police, and on rank. “Police culture contribute to occupational stress among police personnel resulting in early onset of physical or psychological ailments (Thakre, Gogoi and Nishar, 2019, p.10)” (Westmarland, 2017). Katabarwa (2024) states in this regard that the existing police culture in the Ugandan Police Force has a positive effect on their Police Officers (Tanjung et al., 2025). Newburn (2008) argues that in regard to police studies, the academic term canteen culture is among the few terms which is accepted and used to describe cultural behaviour among police officers. The term, which refers to cultural behaviour of police officers in the sense of police chat in a group of police officers, does not necessarily reflect the personality and actions that would be taken when the officer is on duty (Charman, 2017).

The influence of police canteen culture as improving factor for Police Officers' mental health support is out of the scope of this thesis (Kealey and Bell, 2021).

The author argues further that using the term is becoming more complicated with changes and diversity in police structures, which come with outsourcing typical police tasks to non-police persons. Therefore, it needs to be made clear to which circle of police personnel the term 'police culture' is applied and what typical function these personnel have within a police organisation (Campeau, 2015). The author supports the research approach that this "paradox can be addressed by expanding 'police culture' to a more generic and theory-driven conceptualisation of 'organisational culture in the police' (Paesen, Maesschalck and Loyens, 2019, pp.824–825)". Police culture in the context of criminological concepts is 'something of an anomaly' (Cockcroft, 2013, p.1). The author states that police culture has become an accepted academic term for problematic policing and police behaviour. Another debate in this regard is whether or not police culture is going through a period of change at this stage, or whether police organisations are resistant to changes or simply ignore them (Cram, 2020; András and Bélai, 2025). Police culture is used to describe a range of static terms of basic principles implemented in police forces that operate in a liberal democratic environment (Cockcroft, 2017). Police culture stereotypically characterises the gap between formal police guiding rules and procedures and informal rules of actual police behaviour patterns (Charman and Corcoran, 2015).

In the classic or traditional research into police culture, the description of police behaviour is associated with negative attributes (Cockcroft, 2013). Police culture can be divided into two components, namely the official police culture and the informal police culture. The official police culture component has an explicit dimension, which is represented by politically correct language of the organisation, mission reports, signed ethical declarations, formal regulations, implemented codes, directives, and well-established prescribed procedures. The informal police culture represents subjects that police members learn during their work, borrowed beliefs of other colleagues, practical procedures, ideas deviating from the norm, and norms established to get police work done, which influence the governing police in real life (Charman and Corcoran, 2015). In organisational culture, as well as in police culture, individuals share the same values and beliefs as well as work-related behavioural patterns. The manifestation of shared values and behaviour patterns is observed through occupational practices (Cockcroft, 2013). The general direction of behaviour patterns is influenced by a multitude of factors, which can be defined as either internally or externally related influences. Internal influential factors

can be the size of an organisation, function, structure, and many more. External influential factors can be national cultures, social environment, and others (Newburn, 2008).

Another theory in this regard is that informal police culture actually combines two cultures within one. On the one hand, police culture has an operational culture and, on the other, it has an oral culture. The operational culture refers to work-related patterns of police officers in real-life day-to-day work in their field of responsibilities. The oral culture refers to police officers describing their work-related actions undertaken and experiences made during their work to other police colleagues. The oral culture can be hyperbolic and does not necessarily correspond to real actions taken (Waddington, 1999). Newer studies recognise the appearance of a multitude of police cultures, variously referred to in this context as street culture, patrol culture, police subculture, headquarters culture, conservatism, canteen culture, and many more (Newburn, 2008; Cockcroft, 2013).

Research discovered that police culture is also influenced by its members working in the police and their societal cultural influence. During research, shared values between the society from which police are recruited and police cultures have been discovered, and this led to the supposition that cultural shaping of police members influences police culture (Cockcroft, 2013). Until recently, researchers did not take into consideration that police organisations consist often of members from different socio-cultural circles. Leading positions in the police are mostly filled by individuals with a higher education than by uniformed officers who work on the street. Therefore, shared values of societies and shared values of police culture may have a gap, as Cockcroft (2013) states. Due to the absence of comparative data to establish the uniqueness of this appearance, conclusions might be the result of researchers' biases.

A research undertaken to investigate the ability to change police culture was done with the Irish police. Charman and Corcoran (2015) state in their findings on the Irish police culture that the acceptance of police culture depends always on the free will of the police officer (Pickett and Nix, 2019). Acting according to deviating police cultural rules depends on different factors like personality, generation, and career trajectory. Another finding was that police culture also differs within the different ranks of police officers, or that police officers with certain specialisations have different police cultural approaches (Kumara, Muhammad Nur and Ida Ayu Putu Sri, 2024). The research also explained a change in context with the phenomenon of the blue wall, which is the term used when police officers keep silent about misconduct within a police force. Also, resistance of police officers against reforms within the police to maintain the status quo was not

confirmed in this research. Furthermore, it was discovered that reforms introduced at operational level were accepted and implemented among Irish police officers of the researched group. The study of the Irish Gardai has shown that police organisations are capable of change and can adapt behaviour according to introduced reforms, evolving into a modern bureaucratic administration system adapted to the needs and necessities of the public. Introduced reforms challenged the behaviour of police officers in terms of pride, integrity, ideals, and shared values, and highlighted the problem of police officers caught between the variance of the law of books and the law of actions.

Until recently, police culture studies were usually described in the singular, based on research outcomes from earlier classic studies which focused primarily on male police officers. Newer studies take changes within police systems into consideration, and the focus shifts away from purely male police officer research to research of police culture of officers with minority backgrounds, different genders, various police ranks, diverse police activities, and many more (Silvestri, 2017; Ingram et al., 2022; Rice, 2024; Todak, 2024). English police changed significantly in recent years on various levels, and therefore research was conducted to explore the recognition of cultural and gender identities in the internal police culture. Many aspects have been researched, including level of rhetoric, gender-balanced career success, ethnic origin and minorities present in forces, and their regulation and implementation in English police forces (Loftus, 2008). The same can be applied to police forces in Western Europe and North America, where an increase in hiring women police officers is recognisable (Cockcroft, 2013). Loftus (2008) discovered in the conducted research that in English police forces, in terms of diversity, overt discrimination, and mainstreaming equality, progress was achieved and a reduction of harassment within the police force was recognised. On the other hand, the author states that the results of the research only partly confirm that established police culture – white, heterosexual, male – has overcome prejudice against colleagues with diverse cultural backgrounds or from minorities. Reiner, as cited in Newburn (2008), comes to a similar conclusion in his research, that police culture in general has sexist behavioural tendencies which articulate themselves in the form of masculinism and machoism among police officers.

Silvestri (2007), who conducted research among senior policewomen in Britain in different police forces, concluded that a shift to hiring more women in police forces added to a change in existing police culture in general. The author concluded further that although there are more women in the police forces, there is only a small police leadership change recognisable. Despite the fact that women’s participation precipitated a change in police culture, the prevailing police systems are still based on masculinist values and are

macho-orientated, even if the author admits that a transformation to smart machoism, where women working in a masculine working environment try to fit in through working hard and taking on all challenges on the one hand, but also try to change and overcome old established leadership structures on the other hand, is recognisable (Silvestri, 2007; Cockcroft, 2013; Cox et al., 2023). Waddington, as cited in Cockcroft (2013), believes that because of the masculine dominance in police forces, policewomen feel pressured to adapt to this style. The author concludes further that for the sake of being accepted, policewomen become over time either fully assimilated into the male-dominated culture or display masculinist values in order to be fully integrated into the police society.

Changing criminal threats force police systems to change and adapt to new cooperation mechanisms. Such changes are not exclusively limited to police systems within a country but also influence the cooperation culture of police systems in a wider perspective (James and Huotari, 2023). With this in mind, the question arises whether or not there exists one singular police culture across borders, or whether there are a multitude of such cultures throughout different countries (Klockars, 1996; Newburn, 2008). With the appearance of globalisation and the opportunities to spread crime over different countries in a short time, police officers from various countries have to work together on a regular basis to fight cross-border crimes. Police culture plays an important role in how police officers recognise and accept police officers from other countries, and police culture is influential in this cooperation. An example of respecting other police cultures is whether police officers exchange information in a swift way without being overly bureaucratic and employing time-consuming processes. Exercising this discretion towards another police entity shows respect for their police culture (Brouwer, van Der Woude and van Der Leun, 2018).

Trust implications in context with information sharing

This section is researching the role of trust in information sharing. As pointed out earlier in the literature review, the first information exchange patterns discovered between police forces were based solely on trust. In the context of information exchange, trust is a fundamental basis and a necessity for successfully achieving goals in this area. The focus of this section is on trust in the context of information sharing, which is mainly related to electronic information exchange but not exclusively. In this context, especially electronic-related data transfer in order to pay for goods or to share information requires trust in internet web-based platforms. Not only trust in technological equipment encourages people to share information; other factors also have to be taken into consideration as well: people who receive information must be trustworthy; received information must be kept secret or

identified to be shared with others; ensuring the integrity of storage of received information; lawful obtained information; obeying international data protection laws , and many more (Richards, 2021c). So-called trustees are charged with taking care of the aforementioned factors in a way which is aligned with the ideas of trustors, whereby trustees can be a single person or an entire organisation (McKnight and Chervany, 1996). Trusting someone or trusting an organisation always includes an active decision to take a risk. The risk manifests itself in relying on another party's action, with a possibility of a positive or negative result. The uncertainty of the outcome forms the risk for the trustor. Important stimuli for trusting someone can have varied motivations, including attitudes, dispositions, emotions, and calculations, and may vary from trustor to trustor (Bachmann, 2011).

The existing literature on trust and measuring trust has yet to produce a comprehensive and universally accepted definition of the concept, nor a set of implications that are valid across all research fields (Aboueid, Emsden and others, 2023). As McKnight and Chervany (1996) observe, the definition of trust and the factors examined within trust research are highly context-dependent, varying significantly according to the particular domain of inquiry. Similarly, Rousseau et al. (1998) emphasise that while trust is widely recognised as a critical component of cooperation, a universally endorsed definition remains elusive.

Further complicating the field, Lyon, Möllering and Saunders (2016) argue that trust and distrust should not be conceptualised as mere opposites along a single continuum. Rather, they are distinct constructs that can exist independently of one another. Trust itself may manifest as a multifaceted phenomenon or in the form of multiple concurrent types, depending on the nature of trust judgements and the manner in which trust-relevant information is processed – whether through rational analysis or intuitive assessment. McKnight and Chervany (1996) also highlight the variability in trust definitions, noting that trust can be conceptualised either as an individual personal trait or as a structural feature of social systems.

Trust a multidimensional construct

Trust, as a multidimensional construct, can be perceived differently depending on the researcher, the area, and in which context the trust is being researched. According to Rousseau et al. (1998), research in economics tends to examine trust in terms of calculative or institutional appearance, whereas research in psychology focuses on the attributes of trustors and trustees, particularly the host's internal cognitions. Sociological research, in comparison, tends to focus trust research on social interactions in relationships among

people and institutions (Rousseau et al., 1998). Gil-Garcia et al. (2010) state in their research about government cross-country information sharing initiatives that trust is based on interpersonal relations. Cultural differences and how different cultures deal with trust is another factor which should be taken into consideration when researching trust. Bibb and Kourdi (2004) argue that trust is perceived differently depending on the cultural background of engaged parties.

According to Halpern (2001), as quoted in Bibb and Kourdi (2004), in Scandinavian culture, people tend to trust each other more than people in continental Europe. Detailed research into cultural differences in relation to trust is beyond the scope of this thesis. Research has shown that there are also various levels of trust, and trust can be built on the micro level if one person trusts another person and vice versa. On the macro level, trust of organisations is established either between a person and an organisation or between organisations themselves. The conclusion that trust is automatically augmented to the organisation of a trustee or where a trustee is working is not valid and cannot be made in this context. Also, trust within an organisation between different individuals and/or between different departments represents another level in the trust construct (Bachmann, 2011).

In response to ongoing socioeconomic changes, organisations are increasingly required to adapt to emerging trends and evolving organisational dynamics in order to maintain competitiveness and ensure long-term survival. Traditional management practices, based on hierarchical command-and-control models, are becoming increasingly unsustainable in the face of these new organisational forms. As Tyler Tom (2003) notes, organisations must move beyond the conventional reliance on surveillance, incentives, and sanctions to direct employee activities, and instead develop new modes of internal cooperation that reflect the changing nature of work and organisational membership.

During the course of the research for this section, the concept of institutional trust was identified as an important theme in the literature on trust within organisations (James, 2018). Institutional trust refers to the trust placed not in individual organisations or actors, but in broader institutional structures, such as the judiciary or law enforcement agencies (Bachmann, 2011). In this context, trust is vested in the overarching institutional arrangements designed to uphold societal norms and laws, rather than in specific entities operating within these institutions, such as a particular police station or court. Although institutional trust represents a significant dimension of trust research, a detailed exploration of this concept lies beyond the scope of the present thesis.

Although research in trust has not succeeded in finding a universal definition, there are some generally accepted concepts in regard to trust throughout the literature. Tyler Tom (2003) states that trust and risk are closely related. They argue that at least one of the actors must be willing to take risks, e.g.: the risk of being disappointed because the output does not match the expectations, or that the trustee does not fulfil their end of the bargain. Another common understanding in trust research is that trust and cooperation are closely and positively related. On a micro level, trustworthiness describes the probability that the trustee is capable of or will perform an action which is beneficial, or at least not harmful, to the party who takes the risk to give trust, and this probability then can inspire cooperation (Tyler Tom, 2003). In the context of trust within organisations, the author states that trusting is connected to a positive disposition according to social orders within organisations.

Trusting someone or something does not mean that trust is given for everything automatically. There are variations of trust, as well as different trust levels. If a person or organisation is trusted in a specific area, that does not mean that the person or organisation is automatically trusted also in other areas (Schoorman, Mayer and Davis, 2007). Lyon, Möllering and Saunders (2016) state in this context that trust seeks confirmation from relationship evidence, which in turn influences the trust level according to positive or negative evidence for future trust interactions. Motive-based trust occurs, according to Tyler Tom (2003), especially in situations where rational forms of trust are not developed due to different factors, such as at the beginning of relationships. This form of trust is helpful in relationships with limited history where each other's behaviour in this relationship cannot be predicted in situations and in which trust has to be achieved swiftly. A prerequisite for this trust-building form is the ability to presume the character of the opponent based on one's own character judgement (Tyler Tom, 2003).

Trust constructs can be a 'one-off' phenomenon or, as in professional relationships, multiple forms of trust with different layers can materialise. Different forms of trust represent various stages of the evolution of the relationship between trustor and trustee. The more the relationship develops between trustor and trustee, the deeper and more complex trust levels can be built (Lyon, Möllering and Saunders, 2016). The nature of trust in this research chapter of the thesis is approached as an instrumental and rational choice between trustor and trustee. For this research chapter, the idea proposed by Tyler Tom (2003) is accepted, where trust is treated as an issue of predictability. Trust is given when the expected outcome of a likely future is positive, or at least not negative, and if the risk in giving trust is beneficial to the trustor.

Basic trust elements valid for micro as well as macro level are the maintenance of implemented arrangements and being truthful. Those elements on their own do not create trust automatically; there are additional elements necessary to create cooperation based on trust. In organisations especially, the element of personal integrity in leaders is an important element in order to be perceived as a trustworthy organisation. A most important element in the context of trust-building is truth, even if the truth is not always favourable for the organisation. This means it is important in an organisation to admit to mistakes if they occur, instead of negating them, and it is important to deal with mistakes in a transparent manner (Bibb and Kourdi, 2004). Trust-building within an organisation involved in cross-border infrastructure is achieved more readily than trust-building between two cross-border organisations. Within organisations, there are common goals, organisational ties, and regulations in place rewarding positive behaviour and punishing misbehaviour, and these can establish stability within the organisation. Those stabilisation factors are missing in relationships between two organisations that have cross-border relationships, and this makes it more difficult to build trust between them. A trust-building factor in this context can be the circumstance that participation in cross-country cooperation is generally handled primarily autonomously or semi-autonomously. Clarifying roles and responsibilities also reduces the risk of opportunistic misbehaviour and is another important element in building trust in organisational cooperation (Gil-Garcia et al., 2010).

Institutional Trust

Institutional trust is an important factor in interorganisational relationships, and in this context, it is not always possible to rely on interaction-based forms of trust, because these forms require repeated face-to-face contacts which are usually time-consuming and not always efficient. In institutional trust, with little or no prior personal interaction between parties, it is common to include risk-reducing institutional safeguards in the decision-making. Putting risk-reducing safeguards in place can help with developing trust relationships in this specific situation. The level of institutional trust is linked to the constituent elements of the institutional arrangements between parties and to the characteristics of the institutional interactions (Bachmann, 2011). A common measure of trust in organisations is to examine experiences of the past. Such experiences can influence future interactions in a positive or negative way. If organisations lived up to or exceeded expectations in the past, and trust was not misplaced, then the possibility of trusting the same organisation for future interactions can increase.

Experiences where organisations barely managed to fulfil contractual obligations, or in cases where organisations failed in achieving pre-agreed outcomes, can lead to revocation of trust and future interaction with such organisations might be cancelled (Tyler Tom, 2003). Other trust-building elements for organisations are competency and skills. Organisations must ensure they hire employees with the knowledge, skills, and competencies to fulfil organisational goals. Organisations cannot rely solely on their employees' skills and competency alone; there have to be some processes in place for checks and balances. Too much control over employees can destroy trust in organisations. Therefore, a fine balance between controlling employees and giving employees freedom in the context of an agreed goal framework can stimulate trust in organisations (Bibb and Kourdi, 2004).

In general, institutional information-sharing possibilities are developed in the USA to achieve efficient sharing between different governmental agencies and law enforcement entities. Although technical means are developed, law enforcement agencies in the USA face difficulties when it comes to efficiently sharing information. Those difficulties are not based on technical infrastructure but rather on trust and willingness of agencies and agents to freely share information which they have gathered for specific cases. This part of the literature review researches trust in connection with information sharing focused on law enforcement agencies dealing with cross-border issues. Violent attacks from cross-border terrorist groups in the recent past and research into these events have shown that information sharing between law enforcement agencies within the USA is not optimised.

An important part in this mistrust construct is based on the circumstance that agencies in the USA do not trust other agencies within and outside the USA due to various reasons, such as corruption, endangering goals, future achievements of their own agency, and powerplays, among other factors (Joyal, 2012). According to Liu Peng and Amit Chetal (2005), trust, which is integral to sharing information between law enforcement agencies and other entities, is lacking. Trustors fear that shared information could endanger or jeopardise own agency interests (Liu Peng and Amit Chetal, 2005). Sharing information between governmental agencies differs from institutional information-sharing and requires a more restricted trust model. This assumption, according to Liu Peng and Amit Chetal (2005), is based on the assumption that governmental information-sharing deals with a high volume of sensitive information. The authors state further that there is not enough trust built between US agencies to share or give access to their information. Another trust issue is agency differences and existing conflicts of interest. Those trust issues require different information-sharing procedures, which are more accountable and undertaken in a

fair manner. Information-sharing between agencies must ensure that the exchange of information is not only based on cross-agency authority mapping, it must also be assured that information benefits both parties and result in a win-win situation (Yakhlef, Basic and Akerstrom, 2017).

Trust building elements in context with information sharing

Trust-building elements in the field of information sharing with law enforcement agencies include sharing motivations and visions to enable the creation of a collaborative identity. In this context, it is important that people meet and develop this collaborative identity through social events, exchanging working methods, discussing aims, goals and motivations. These elements are seen as speaking the same language among law enforcement employees throughout different agencies (Yakhlef, Basic and Akerstrom, 2017). Similarities between individuals in regard of ethnic background, age, gender and social status can influence trust in groups, especially in a law enforcement environment. Yakhlef, Basic and Akerstrom (2017) state that research in cooperation related to trust of law enforcement agencies working around the Baltic Sea has shown that although there are sometimes sizeable differences in organisational structure or cultural background, those differences have little or no effect on cooperation practices. More important than the before-mentioned differences for cooperation in this context are similar adaption and mindsets in upholding the law and obeying the legal framework (Yakhlef, Basic and Akerstrom, 2017). The authors partly confirm in their research of the results of Liu Peng and Amit Chetal's research from 2005, where sensitive information sharing between law enforcement agencies is primarily based on micro-level trust between persons.

As a result of their research and interviews conducted with law enforcement officers working in the field of migration around the Baltic Sea, Yakhlef, Basic and Akerstrom (2017) concluded that sharing of sensitive information requires a high level of trust between trustor and trustee. In that study, law enforcement officers said they preferred to share sensitive information during face-to-face meetings and that there was a certain reluctance to share sensitive information with anonymous entities via email or over the phone (Birdi et al., 2020).

Yakhlef, Basic and Akerstrom (2017) confirmed that EU information sharing channels are efficient, but for specific sensitive information exchange, a personal face-to-face meeting is a necessity. In contrast to the view that interpersonal relations are the foundation of information sharing for law enforcement agencies, Cook, Russell and Levi (2005), as cited in Yakhlef, Basic and Akerstrom (2017), argue that such micro-level trust

constructs cannot handle the complexity of macro-level social constructs and their functionalities. Cook, Russell and Levi (2005), as cited in Yakhlef, Basic and Akerstrom (2017), argue that regulations are more important than trust and that interpersonal trust works only on micro-level based constructs. The authors state that their research resulted in the conclusion that trust must be earned and that trust in an individual person does not automatically extend to trust in the organisation the person works for.

Complete absence of trust could be mooted if actions could be undertaken in an environment of complete certainty and without risk. Such a situation almost never exists; lack of manageability of others' intentions and fragility about outcome involving other parties constitutes the basis of risk. Research in trust might not agree on a universal definition of trust yet, but a common denominator in trust research is the agreement of scientists that trust is interconnected with risk. Psychology, sociology and economics consider risk in this context as an essential element of the conceptualisation of trust (Rousseau et al., 1998). Risk can appear in various forms in context with trust, for instance, the probability of loss or the probability of harm, with an unpredictable outcome of an interaction. Trust giving and risk taking is a reciprocal relationship (Rousseau et al., 1998).

Shifts between risk and trust appear when interdependencies increase. The higher the dependency of one party to another manifests itself, the higher the risk appetite can rise, and these circumstances alter the level and potential form of trust (Rousseau et al., 1998; Gil-Garcia et al., 2010). In context with trust in mangers, Tyler Tom (2003) researched in an Australian organisation, antecedents and consequences in context of manger-subordinate relationships. Research has shown that organisational support, procedural justice and transformational leadership are important to build trust in managers (Akerboom, 2024). The author states further that consequences of trust in management can manifest in less interest in leaving employment and the commitment of employees (Tyler Tom, 2003). Bibb and Kourdi (2004) argue that trust provides credibility, especially in conjunction with leadership. The authors state further that trusted and credible leadership in organisations is a necessity in an efficient organisation.

Scholars researching trust promulgated the idea that trust can almost completely replace command and control in organisations. According to Cummings and Bromiley (1996), Cural and Judge (1995), and Smith and Barclay (1997), as cited in Tyler Tom (2003), there is an inverse relationship between the level of trust and control in organisations: the more trust is built, the less investment an organisation has to make in

monitoring and control to ensure effective functioning of the organisation. In contrast, Morris and Moberg (1994), as cited in Tyler Tom (2003), state that increased trust does not necessarily result in less monitoring and controlling functions of organisations. They argue that violations most likely appear in organisations that are vulnerable, meaning having fewer monitor and control mechanisms in place. Furthermore, violations can also impact on all personnel in the form of restrictions and limitation of liberties, which can have a negative impact on the overall working climate in an organisation. Increased trust cannot completely replace established control and monitoring functions in organisations. It is vital to find a balance between increasing trust and reducing controlling mechanisms. Furthermore, these two factors should be seen as complementary phenomena. Both factors need to be balanced and they need to be brought into play with cooperation needs and relationships (Tyler Tom, 2003).

Trust in Organisations

Established trust within organisations and between cooperating organisations can have a positive effect in terms of strengthening relationships on a micro level between individual persons and on a macro level between organisations. Another advantage of trust can result in increased efficiency and speeding up processes, between organisations and improved performance in working teams (Ben-Gal, Tzafrir and Dolan, 2015). Acquiring and maintaining trusting relationships between law enforcement agencies is not easily achieved. Obstacles in building relationships between law enforcement agencies can be the bureaucratic environment in which law enforcement agencies operate, political influence, common high turnover of employees, competing tasks and many other challenges. If trusting relationships between law enforcement agencies can be achieved, the outcome of such cooperation can have positive effects on efficiency in fighting crime.

Joyal (2012) states in this context that improved trust relations in the USA have pushed agencies' abilities to share information and intelligence in a more efficient way than in the past. The author states further that positive trust developments in turn are responsible for growing recognition among sub-federal law enforcement agencies. With trust built between different law enforcement agencies, sharing information brings added value to their work, and it is also recognised that multi-agency cooperation in terms of information sharing improved (Joyal, 2012).

Trust in this chapter of the thesis was defined as willingness to take a risk. Absence of trust or having no trust in an organisation or a person translates into absence of faith to take a risk, which equates to mistrust (Schoorman, Mayer and Davis, 2007). The authors state further that lack of trust and distrust have the same meaning and are interchangeable

terms. Trust and distrust, however, are not always two sides of a coin; that is, if trust is given, this does not automatically mean that there is no distrust. As previously discussed in this section, trust is finely nuanced and can have different levels, so it can be given as an overall element or only for certain issues. Trust and distrust are asymmetric components in the trust building construct (Kramer, 1999).

Trust scholars concluded that trust is more easily destroyed than built. Trust-building elements are primarily connected to time-consuming events with investment of effort and persistence, and trust-destroying elements are usually more visible and recognisable and can appear in a relatively short period of time. Kramer (1999) states in this context that bad news as trust-destroying elements are prone to be received more credibly than trust-building good news. Trust can turn into distrust when suspicion about the motive of an organisation or the capability of achieving arrangements arises in cooperation partners. Suspicions can be circumstantial and often the result of being targeted by competitors, and are not necessarily based on true events. In the context of interorganisational trust, suspicion is closely linked to distrust and therefore suspicion can be a nurturing element leading to distrust (Kramer, 1999).

The most obvious trust-losing element in interorganisational relationships is lying or obfuscation of truth. According to Bibb and Kourdi (2004), overstating or falsifying business results, lacking transparency about hidden organisational losses, publishing lies about the status of a company, and spinning the truth about investments are, among others, the main elements in losing the trust of cooperation partners. Lost trust does not automatically mean that there cannot be trust built again in the future, although it is important in this context how trust is lost, because this influences future re-trust gaining processes. Trust can be regained, but it is evidently harder to regain lost trust than to build trust in the first place (Kramer, 1999).

Law enforcement agencies are often reluctant to share sensitive information with other EU Member States via EU-wide facilitated sharing platforms. Having no control over given information, respectively not knowing who can have access or has accessed this information, can be an obstacle in productive information sharing. This fear is based partly in police culture in general, different police backgrounds, corruption, as well as the perception of the police being forced by EU politicians into a must-share situation, e.g.: EUROPOL (Plecas et al., 2011; James, 2016; Hufnagel and McCartney, 2017). Sharing specific case information in uncontrolled systems can hamper investigations in the sense of losing control of unique investigative information and therefore can make the investigation

vulnerable. Information sharing in this context could also reveal investigative techniques as well as surveillance techniques. Case-related information is sensitive, and if that information is leaked or made public, then this could set back ongoing investigations or, in the worst-case scenario, bring investigations to an end. This is one of many reasons why law enforcement agencies prefer to share information with trusted counterparts or trusted law enforcement agencies only (Rathbun, 2011).

While the EU tries to encourage information sharing and implements trusted sharing platforms for EU Member States, bilateral and multilateral information sharing implementations arise between trusted EU Member States, whereas non-trusted EU Member States are left out (Hufnagel, 2013a). Those exclusive sharing inventions between trusted EU Member States facilitate a swift cross-border information sharing possibility, with the disadvantage of being an enclosed environment with no EU-wide information sharing perspective. Information exchange of a sensitive nature requires a high level of trust between sharing parties. To gain this level of trust, EU Member States also use EU Police Liaison Officers. Their main duty is, among others, to make sure that host country authorities, as well as host country police practitioners, have the trust to share sensitive information. Hufnagel (2013a) states in this regard that the layout of EUROPOL encourages the build-up of trust between EUROPOL Liaison Officers, with close working relationships between Liaison Officers in one building as well as the possibility of working unsupervised by EUROPOL, which gives the Liaison Officers a greater possibility to cooperate on formal as well as informal levels.

Theoretical framework of information sharing in PLO systems

The section theoretical framework provides a detailed examination of the theories that underpin information sharing in Police Liaison Officer systems, particularly in a peer-to-peer context. As information sharing can be seen as a two-act process, more than one social theory is applicable to the process of exchanging data (Constant, Kiesler and Sproull, 1994). The first act or step in these processes is the creation of an environment where Police Liaison Officers are established, and information can be legally shared with counterparts of the host country. In the context of Police Liaison Officer systems, governments or law enforcement agencies have first to establish possibilities and legally binding regulations for their employees to share and receive information. In this regard, the literature review researched different existing theories of police cooperation in general to explore the dynamics of cross-border police cooperation. The second act of the information sharing process affects the persons within peer-to-peer networks themselves. Important in this context is the question: why do Police Liaison Officers share information with others,

and what is the general motivation behind it? In the context of Police Liaison Officer systems, a critical literature review was conducted in the field of social science theories, with the topic of social exchange in general, information sharing in specific, and motivation or demotivation of individuals sharing information.

It is clear that globalisation and changes in the international arena and within the EU over the past quarter-century, particularly the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, have meant that states as unitary actors can no longer tackle transnational or international criminal or terrorist threats in isolation (Aydinli and Yn, 2011). In the same way that criminality and terrorism is not limited by geopolitical borders, neither can policing in the modern age be. Within the EU, many efforts in the area of policing have been undertaken to respond to such threats, some more successful than others (Friedrichs, 2008). As well as the establishment of supranational institutions such as EUROPOL, more intergovernmental responses were also attempted, one being the proposal to establish a Common EU Police Liaison Officer System (Lingenfelter and Miettinen, 2021). The use of Police Liaison Officers by EU Member States is not new, and as well as the existence of bilateral police liaison arrangements where Police Liaison Officers operate for one country in a second, there are also examples of bilateral Police Liaison Officers being accredited to operate for a region (Aydinli and Yn, 2011); examples include the Nordic and Benelux systems, subject of this research. In this context, it should be noted that critical issues addressed in the context of national and international cooperation are the relationships between sovereignty, the loss of sovereignty, and legal jurisdiction (Deflem, 2004). The author argues various theories applicable for international policing, for example, bureaucracy or state-centred theories. According to the author, international cooperation can only be operationalised if the participating entities establish specialised bureaucracies and gain a sufficient degree of independence from their respective governments (Modise, 2025a). The author further argues that a very important factor is the common organisational interest of the national police institutions in fighting international crime. The greater the national interest, the greater is the likelihood of engaging in international police cooperation (Deflem, 2004).

The conceptualisation of police cooperation in the EU, particularly at an EU level, can be related to the conceptualisation of EU integration in a broader sense (Jrgensen et al., 2015). EU integration cannot be explained by one single theory, making it necessary to examine several in order to establish a theoretical framework which can offer explanations for developments in this specific area. Within an EU context, supranationalism and intergovernmentalism and the ongoing relationship and conflicts between the two are key

concepts to be explored. The struggle between the EU supranational institutions such as the Commission and the Parliament on the one hand, and the intergovernmental institutions such as the Council (Member States) on the other, is relevant in any discussion related to integration developments in the EU, including integration in the area of policing, particularly given the continued reluctance of states to concede power in areas traditionally related to sovereignty (Bache, 2011). National sovereignty has long been a hindrance to European wide police cooperation (Deflem, 2004). The author also states that attempts made to create and harmonise European international police activities in the second half of the 19th century failed due to the focus of police practices towards political objectives and concerns from the major European players for national sovereignty. This attitude of the European countries changed towards the end of the 19th century and police work objectives were refocused on criminal objectives. Although international police cooperation was still based on bilateral ad hoc agreements, the attempts at the time to structure police cooperation on a broader international basis were increased (Deflem, 2004).

Explanations for the initiation and developments of a Common EU Police Liaison Officer System will be sought through examination of theories of European integration in general. Early theories developed in this regard include neofunctionalism (Rosamond, 2005), which includes the concept of functional spillover, where developments in one area of integration impact on other policy areas, in this case for example, the opening of borders in the EU with Schengen highlighted the need for increased cooperation in the fight against transnational and global threats. Criticism that neofunctionalism was based on an assumption that integration was affected by internal dynamics, with a fixed international context (Bache, 2011), led to Stanley Hoffmann's development of the theory of intergovernmentalism. This theory rendered weight to the impact international changes have on integration, and emphasised the power of national governments as well as the importance of national interest on progress in the area of integration (Jrgensen et al., 2015). Andrew Moravcsik, as cited in Kuhn (2019), further developed intergovernmentalism, leading to the theory of Liberal Intergovernmentalism, a key theoretical paradigm in studies of the European Union. This theory is concerned with the issues of power and motive as shaped by national interest and domestic concerns, as well as the bargaining that takes place among EU Member States and between them and the EU supranational institutions in developing policy, and how this has impacted on the evolution, or lack thereof, of a Common EU Police Liaison Officer System.

Trans-governmental theory concerns cooperation between one or more states with the goal to establish trans-governmental structures for solving problems of mutual concern (Whytock, 2005). According to trans-governmental fractions, the most efficient way to establish a Police Liaison Officer system is to establish a peer-to-peer information exchange system between the sending and host country. Police Liaison Officers are considered mid-level representatives of their home authorities in a diplomatic context in contrast to mainstream-level diplomats like official political and consular officers (Bayer, 2013). The author believes further that –

> A genuine, internationally recognised diplomatic track would serve the purpose of fostering legitimacy and accountability through diplomacy while maintaining the flexibility and efficiencies presented by transnational networks. In this manner, international policing networks can be made both more efficient and more accountable through officially recognised channels that are backed and supported by conventions and treaties (Bayer, 2013, p.120).

Official diplomatically accredited Police Liaison Officers in a foreign country have the possibility to set up peer-to-peer networks in the host country. Within the acknowledged agreement between sending and host country, Police Liaison Officers have the possibility to share information through official diplomatic channels as well as through established personal contacts of the host country law enforcement agencies. This gives Police Liaison Officers the unique possibility to share information on different levels of the information-sharing spectrum.

The next part of the literature review is concerned with individuals' behaviour and motivation in the context of conducting information sharing. Why human beings share information and what factors can increase or decrease an exchange of data between those individuals is the concern of the next part of the thesis. To gain a deeper insight into this topic, different social science theories have been reviewed. In a peer-to-peer network system, which is a typical setup for Police Liaison Officer systems, information is normally shared directly between human beings who have access to different information via technical means. Earlier research into this topic of information sharing did not explicitly take into account the willingness of individuals to share information; newer studies focused specifically on the aspect of gains from sharing information. Zaheer (2017) states in this context that it is important for understanding the information sharing process to research the motivational aspects of human beings exchanging data with others. Concerns and research by social scientists into understanding workplace behaviour can be traced back at least to 1920. Although social exchange theory overlaps different social research fields like anthropology, social psychology and different sociology variations, this

theory has emerged in multiple forms. A general common understanding of the social exchange theory involves interaction between human beings which creates obligations related to their workplace behaviour.

Social exchange theory has far-reaching significance in various different areas like power, networks, board independence, organisational justice, psychological contracts, leadership and others (Cropanzano, 2005; Meira, 2021). Among others, one basic assumption of social exchange theory is the development of workplace relationships over time into trusting, loyal mutual commitments. To achieve this kind of relationship at a workplace, certain rules have to be adhered to (Cropanzano, 2005). Researching the social exchange theory in depth is outside the scope of this thesis and therefore this research focuses on the social exchange theory rule of reciprocity. To put this theory in perspective with Police Liaison Officer systems, the exchange of information between two human beings creates interdependencies and the expectation of reciprocity. According to Cropanzano (2005), reciprocity can be divided into three different types:

> […] distinguishing three different types of reciprocity: (a) reciprocity as a transactional pattern of interdependent exchanges, (b) reciprocity as a folk belief, and (c) reciprocity as a moral norm (Cropanzano, 2005, p.876).

Reciprocity as a transactional pattern, in a nutshell, is understood in the way that one person's action leads to another person's response. Whereas reciprocity as a folk belief takes cultural expectations into consideration and reciprocity is understood in the way that a person's actions are rewarded with what they deserve. Reciprocity as a moral norm is seen as a cultural mandate in which persons who do not comply with reciprocity are punished. In general, it can be stated that reciprocity as a norm can be seen as the universal principle of the social exchange theory, although scientists comment that there are differences between individuals in valuing reciprocity in the first place, as well as cultural differences when it comes to reciprocity in general (Cropanzano, 2005). Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison and Sowa *et al*., as cited in Cropanzano (2005), argue that based on their empirical research, a significant correlation can be recognised between individuals with a strong exchange orientation and good reciprocity behaviour, contrary to individuals with low exchange orientation (Meira, 2021).

In social exchange theories, reciprocity is used in a wider context and does not always mean to give back in the same way; reciprocity may well have the meaning of economic values, symbolic relevance, something beyond plain material properties, and others. Foa and Foa, as cited in Cropanzano (2005), believe that six exchange resources

exist in connection with the social exchange theory: love, status, information, money, goods, and services. In organisational science, Foa and Foa's six exchange resources are merged into economic and socioeconomic benefits. Economic reciprocity in this context represents tangible financial appropriations, and socioeconomic reciprocity furthers the social and esteem needs of counterparts. Socioeconomic reciprocity is believed to show value of counterparts, and being treated with dignity is a sign of appreciation in itself. Reciprocity exchanged in these cases is primarily symbolic and particularistic (Cropanzano, 2005).

Research indicates that the establishment of clear information-sharing policies and the promotion of proactive information exchange can significantly enhance organisational performance (Constant, Kiesler and Sproull, 1994; Zaheer, 2017). A critical factor in achieving this improvement lies in understanding the development and implementation of information-sharing mechanisms within organisations. Much of the extant literature focuses primarily on peer-to-peer information sharing facilitated through electronic communication technologies (Cheng, 2011), with limited attention given to inter-organisational behaviour or the motivational factors influencing individuals' willingness to share information (Fawcett, 2011; Zaheer, 2017).

Theories of interdependence suggest that motivations for information exchange vary depending on the context (Qu and others, 2024). As cited in Constant, Kiesler and Sproull (1994), Kelly and Thibaut's interdependence theory posits that when individuals act autonomously, their willingness to share information is often governed by self-interest and reciprocity.

Under such conditions, information is likely to be shared only if mutual benefits are perceived; absent reciprocity, individuals may withhold information. However, when individuals act within an organisational framework, the dynamics shift: individuals may prioritise organisational goals and relational considerations over immediate personal gain. In such cases, concerns about long-term relationships, organisational reputation, and broader strategic outcomes may encourage continued information sharing even in the absence of direct reciprocity (Constant, Kiesler and Sproull, 1994; Zaheer, 2017).

Empirical studies further demonstrate that attitudes toward information sharing are shaped by a combination of economic incentives and social-psychological factors. Bock et al. (2005) found that the willingness to share knowledge within organisations is influenced not only by expectations of tangible rewards but also by social drivers such as reciprocity, self-worth, and adherence to organisational norms. However, their research also highlights

that effective information sharing cannot be mandated solely through organisational policies; rather, it requires a genuine willingness on the part of individuals to engage in knowledge exchange (Zaheer, 2017).

Trust has been identified as a pivotal factor influencing information-sharing behaviours. Tsanos (2014) argues that trust underpins the willingness to share information, with individuals more likely to disclose information when they believe that the recipient will act reciprocally and uphold the interests of the information provider. High levels of trust are associated with increased information-sharing and with the strengthening of positive attitudes toward collaboration (Zaheer, 2017).

Another key element in the literature is the principle of reciprocity, which parallels concepts from social exchange theory. Reciprocity in the context of information sharing involves the expectation that information exchanged will be matched in value and quantity. Research consistently shows that perceived reciprocity positively impacts individuals' willingness to share information (Banerjee, Bowie and Pavone, 2006).

The literature reveals notable conceptual overlaps between information-sharing theories and social exchange theory, particularly regarding the importance of trust and reciprocity. However, much of the existing research is situated within supply chain management contexts, limiting the direct applicability of these findings to other domains, such as Police Liaison Officer systems, the subject of this inquiry.

Fundamental differences exist between these systems: while supply chains are primarily motivated by profit generation, PLO systems are concerned with national security and public safety. Organisational structures also differ significantly; PLO systems typically operate within rigid hierarchical frameworks, whereas supply chains are often characterised by market-driven, decentralised coordination. Furthermore, confidentiality obligations and 'need-to-know' information-sharing policies in PLO systems impose stricter constraints than those typically found in supply chain environments.

An additional limitation in the literature concerns the role of information as a form of power. Zaheer (2017) highlights that information sharing can alter power dynamics, as the possession of exclusive knowledge can confer strategic advantages. This aspect is particularly salient in law enforcement contexts, where information can be perceived as a source of influence. The potential reluctance of individuals to share information due to fears of losing power or strategic advantage is an important, yet underexplored, consideration.

Institutionalised information exchange comparison Interpol vs Europol

With the beginning of industrialisation in the 19th century, police in Europe went through a transformation of the police system. Police systems changed from protecting the class systems and property to a modern police system with the implementation of a sovereign police bureaucracy, which was crucial to a successful transformation. Another difference materialised in cases of enforcing state power according to criminal law, accompanied by rationalisation of police systems and development of specialised bureaucratic systems on a broader spectrum (Deflem, 2002; Deflem, 2006a; Durmaz, 2007). Modern police systems reflect the movements of industrialisation and the socio-economic changes that go with it. The focus of investigations changed away from groups to individual persons, accompanied by applying only minimum physical force from police while executing laws and regulations. Modern police characteristics were well received by the population, and police forces developed into a protection mechanism against a discretionary government in the eyes of the population (Liang, 1992). With the change of national police services in the 19th century to modern police forces, it was recognised that police work cannot be done only by looking at their own country and resources alone. The benefit of having access to information from other countries, which could not be retrieved with national resources alone, as well as having the possibility of police cooperation with other independent countries, was discovered as an advantage to fulfil police tasks like fighting border-crossing criminal activities (Durmaz, 2007; Hufnagel, 2013a). Traditionally, nation-state law enforcement agencies carried out the collection, analysis and evaluation of data for crime intelligence purposes. Because of socio-economic changes, threats also undergo a change from a local to a global perspective. These conditions, among others, foster the building of transnational crime-intelligence sharing organisations like INTERPOL and EUROPOL (Safjański and James, 2020). The change to modern police, the shift of focus onto individuals, dubious executed unilateral operations in foreign countries with or without the knowledge of the host country, and adapting to socio-economic changes, led, among others, to the founding of international police cooperation organisations. This chapter focuses on the international police organisations INTERPOL and EUROPOL. The research in this regard is narrowed down to a comparison between the information sharing of INTERPOL and EUROPOL with their Member States, resulting merits and disadvantages, as well as general problems related to these two international police cooperation organisations in the context of information sharing.

INTERPOL was founded in 1923 as "[…] being a police- led initiative (Hufnagel et al., 2021, p.295)" and stands for International Criminal Police (Calcara, 2020). It is an intergovernmental body with no operational power and with the aim to facilitate police cooperation beyond national borders, with 194 Member States at the time of the research, all over the world, and the headquarters based in Lyon, France (Calcara, 2020). INTERPOL has no investigative power and is not a supranational institution; it is a purely cooperative network implemented independently between national police agencies with the aim to support Member States in police work with assistance and analyses to foster cooperation across borders (Deflem, 2006b; Durmaz, 2007; Gerspacher, 2008; Hufnagel, 2013a; Jansson, 2018). The General Secretary runs the General Secretariat, which is responsible for the day-to-day work performed by police and civilians in Lyon. INTERPOL also has a Global Complex for Innovation in Singapore and several satellite offices in different regions (Deflem, 2006b; Interpol, 2020).

INTERPOL achieves cooperation between different national police organisations by providing various services and tools to Member States. Among others, INTERPOL hosts 18 databases with data provided voluntarily by Member States, containing information on crimes and criminals such as names, fingerprints, DNA profiles, stolen passports, and others. Databases of INTERPOL can be accessed by National Central Bureaus of Member States via a standardised form-bound process through the INTERPOL network, which is operational 24 hours, 7 days a week, to ensure the facilitation of information sharing in the context of criminal activities (Tryfon, 2014; EU Council, 2016a; Interpol, 2018). Access to INTERPOL databases for Member States is implemented via an encrypted system that uses the internet to communicate between the national INTERPOL Office in the Member State and INTERPOL servers based in Lyon (Gerspacher, 2005; EU Council, 2016a; Deflem and Chicoine, 2018; Interpol, 2020). Additionally, INTERPOL fosters the possibility for Member States to access national databases from other Member States directly via a business-to-business connection, which is not linked to INTERPOL servers and therefore bypasses INTERPOL's information sharing infrastructure . INTERPOL Member States that give access to other INTERPOL Member States to their national databases are responsible for maintaining those databases, controlling the access they give to others, and ensuring compliance with national data protection laws (EU Council, 2016a).

A service INTERPOL offers is support for Member States, among others, in investigations, analysis, locating fugitives around the world, and training. Other activities supported by INTERPOL include field operations, networking, and research to identify

future international crime trends. According to INTERPOL, the international police cooperation organisation focuses on supporting national efforts of Member States in fighting terrorism, cybercrime, and organised crime (Interpol, 2020). Another facilitation provided by INTERPOL is the possibility of cooperation between two Member States on a bilateral level, even if those countries do not maintain diplomatic relations. INTERPOL also represents police on the world stage during international police congresses and engages with governments at the highest level. INTERPOL further fosters cooperation between other international police organisations, such as EUROPOL, and international organisations such as the United Nations (Gerspacher, 2005; Interpol, 2020).

Furthermore, INTERPOL has a colour-coded notice system implemented for Member States. Different colours are assigned to notices according to their general information sharing or seeking purposes. INTERPOL has in total six colour codes implemented for information requests or sharing by Member States. A red notice is, according to INTERPOL, the notice with the highest priority. Red notices are assigned to notices containing information about a wanted person based on an arrest warrant issued by an international or national court for a crime that carries a maximum imprisonment of at least two years. A red notice does not constitute an arrest warrant per se; the purpose of a red notice is to request the temporary containment of a wanted person until extradition procedures are implemented between the requesting INTERPOL Member State and the Member State where the wanted person is residing. Red notices can only be issued by the INTERPOL General Secretariat on its own initiative or upon request by an authorised entity or Member State (Schöndorf-Haubold, 2008; Marino and Grantham, 2015).

INTERPOL National Central Bureaus can issue colour notices other than red ones. A yellow notice is sent out in cases where a Member State is seeking information about a missing person or about a person who cannot identify themselves. The colour blue is assigned to notices to receive additional information about a person related to a crime, such as personal data, location, or activities (Schöndorf-Haubold, 2008). A green notice contains information about persons involved in criminal activities with the potential to pose a danger to public safety. An orange notice is a warning notice about persons, events, or objects that represent a possible danger to public safety. A purple notice seeks information about modus operandi of crimes, devices, concealment methods, as well as devices used in crimes. A black notice is used to seek information in the context of an unidentified body. Additionally, INTERPOL has implemented a mechanism to seek information about wanted persons on behalf of the UN Security Council via INTERPOL Member States (Schöndorf-Haubold, 2008).

According to Schöndorf-Haubold (2008), INTERPOL notices in general must undergo an evaluation process before being distributed via INTERPOL channels to other Member States. The evaluation process is undertaken by INTERPOL National Central Bureaus and the INTERPOL General Secretariat, considering necessity, advisability, alignment with INTERPOL aims and tasks, compliance with human rights, security measures to protect police cooperation of Member States, INTERPOL itself, or individual Member States. If a requested notice does not comply with those regulations, the INTERPOL General Secretariat must decline the issuing of such notices.

INTERPOL's information sharing system implemented for police agencies can be seen as a successful cooperation tool to support law enforcement agencies globally in effectively fighting border-crossing crimes. According to Fair Trials (2013), reality seems to differ. Fair Trials claims in a report written in 2013 about shortcomings of the INTERPOL organisation that –

> […] amongst its members are many countries which are known human rights abusers and notoriously corrupt (Syria, Russia and Venezuela, to name just three). Countries are effectively misusing INTERPOL to export repression and silence dissent (Interpol-Summary Fair Trials, 2013, p.3).

Fair Trials (2013) claims further that INTERPOL tools misused by governments can deprive people of their freedom and have serious impacts on the lives of people who are unjustifiably tracked via the INTERPOL system. Knowing the INTERPOL information sharing system, control mechanisms can be undermined and used to pursue political agendas. Another issue is the problem of granting access to international cross-border information to countries with an unstable situation or those lacking the rule of law and with widespread corruption (EU Observer, 2013).

Red notices and the evaluation process by the INTERPOL General Secretariat can be circumvented by issuing a so-called diffusion. Diffusions serve the same purpose as notices and can be issued by National INTERPOL Bureaus or international entities directly to other Member States of their choice. The difference between a notice and a diffusion is that notices are official requests, whereas diffusions represent an informal information exchange. Another difference is that the evaluation and compliance processes apply to notices, whereas diffusions are not subject to such checks. According to Marino and Grantham (2015), an increase in informal information exchange is noticeable within INTERPOL due to the rapid development of information sharing technology within the organisation. The authors further state that –

> […] INTERPOL's web-based information-sharing system launched in 2009, drastically improved the ability of member countries to exchange information by putting data submission and control functions directly into the hands of local officers in NCBs, and allowing them to record data directly into INTERPOL's database (Marino and Grantham (2015, p.4).

EU Observer (2013) states in this context that in 2011, 20,130 diffusions were circulated by INTERPOL National Bureaux. The number of diffusions was almost three times the number of red notices. Not only Fair Trails recognised the shortcomings in the INTERPOL system; Members of the EU Parliament (EU MEPs) have pointed out to the EU Commission that action should be taken on INTERPOL abuse. EU MEPs view the misuse of INTERPOL as an attack on the European Union values of Security, Freedom, and Justice (EU Observer, 2013). Fair Trials (2013) suggest in this regard that INTERPOL should carefully evaluate red notices to ensure that governments do not misuse these tools to pursue political agendas, particularly against journalists, human rights activists, and political opponents. INTERPOL should also have a transparent process and make information available on how red notices are reviewed. Additionally, Fair Trials suggests that individuals wanted by INTERPOL should have the opportunity to challenge the decision in a transparent process, with a decision made by INTERPOL within a reasonable timeframe. EU MEPs suggest that the EU should implement a group of experts to monitor INTERPOL information exchange, with the aim of preventing the criminalisation of people who have been granted asylum (EU Observer, 2013).

Another identified shortcoming of INTERPOL’s information sharing system can be a decentralised police system in a national state. The USA, for example, published an audit report about the USA National INTERPOL Bureau and identified shortcomings regarding the sharing of information about wanted persons in the USA with domestic law enforcement agencies. The lack of information sharing is based, among other factors, on missing regulations for sharing case-related information between local law enforcement agencies, the USA National Central Bureau (USNCB), and INTERPOL. The report also points out that there is little or no awareness among local police forces of the possibilities to acquire information from USNCBs and INTERPOL, or of the appropriate use of that information (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009). Lack of awareness in the context of INTERPOL’s information sharing systems leads to the false conclusion among some law enforcement officers that different International police cooperation organisations are strictly bound to specific tasks and geographical areas. Due to the interconnections of information-sharing systems between police cooperation organsiations and the increasing variety of tasks and geographical areas, new dynamics arise. For example, EUROPOL

databases are connected to INTERPOL databases and vice versa, meaning a search for a person in the INTERPOL databases does not stop at the EU border; on the contrary, it includes all the relevant EUROPOL databases as well (Deloitte, 2015).

Because of the aforementioned criticism, INTERPOL acted on its shortcomings in the context of its information-sharing system and adopted, during the General Assembly in Bali on the 9 September 2016, a resolution on new measures to strengthen the integrity of the INTERPOL information system, specifically the Red Notice and the diffusion systems (Zagaris, 2016). Nemets (2017) points out that INTERPOL made significant changes to prevent misuse of the information systems (Calcara, 2021). They argued that INTERPOL has implemented a series of reforms aimed at enhancing transparency and accountability within its information systems. These include granting individuals the right to access and request the deletion of personal information stored in INTERPOL databases, as well as introducing new procedures related to staff qualification requirements and decision-making processes.

Despite these efforts, Deflem (2006b) argues that fundamental challenges remain, particularly regarding the level of trust between INTERPOL Member States. The diversity of member agencies, encompassing a wide range of political, legal, and administrative traditions, undermines mutual trust. This persistent lack of trust continues to hinder the overall effectiveness of INTERPOL's information sharing mechanisms, suggesting that procedural reforms alone may be insufficient to fully address the deeper structural issues affecting cooperation among Member States. The author further states that missing trust is bypassed with the tool of unilaterally executed police operations between specific INTERPOL Member States instead of participating in multilateral cooperation systems. These measures address the information sharing process but contribute little to the trust-related issues among Member States.

EUROPOL stands for European Police Office and is a law enforcement agency for European Member States and selected non-EU Member States. EUROPOL was established as an intergovernmental body in 1999 in The Hague as a top-down institution based on political and legislative EU bodies. EUROPOL was implemented within the framework of the Treaty of the European Union and regulated by a Convention concluded between EU Member States. The transformation of EUROPOL to an EU agency was decided in 2009 based on a decision of the EU Council. EUROPOL is now an EU agency with the aim of fighting cross-border crime, including organised crime and terrorism, by facilitating information exchange, elaborating intelligence analysis of criminal trends for Member

States, providing training, and more. EUROPOL is not a typical EU agency in the classical sense because EUROPOL is different from other EU agencies in that its activities are funded by the EU Budget and has more power compared to other EU agencies. Another difference is that EUROPOL, in context with international relations to other organisations, represents itself and the EU (Deflem, 2006a; Durmaz, 2007; Walsh, 2010; Safjański, 2013; Plachta, 2016; Jansson, 2018).

All EU Member States joined EUROPOL after adopting the EUROPOL Convention and receiving official acceptance from the EU. Every EU Member State, as well as cooperating organisations and non-EU countries, has at least one Liaison Officer in EUROPOL, with approximately 145 Liaison Officers performing their duties in The Hague (Walsh, 2010; Safjański, 2013; Tryfon, 2014). The EUROPOL Directorate, consisting of one director and three deputy directors, governs EUROPOL. The EU Council approves the EUROPOL budget and acts as a control and regulatory body. The EU Council forwards an annual report on EUROPOL's work to the EU Parliament. EUROPOL must consult the EU Parliament if EUROPOL regulations or the EUROPOL Convention require adaptation. EUROPOL's day-to-day activities are supervised by the EUROPOL Management Board, consisting of appointed representatives selected from EUROPOL Member States. The EUROPOL Management Board meets at least twice a year and is responsible for ensuring the rights of individuals in the context of information sharing via the EUROPOL network (Safjański, 2013; Plachta, 2016; Jansson, 2018; EU Parliament, 2019).

EUROPOL also shares information with non-EU Members and other international police organisations such as the USA, Turkey, Colombia, INTERPOL, the Counter Terrorism Group, the Police Chiefs Operational Task Force, and others. Within the European Union's legal framework, EUROPOL is somewhat limited in autonomy and has developed a flexible approach to achieving cooperation with countries outside the EU and with international police organisations. EUROPOL uses cooperation agreements on institutional and non-state levels. Such cooperation agreements are initiated by the EUROPOL Management Board and must be approved by the EU Justice and Home Affairs Ministers (Safjański, 2013; Tryfon, 2014; Jansson, 2018).

The difference between EUROPOL officers and national law enforcement officers is that EUROPOL officers do not wear a uniform, nor are they armed. Another difference is that EUROPOL's competencies do not include common law powers such as interrogation, inspections, or detention. EUROPOL's competencies and skills lie in criminal intelligence

used to support and coordinate activities undertaken by Member States, prevention diagnostics, detection, and elaborating analyses of criminal trends. EUROPOL's aim is to strengthen Member States' law enforcement agencies and to ensure cooperation among Member States regarding the prevention and combating of serious crime involving at least two EUROPOL Member States. EUROPOL's purpose is to tackle more than 30 forms of serious crime, including terrorism, human trafficking, money laundering, and many more.

Additionally, EUROPOL acts as an information hub for Member States and provides support and expertise in investigations (Deflem, 2006a; Safjański, 2013; Tryfon, 2014; EU Parliament, 2019). Each EUROPOL Member State establishes a EUROPOL National Unit (ENU) in their home country. ENUs are responsible for liaising with EUROPOL and national law enforcement bodies. ENUs designate at least one Liaison Officer to be attached to EUROPOL in The Hague, tasked with representing the Member State in EUROPOL (Tas, 2023). The main responsibilities of ENUs are to share relevant information with EUROPOL, act on EUROPOL requests for information, and ensure effective communication between EUROPOL and national authorities based on national law (Deflem, 2006a; EU Parliament, 2019). EUROPOL provides a secure electronic information exchange network with connections to every Member State and EUROPOL partner institution.

The advantage of this system is that information can be shared in real time with all EUROPOL Member States at the same time without prior contact with individual contact points. Information sent to all Member States is encrypted and first sent to EUROPOL's main headquarters (MHQ) in The Hague and, without delay, passed on to individual national Member States' contact offices (Deflem, 2006a). In the context of information sharing between EUROPOL and ENUs, there are three exceptions when ENUs are not obliged to share information. These are if the information sharing is against the Member State's security interests, if the information sharing is likely to jeopardise an ongoing investigation including the endangerment of an individual, or if the information sharing is connected to operations in the national security area (EU Parliament, 2019). The tasks of EUROPOL Liaison Officers are regulated by national law and their goal is to ensure information exchange with their sending country and Liaison Officers from other EUROPOL Member States. Liaison Officers can also exchange information on a bilateral basis with Liaison Officers from other EUROPOL Member States beyond EUROPOL's mandate (Deflem, 2006a; EU Parliament, 2019).

EUROPOL developed a network-spreading system due to the limitations of its mandate by broadening its membership and cooperating with other international police cooperation organisations with different mandates and limitations. Another method of building an extensive information-sharing network is to utilise other agencies of non-EU countries. In this regard, Deflem (2006a) states that due to EUROPOL's activities and well-developed information-sharing network, based on international police culture in Europe and across the world, a group was formed based on a common understanding of the function of police and their tasks. In the context of analysis and identifying criminal trends, EUROPOL developed in 2025 the latest Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA). EUROPOL relies in this regard on data provided by Member States to identify threats and predict possible risks arising from those threats for Member States (Occhipinti, 2015).

In 1998, EUROPOL assumed the responsibility to support Member States in the fight against terrorism. In this regard, EUROPOL produces threat assessments such as the analysis work file Islamic Terrorism, which focuses on Islamic fundamentalist terrorism. With the analysis work file Dolphin, on the other hand, EUROPOL supports Member States with an analytical product covering all other terrorist group activities (Deflem, 2006a). EUROPOL also provides strategic diagnoses of risks associated with border-crossing threats for their Member States based on EUROPOL's criminal intelligence processes. The most important reports are SOCTA, Internet Organised Crime Threat Assessment (IOCTA), and EU Terrorism and Situation and Trend Reports (TE-SAT) (Safjański and James, 2020).

An important cooperation tool for exchanging information within the EUROPOL framework is the Schengen Information System (SIS) database. By providing, managing, and maintaining SIS for Member States, EUROPOL has accomplished significant success towards law enforcement cooperation across borders. The SIS database is one of the most important databases in the EUROPOL information network because it offers highly effective search possibilities, making it particularly valuable for EUROPOL Member States (Safjański and James, 2020). Another database hosted by EUROPOL is the Secure Information Exchange Network Application (SIENA). SIENA was established to ensure the rapid exchange of information between different Member States (Safjański, 2013; Interpol, 2020). SIENA's main function is the exchange of information on a bilateral basis between Member States outside of the EUROPOL mandate (Vavoula, 2021). EUROPOL can only be included in the recipient list if the criminal case falls within EUROPOL's mandate (Tryfon, 2014).

EUROPOL is an international police institution designed from top to bottom based on regulations and laws, and created by the international governing body of the EU. EUROPOL's cooperation framework is created by the EU to increase the accountability of EUROPOL. According to Safjański (2013), this accountability can be seen by Member States' law enforcement as an intrusion into their activities and can be a cooperation obstacle. Safjański (2013) detected a gap between funds allocated to EUROPOL and operational outcomes in Member States. The author states further that the discrepancy is not solely due to EUROPOL but also concerns Member States, owing to an interoperability problem with databases, meaning EUROPOL's databases are not compatible with national databases.

Assessing the value and effectiveness of EUROPOL and resulting cooperation between Member States with EUROPOL and/or cooperation between Member States based on EUROPOL's initiative is almost impossible to determine. ENUs are responsible for the implementation of operational activities requested via EUROPOL channels in their country, and activities in this regard count toward the effectiveness of EUROPOL. Because ENUs differ significantly, and they are tailored nationally in terms of staffing and agency composition, efficiency measurement is difficult.

Another problem in this regard is the allocation of tasks and their effects. Because EUROPOL offers the possibility of using the official EUROPOL information-sharing network or using national Liaison Officers based in the EUROPOL MHQ, a clear distinction of effects between those cooperation mechanisms is difficult (Safjański, 2013). EUROPOL's incoherent organisational structure, such as the lack of control over EUROPOL Liaison Officers working in The Hague for Member States, constitutes another shortcoming. EUROPOL Liaison Officers are detached from EUROPOL's organisational structure because they work for their national institutions based in the MHQ of EUROPOL. EUROPOL has no control or supervisory power over the activities of Member States' Liaison Officers, and they are bound by the relevant national laws of their sending country. This gives them the possibility to cooperate directly with other Member States by bypassing EUROPOL and its infrastructure, and to decide which information is shared with EUROPOL and which is held back (Safjański, 2013; Jansson, 2018; Safjański and James, 2020).

Another trend identified in this context is that EUROPOL's capacity for intelligence analysis has grown in recent years, but the data reaching EUROPOL, according to Deflem (2006a), are inadequate in terms of volume because EUROPOL is reluctant to share

information on a multilateral level and prefers to cooperate directly with Member States' law enforcement agencies. Safjański and James (2020) identified a similar issue in sharing sensitive information on a multilateral basis. EUROPOL's analyses depend on the input of Member States, and the idea of sharing information equally is not a concept manifested in all EUROPOL Member States, especially if the information sharing goes beyond the Member State's operational environment. Safjański and James argue that information sharing between EUROPOL and its Member States is suboptimal because Member States are reluctant to share specific sensitive information on a bilateral level due to lack of trust. EUROPOL Member States rather instrumentalise their own national Liaison Officer to initiate bilateral cooperation with another EUROPOL Member State (Safjański and James, 2020). Furthermore, it was noted that EUROPOL, as an international police organisation, is dependent on national police forces, and therefore the national police culture of each Member State can influence the accountability and control of EUROPOL. This problem must be seen in the context of EUROPOL's limited operational capability, as it relies solely on national states to carry out operational functions .

Lack of information sharing by Member States in the context of counterterrorism was also identified by Bureš (2016), who argues that Member States struggle to share valuable, high-grade, real-time information which could be acted upon in the context of counterterrorism. The observation of this lack of information sharing is, according to the author, also confirmed by EUROPOL with the explanation that such data are personal data protected by national data protection laws and therefore cannot be shared with EUROPOL. Another explanation from analysts in this regard is that valuable information is sometimes seen as currency, with the option to exchange it for other valuable information or political favours. Naturally, in this context, as soon as the information is shared on a multinational level, the value of the information disappears (Bureš, 2016).

An important issue in the context of high-grade information sharing is based on trust. As Bureš (2016) states, trust in the context of information sharing with EUROPOL cannot be created or built by EU legislation itself. Trust in information sharing involves more than a legal basis and implemented procedures; trust can develop if partners have faith in each other and if involved parties have shared expectations of positive outcomes. Because of the lack of mutual trust, some EU Member States share high-grade intelligence information only on a bilateral basis, as this is seen as the most workable procedure, and EUROPOL is regarded as an optional bonus tool which can also be used by European Member States (Bureš, 2016; Safjański and James, 2020). In the context of counterterrorism information sharing, EUROPOL competes with other intelligence-sharing organisations such as Club

de Berne, the Police Working Group on Terrorism, and others. Such informal networks have the advantage of being well known for their flexibility, relative independence from national governments, and the possibility of a wide range of participation on equal footing. These informal information-sharing networks are seen as suitable for tackling common goals and governance problems.

In contrast to EUROPOL, such networks are seen among police practitioners as a possibility to exchange information on horizontal level, with the advantage of flexibility, practical use, and successful outcomes (Bureš, 2016). Because of a lack of trust and resulting non-sharing by Member States of necessary information for analytical EUROPOL products, the value of EUROPOL analysis must be critically questioned in terms of comprehensiveness and limitations (Safjański and James, 2020).

A lack of awareness of EUROPOL's capabilities, as well as the possibilities of participating in the information-sharing process among law enforcement practitioners, was also identified. Safjański (2013) believes that, because of the multiplicity of institutions and competencies and interdependent mechanisms within the EU, whereby EUROPOL is only one of these agencies, awareness of specific institutions and services can become lost (Safjański, 2013). Another shortcoming of EUROPOL is based on the decision-making process in the EU and the complex political–ideological entanglements. According to Deflem (2006a), in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005, which were swiftly condemned by the EU Council, new anti-terrorist measures were proposed. Not all EU Member States implemented the new anti-terrorist measures equally. According to the author, EU Member States with different political–ideological standpoints prevented the implementation of certain anti-terrorist measures.

Another issue in this context is that EU Member States have different law enforcement structures, based on historical background and specific regional and national development of the country. Some EU countries have a strict separation between serious crime-fighting departments and counterterrorism units. Depending on a country's infrastructure, other EU countries have serious crime units on a local level and counterterrorism activities on a national level. Although there is cooperation between these departments, they are strictly separated in organisational and operational terms, as in Germany (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 2020). Because of the separation of counterterrorism activities from serious crime tasks in some EU Member States, EUROPOL's development and its organisational remodelling, accompanied by gaining

more competencies—specifically in regard to counterterrorism—is not in favour of gaining or building trust to share information (Safjański and James, 2020).

Bureš (2016) believes that EUROPOL is unlikely to become a genuine intelligence agency in the foreseeable future in the context of fighting terrorism. He bases his belief on the fact that Europe's politicians lack results in the context of public promises of improving the fight against terrorism through improved intelligence sharing of information across Europe and the implementation of those promises. One reason for politicians having little result in this context is that, on the one hand, politicians have to convince relevant national agencies to improve the information-sharing processes with other countries, and on the other hand, politicians have no overall control of such agencies and no power to force relevant agencies to share information. EUROPOL's strategy in this regard is to depoliticise terrorist attacks in favour of enhancing cooperation among Member States in the fight against terrorism. By eliminating the motivational discussion of terrorist acts, EUROPOL tries to turn investigations into a technical matter. By following this strategy, the enhancement of cooperation in this regard is questionable (Jansson, 2018).

EUROPOL Member States' trust towards EUROPOL is distributed unequally (Safjański and James, 2020). In general, it can be stated that Member States see EUROPOL as adding value in the fight against crime, and EUROPOL offers significant value towards this goal. However, trust in EUROPOL is not equally distributed across all of EUROPOL's activities and products. Senior police officers and EU policing experts consider EUROPOL excellent in the area of fighting drugs and financial crime, and EUROPOL has earned the trust of its Member States in this regard. In the field of fighting human trafficking and child sexual abuse, EUROPOL has had some success. The EUROPOL Joint Investigation Team (JIT) tool was created in 2002 through the Framework Decision on Joint Investigation (Riehle, 2023). JITs have, in general, proven to be unsuccessful when used during major operations. EUROPOL must improve in these areas to gain the general trust of its Member States. Little or no trust from Member States exists when it comes to the fight against terrorism, and Member States prefer cooperation mechanisms outside EUROPOL's control (Rozée, Kaunert and Léonard, 2013).

INTERPOL and EUROPOL are both international police organisations with the goals of supporting their Member States in the fight against cross-border criminal activities, enhancing cooperation among Member States in this regard, fostering information exchange between them, and supporting Member States with various analytical products, providing different databases, and training for law enforcement in the

fight against crime. Both institutions act as intermediaries to provide services for their Member States, and both institutions do not have executive powers to perform operations on their own. INTERPOL was established earlier than EUROPOL and has a global approach, which is reflected in the number and geographical location of Member States, including countries all over the world. INTERPOL was founded as a non-governmental institution based on an internal set of rules and regulations and cooperation contracts with its Member States. EUROPOL, on the other hand, is more focused on the geographical area of Europe, although it also has cooperation arrangements with countries and institutions outside of Europe. In contrast to INTERPOL, EUROPOL is explicitly defined by the EU and its operations are overseen by regulatory EU bodies.

The establishment of INTERPOL and EUROPOL occurred in exactly the opposite way. Whereas INTERPOL is a bottom-up institution initiated by practitioners at the beginning of the 20th century, EUROPOL is a typical top-down institution initiated by the EU and controlled by EU laws and regulations. Although the compared international police institutions have different geographical focuses, different sizes, and different implementation backgrounds, both organisations struggle with similar problems for different reasons. Both international police organisations offer the possibility of using the official information-sharing networks provided by the organisation, with the advantage that, if used, multilateral information sharing with all Member States is performed. Both organisations also offer the possibility for Member States to contact another Member State via the official information network and continue the cooperation on a bilateral basis. By doing so, information is not shared on a multilateral level; rather, it is withheld from all other Member States. Seeking direct contact on a bilateral level without sharing information with all Member States has its foundation in both organisations in a lack of trust. INTERPOL’s trust issue is connected to its provided services and a lack of control mechanisms.

Some national governments of INTERPOL Member States have misused INTERPOL’s notice systems to detain or restrict the mobility of politically unwanted persons. EUROPOL, in contrast, expanded its portfolio and widened its activities to include fighting border-crossing crime as well as terrorism. Member States' trust in EUROPOL is limited to crime-fighting activities, where EUROPOL is seen as a centre of excellence; in other areas, trust in sharing information remains limited. Some Member States are reluctant to share sensitive or terrorism-related information on a multilateral level.

In supporting Member States with analytical products, both organisations rely on data provided by their Member States. Due to similar reasons in both organisations, these data requests can lack integrity because information sharing depends on the political will of individual Member States as well as the infrastructural capability to collect the requested data. The outcome is the same in both organisations: analytical products elaborated by these international police organisations can become incomplete and distorted.

Overall, it can be stated that both international police organisations, INTERPOL and EUROPOL, represent added value for national law enforcement agencies in supporting the fight against cross-border criminal activities. However, because of organisational deficits and trust-related issues, both INTERPOL and EUROPOL do not live up to their full potential in the context of information sharing and fall short in terms of maximum efficiency.

The literature review critically analysed the history of police cooperation and information exchange in Europe, and the development of Police Liaison Officer systems, and examined the theoretical applications of information sharing in the second part. The development of PLO systems shows that, firstly, unilateral actions were undertaken to support the status quo of regimes in Europe. Subsequently, the understanding of the added value and benefits of information exchange between European countries prevailed, and information exchange systems between European countries developed. In this context, the importance of legal frameworks and the influence of law enforcement structures in implementing PLO systems were discovered and analysed.

The role of Police Liaison Officers, their tasks and challenges, as well as information sharing in Europe and failed attempts by the EU to control Member State PLOs, constitutes the end of Chapter One of the literature review. The second part of this review assessed bureaucratic necessities and efficiency measurement methods in bureaucratic systems, focused on PLO systems. The importance of cultural aspects was also examined, including the role of trust in the information exchange process between police forces. Furthermore, an analysis of social exchange theories was reviewed to obtain a comprehensive and complete picture of the underlying theoretical elements important for information exchange. A critical comparison between established police information exchange organisations in Europe, INTERPOL and EUROPOL, their merits, limitations, and standardisation completes the second part of the literature review.

Methodology

This study researches information sharing between EU police forces and non-EU police forces, based on a critical examination of regional Police Liaison Officer information-sharing mechanisms in the EU and the systems they have established to collect and transfer information from policing partners outside the EU. The aim of the research is to contribute to the existing knowledge about regional PLO systems, as well as explore the feasibility of a European-wide PLO system.

The researcher previously worked for eight years as Austrian Police Attaché in Georgia from 2007 until 2015, and in 2024 as Austrian Police Attaché in Iraq. Additionally, the researcher conducted a master's study about the common use of EU PLOs. The researcher is familiar with the general role and responsibilities of a PLO working abroad for one EU Member State within the context of a bilateral agreement with the host country. This insider status helped establish trust with interviewees and granted access to PLO networks for conducting the study. During the author's work as Police Liaison Officer for one EU Member State, the question arose as to whether it is feasible to establish one Police Liaison Officer system representing the entire EU in a host country.

To research the question of the possibility of a single EU-wide Police Liaison Officer system, the study focuses on two existing regional EU PLO systems, in particular the Nordic Police Liaison Officer system and the Benelux Police Liaison Officer system, to draw conclusions about the feasibility of a European-wide system. Consequently, a review of academic literature was undertaken for a critical examination of the history of police cooperation and the key elements of cross-border cooperation in general, and police-specific cooperation in particular. The research focuses on specifics such as bureaucratic substructure, processes of information exchange, and the surrounding circumstances, including trust and cultural influences.

These research topics, identified through the literature review, were reflected in the questionnaire created for the interviews with practitioners. Since the Member States of the EU initially neglected the pooling of Police Liaison Officers in the 1980s but have shown increasing efforts to pool resources and foster cooperation in this field in recent years, the research objectives of the study are as follows:

To answer the research question: how do structural, cultural, and trust-related factors influence the effectiveness of Police Liaison Officer systems and information-sharing practices in Europe, and what lessons can be drawn from regional and institutional models for future EU-wide cooperation? To achieve this aim, the research focuses on:

1. Critically reflecting on the development of police cooperation in Europe.
2. Critically evaluating the origins and development of PLO systems in Europe, as well as the current structures and the EU's attempts to control these systems.
3. Critically examining the role, functions, and responsibilities of PLOs, the practical, motivational, and cultural challenges they face, and reflecting on the utility of regional systems.
4. Critically researching established law enforcement information-sharing processes in the EU, the principles of information sharing, and the existing strategies and legal foundations in place.
5. Critically examining bureaucratic aspects influencing PLO systems, cultural aspects in general, and police culture in particular.
6. Critically evaluating the role of trust in information sharing and the theoretical framework of information exchange.
7. Conducting a critical comparison of institutionalised information-sharing organisations: INTERPOL and EUROPOL.

The objectives of the research are:

1. To review literature on international police liaison, with a particular focus on European police structures and information-sharing processes.
2. To conduct an extended literature review on the circumstances surrounding information-sharing processes, including bureaucratic necessities, cultural influences, the role of trust, the theoretical framework, and a comparison of institutionalised information-sharing organisations.
3. To conduct semi-structured interviews to collect empirical data from practitioners involved in regional PLO systems.
4. To analyse the collected data in the context of the existing literature, comparing and contrasting the Benelux and Nordic cases through thematic analysis in relation to a potential EU-wide PLO system.
5. To critically reflect on the evidence for structural change based on the findings of the research, as discussed in the conclusion section.

Methodology represents the organisation of many different activities (Novikov and Novikov, 2013). King and Wincup (2008) argue that the design of any research project is an essential element of its credibility. Before the research commenced, the author already

had general knowledge about Police Liaison Officer work, having worked as an Austrian Police Liaison Officer abroad for nine years. Additionally, the author presented a previous research paper on the topic of the common use of EU PLOs by other Member States. The fact that the author had recently completed an assignment as a Police Liaison Officer in a non-EU country and, based on this experience, had an established network in the PLO community, was considered an advantage and vital to gaining access to gatekeepers for the two regional PLO systems. The aim of the research is to analyse existing EU regional PLO systems based on a case study in order to answer the research question. The research strategy was based on using established networks to gain access to interview partners from both Police Liaison Officer systems.

The research philosophy employed here is a positivist approach with interpretative elements combined. Positivism describes a research method for studies of society based on empirical scientific evidence (Nickerson, 2022). The author further states that positivism utilises a sociological and philosophical approach based on empirical evidence found through experiments and statistics, which informs researchers about how society functions. According to Howell (2016) and his empirical observation on positivism, humanity is governed by cause and effect. Although positivism appears to be a useful tool to study human behaviour, factors such as feelings and emotions are not considered in this context as important and therefore can undermine or mislead a research. Critics of positivism, especially philosophers of science, believe that a disadvantage in research concerns the decision on how to measure variables. According to the critics, the measurement of variables is undertaken in a particular way with prior knowledge, expectations, or commitments, which can at least partially affect the result of the research and undermine positivism (Williams, 2016). Although Émile Durkheim shaped the idea of positivistic interpretation of sociology, he was also a critic of positivism. Durkheim warned that positivism should not be connected to an oversimplification of conceptions of social science or a misjudgement of achievements in the field of social science (Nickerson, 2022).

Interpretative methods in social science distinguish between normative and interpretative paradigms (Rosenthal, 2018). According to the author, a normative paradigm approach assumes that human beings are organisms that react to shared systems of symbols. In contrast, in an interpretative paradigm, humans are understood as acting and knowledgeable organisms. An interpretative approach assumes that humans interacting with other humans continuously create a social reality that constantly changes. For this research, the combination of positivist and interpretative methods was chosen to overcome

the limitations of both systems. A strictly positivist approach would limit the research because data produced would fail to address personal beliefs, experiences, and motivations. With interpretative methods, which include various forms of open interviews, the limitations of a strictly positivist approach can be overcome. The interpretative approach aims to describe the research aim from the perspectives of Police Liaison Officers in their daily work abroad in a foreign country. This method is also capable of investigating unknown and new phenomena. Interpretivist studies aim to understand phenomena, as opposed to providing the rigid explanations that a positivist study would offer. Interpretivist studies can provide in-depth and valuable results; however, the disadvantage is that the subjectivity of the researcher can be carried through the research from data collection to data analysis. To overcome the limitations of both positivist and interpretivist research, a combination of the two methods was selected as the research philosophy for this study on regional Police Liaison Officer systems. With this combined approach, data were collected via interviews, and answers to open questions were interpreted with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding and answering the research questions.

According to MacKay (2007), qualitative searching can help to probe in-depth published literature in limited sources to identify ideas and concepts related to the research topic. Quantitative research results in a large amount of literature, which produces a vast amount of insight not limited to subject-specific publications. For the literature review, a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative searching strategies was applied. Qualitative research was used for researching the Nordic and Benelux Police Liaison Officer systems, as this topic is under-researched and there are limited publications available. Quantitative research was applied for investigating related topics, including trust in information sharing, information sharing between police entities, and the history of information exchange in policing in Europe and elsewhere.

A thorough and systematic search of published literature was conducted. Because the topic of regional Police Liaison Officer systems is not well conceptualised, the search ranged widely; therefore, a mixed qualitative and quantitative literature search was carried out (MacKay, 2007). The literature review concerning publications about regional Police Liaison Officer systems was performed using information technology and began with general search phrases. Because the outcome of this search was not satisfactory, search phrases were broken down into search terms, which were later combined with logical operators such as AND, NOT, and OR until the search was narrowed and focused on the research topic. The research does not focus solely on regional Police Liaison Officer

systems but also includes related topics in conjunction with information sharing in police circles, such as bureaucratic systems and cultural influence.

Another essential factor in the context of information sharing is trust. To establish trust, a suitable environment must be created, supported by legal frameworks and binding regulations, particularly in international settings where Liaison Officers operate. Corresponding published literature was also sought in academic databases. In this context, different theoretical perspectives of international cooperation—such as supranationalism vs. intergovernmentalism, trans-governmentalism, neofunctionalism, intergovernmentalism, and liberal intergovernmentalism—were essential to understand the dynamics of cross-border policing, including bureaucracy and state-centred theories.

Because information sharing also involves reciprocity, the social exchange theory and the information-sharing theory were researched to encompass key factors in the context of information sharing, such as trust, power dynamics, and imbalance of reciprocity. As the study also researches supranational institutions like INTERPOL and EUROPOL and their implemented sharing procedures, it provides a deeper understanding of the challenges of information sharing between different national governments and international institutions. The literature review therefore includes a comparison of these two organisations.

Following an extensive review of existing literature on the Nordic and Benelux Police Liaison Officer systems, bureaucracy, police cooperation, police culture, and information sharing in the EU, as well as cultural and trust-related topics, a concept for qualitative interviews with open questions was developed, along with quantitative aspects that could be numerically quantified (Allwood, 2012). Barberet (2014) argues that quantitative methods are useful for measuring specific values numerically, whereas qualitative methods are suitable for using data sources that are not typically number-based. Qualitative studies are not statistically representative, and they do not allow for conclusions about whether observed frequencies of occurrences are socially relevant. In comparison, the appearance of frequencies is not decisive in determining whether social reality is influenced (Rosenthal, 2018).‘Phenomena which occur only rarely can have deep effects on social and “historical” reality and exercise power over it’ (Rosenthal, 2018, p.24). According to the author, qualitative research is capable of identifying the appearance of phenomena, while interpretative research is capable of understanding influences that place the phenomena in a concrete context.

However, a purely quantitative data collection method was not feasible due to the limited number of people working in regional Police Liaison Officer systems, and the expected data sample was too small to draw useful conclusions. In contrast, purely qualitative data collection methods might miss out on measurable data that can be used for a direct comparison of different destinations within one regional Police Liaison Officer system. After reviewing the pros and cons of available qualitative and quantitative methods, the author decided to use a qualitative method combined with a minimal number of quantitative questions in the questionnaire to collect data and answer the research questions of this thesis, thereby contributing to existing academic work on regional Police Liaison Officer systems (Rudestam, 2015). The decision to use qualitative interviews with a minimum of quantitative questions was based on the experience of the researcher, the limitations due to the total number of PLOs working in regional systems, and the advantages of conducting qualitative interviews, including the ability to clarify respondents' answers. Therefore, a quantitative survey did not appear feasible in terms of producing enough data for analysis. As the author of this research previously conducted a study of the Austrian Police Liaison Officer system in 2015 and had experience with the merits and limitations of research in this field, the decision to undertake qualitative research with open questions and complementary quantitative aspects was made.

Liverpool John Moores University ethics committee assessed the research proposal, evaluated the proposed questionnaires, and finally approved the study under the ethical approval reference number 21/LCP/008. This alone is not sufficient to fulfil the high ethical standards of social research, as the responsibility of the researcher does not end with the approval of the ethics commission. The researcher was driven to seek the truth and acted in a transparent and open manner to establish trust and create a comfortable situation for the interviewees and other individuals involved in the research process (Bulmer, 2008). The implications for the various parties involved, and their rights in the process, were explained, including the right to withdraw consent at any time and the resulting consequences. The promised guarantee of confidentiality for all participants was ensured through a coding system and data security measures.

After approval of the research concept by Liverpool John Moores University ethics committee, test interviews were conducted, and the data collection process for this research commenced with a focus on EU regional Police Liaison Officer systems. The aim was to examine merits and limitations and explore the motivational reasons for regions within the EU to establish a combined Police Liaison Officer representing more than one EU Member State. Research has shown that only two regional Police Liaison Officer systems are

established within the EU. The Nordic Police Liaison Officer system comprises five countries: three EU Member States (Denmark, Sweden, and Finland) and two non-EU countries (Iceland and Norway). These five countries jointly send one Police Liaison Officer to represent them all. The Benelux Police Liaison Officer system includes three EU Member States: the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg, which collectively send one Police Liaison Officer to represent all three. As there are only two regional Police Liaison Officer systems established in the EU, the sampling strategy for this research was necessarily limited.

The research sampling strategy involved conducting test interviews with Police Liaison Officers from EU Member States other than those forming the regional Police Liaison Officer systems under investigation. In case this was not feasible, an alternative sampling method was devised, which included conducting test interviews with Police Liaison Officers from the two regional networks, with the caveat that candidates for test interviews would be chosen from among those based in EU countries. Three test interviews were conducted with two Police Liaison Officers and one member of the Austrian backup office. One Austrian Police Liaison Officer was based outside the EU and one within the EU. As the test interviews were successfully conducted, the fallback strategy was not applied. After each interview, the questionnaire was revised, and unclear or misleading phrases were replaced with more easily understood expressions. In this phase, the questionnaire items were grouped. The questionnaires for backup officers and Police Liaison Officers were divided into three sections. The first section included warm-up questions about general backup office or Police Liaison Officer background. The middle section focused on information exchange within the regional Liaison Officer system and with host countries. The third, or ‘calm-down’, section of the questionnaire included cultural and motivational questions. Depending on the interview partner, each test interview lasted between 50 and 90 minutes. This information was later used to inform interviewees about the estimated interview duration and the time they should allocate for an online meeting.

After completing the literature review, obtaining ethics approval, and conducting sampling interviews, the PLO support offices of all eight countries in the two regional Police Liaison Officer systems were contacted. A contact email was sent to the heads of the backup offices, including an introduction of the researcher, a description of the research, its aims, and an invitation for one member of each backup office to participate in an interview. Members of backup offices were regarded as gatekeepers who could provide access to Police Liaison Officers willing to participate in the research. The email also

included a request to forward the research information to Police Liaison Officers in their respective systems and to ask for volunteers. The research strategy aimed to interview three Police Liaison Officers from each participating Member State, plus one interview with a member of each backup office, to gain a sufficient volume of data to identify merits and limitations of the different systems. Because one of the countries in each system does not provide PLOs for the field, interviews were conducted with eight support officers (one from each country) and three PLOs working in the field from six countries. In total, 26 interviews with employees of the regional systems were planned. Based on prior experience in conducting interviews with individuals distributed across different countries and time zones, a seven-month timeframe was established for sampling, conducting interviews with volunteers from the regional Police Liaison Officer systems, and transcribing the interviews.

This research employed two different questionnaires to collect data: one for Police Liaison Officers and one for members of backup offices. Both questionnaires were thematically similar and began with general background and selection questions as warm-up items. The middle sections of the questionnaires addressed information exchange with the host country and with other participating Member States of the regional Liaison Officer system. This section also included questions about trust and proportionality between host countries and participating Member States. The final sections of the questionnaires included questions on cultural differences among participating Member States and host countries, as well as questions about preparation tools and awareness programmes. Questions regarding the motivational tools of backup offices for Police Liaison Officers and a subjective assessment of the feasibility of an EU-wide Police Liaison Officer system, based on the interviewee's experience, completed the questionnaires.

As the author had no direct access to a pool of interview partners from which to choose, specific requirements for interviewees were defined and shared with the gatekeepers. These requirements included that the interviewee's work location should be outside the EU, and the work undertaken should be Police Liaison Officer duties. After receiving lists of volunteers from gatekeepers of each regional Police Liaison Officer system, the researcher established contact with the interviewees via email. Information about the research, the rights and obligations of the interviewees, and details regarding consent for participation, data processing, storage, and retention were provided. Visiting all interviewees in person to conduct one-on-one interviews was beyond the financial and time scope of this research. Furthermore, Covid-19-related movement restrictions during the data collection period required alternative arrangements. Owing to these research

limitations, one-on-one interviews were not feasible, and the author decided to conduct individual online video interviews with each interviewee instead.

Anonymity of interviewees is a basic concept of this research in order to build trust between interviewer and interviewee. Utilising this concept, the researcher aimed to create an environment in which interviewees could express themselves freely without fearing a negative impact on their future work or career. The research findings represent a snapshot of the research environment that may be vulnerable to a host of influences and to human error, but the researcher has endeavoured to account for as many situational and temporal conditions as practicable, and to represent respondents' views as faithfully and objectively as possible. All participants have been anonymised. Their contributions to this study are identified by a coding system created by the researcher. The code consists of two letters and four numbers. Random letters and numbers were used for each interview participant. Codes assigned to participants are recorded in a log file, which is encrypted with a 256-bit AES encryption key. Additionally, information about the name of the regional Police Liaison Officer system, as well as specific names of host countries or cities, has been obfuscated with general expressions such as regional Police Liaison Officer systems and host country or city of the host country. Interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees, and the original interviews, as well as the original transcribed interviews, are also encrypted with a 256-bit AES encryption key. The same applies to backup data, which are stored in a different location from the original data.

For this research, data management and analysis of a total of 26 interviews were conducted. To ensure the accuracy of the interviews, 25 interviews were conducted via video and one interview via audio recording only, due to internet problems. All 26 interviews were transcribed. Transcribed interview data were then read, examined, proofread, and reviewed. Answers to every single question from one regional system were extracted and merged into one single document. This approach made it easier to analyse individual questions and to find thematic subgroups. Although thematic analysis for academic research is not without disadvantages, this method was chosen by the researcher because of its merits in data analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The data collected from the interviews were thematically grouped according to the questionnaires. General groups were divided into identified themes according to the sub-topics of the original questionnaire. Subsequently, the themes were examined and assessed for their relevance in the context of the research question to ensure the best outcome possible (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Gathered data were constantly analysed, reanalysed, and compared with other collected data to ensure the researcher's familiarity with the topic and the content of

the collected data, enabling recognition of relationships and the drawing of conclusions (Biggam, 2008).

In the section *Data Presentation*, data were divided into general themes and subtopics according to findings from the interview data and themes identified for each regional Police Liaison Officer system, and displayed in a comparative method. The *Data Presentation* section begins with the history and organisational differences of the Benelux and Nordic systems, with the subtopics of working language, evaluation process of PLO host countries, PLO selection process, motivational tools in place, and exit strategies. This is followed by the theme related to PLOs, with subtopics including the role of the PLO, tasks and challenges, and assessment of the feasibility of an EU PLO system. Another theme presented is information exchange, with subtopics on sharing among PLOs of the same systems, EU PLOs, and PLOs from non-EU countries. An additional subtopic in this regard is information exchange with host countries, challenges and obstacles, as well as information reciprocity. This is followed by the identified theme of cultural implication in the context of information sharing, with the subtopic of cultural awareness and cultural preparation. The final identified theme is trust-related, with the subtopics of trust-building and self-assessment of the status of trust gained with counterparts in the host country.

After the *Data Presentation* section, the *Discussion* section of the thesis follows, where findings of the research are discussed according to the structure of the *Data Presentation* section in the context of an EU-controlled PLO system. The *Discussion* section begins by comparing the two PLO systems. This is followed by a discussion of merits and limitations, and best practices are discussed in the context of the applicability of an EU-wide PLO system. The discussion continues with a debate on the different motivations behind each regional PLO system, followed by a discussion about the two compared systems. Further discussion topics include selection processes for PLO host destinations, the role of a PLO in the regional PLO systems, efficiency measuring tools established, and cooperation obstacles within the regional PLO systems. This section is followed by a discussion of recruitment and motivational processes in place for regional PLOs, established exit strategies for PLOs, and a practitioner's opinion on an EU-wide PLO system. The section continues with a discussion about information exchange-related topics, PLO-related duties, and the imbalance ratio in the context of information requests within the different regional PLO systems and with host countries. Subsequently, obstacles associated with information sharing with host countries are debated. This is followed by a discussion of trust-related aspects of information sharing, and the section concludes with a discussion of cultural aspects of information sharing.

Research challenges encountered

Coleman (2016) states that the method of examining police practices on a micro level is capable of identifying procedures and evidence of outcomes on this specific level. However, the author further states that this method seems to have shortcomings when using identified micro-level evidence to influence macro-level outcomes. Another problem with researching police procedures is the validation of outcomes. In this research, validation of the outcome of Police Liaison Officer work in terms of numbers or handled cases was not a priority. However, one question for Police Liaison Officers concerned a rough estimation of the number of cases they had dealt with over the year. This question aimed to provide a better overview of the volume of information sharing undertaken between Police Liaison Officers, host countries, and police entities in their home countries. Case files can serve as an instrumental value tool to justify or withdraw the posting of a Police Liaison Officer to a specific destination but do not provide feedback on the quality or amount of work involved (Thacher, 2008).

Limitations in quantitative and qualitative research methods have, according to Greene (2014a), often divided researchers based on the theoretical substructure of their research and their specifically chosen methods. Acknowledging that neither side is right or wrong, many scholars are convinced that mixed methods support an improvement in the prediction and meaning of research (Greene, 2014a). Due to the limited number of regional PLOs, it did not seem feasible to use only a quantitative method to collect an analysable amount of data. Another methodological limitation of the research is that only two regional Police Liaison Officer systems were implemented in the EU at the time of the research. Both regional Police Liaison Officer systems exchange information based on procedures predating EU regulations as well as those established by EU regulations. Members of the Benelux system joined the EU in 1958, and the last member of the Nordic system joined in 1994. A limitation identified here is the exclusion of EU Member States that joined the EU more recently and EU Member States that do not have a regional Police Liaison Officer system in place.

Another limitation in this research was due to the fact that gatekeepers of the participating Member States having regional Police Liaison Officer systems contacted their Police Liaison Officers for voluntary involvement in the research. The author of this paper was not able to choose from a list of Police Liaison Officers to contact and ask for their contribution. Due to this limitation, no gender balance could be achieved, which in further consequence could affect the result of this research. Video call-related limitations are

based on the circumstance that video calls often showed only the upper body, limiting the researcher's ability to observe full-body language and other subtle, nonverbal cues that enhance understanding in face-to-face interviews. Video calls also make direct eye contact more difficult, since looking at the camera does not align with looking at the participant on-screen, which can weaken rapport and engagement. During video calls there is also a potential for missed nonverbal reactions, like facial expressions or gestures, which may be overlooked due to screen size, lighting, or camera angle, reducing the richness of data derived from nonverbal communication.

Obstacles of the research were primarily connected to technical infrastructure and the circumstance of interviewees living in different parts of the world with different time zones. Interviews were scheduled according to the availability of interviewees, taking into consideration their duty hours. Due to the flexibility of the researcher, all interviews were conducted according to the proposed time schedule. Technical obstacles pertaining to interviews were the existing infrastructure in countries where Police Liaison Officers are based and the associated internet connection. Interviewees received a selection of three possible video interview applications to be used for the online meeting. Prior to the interviews, telephone numbers between interviewer and interviewees were exchanged via email as a backup plan in case an internet interview was not possible because of technical reasons. All interviews were recorded with three different devices to ensure a backup in case one device experienced a technical malfunction. The majority of the interviews were conducted in one session, but sometimes the connection abruptly broke and was later restored in due time, allowing the interview to continue and be finalised.

A strength of this research is based on the circumstance that the author is an insider researcher. Greene (2014b) states that insider research is conducted within a certain social environment, like a social group or an organisation of which the researcher is a member. The author of this research is also a member of the Austrian Police force and has been a member of the Austrian Police Liaison Officer group for nine years. The extensive insight that the author has gained during his time as a Police Liaison Officer and the conducted master study in the field contributed to a good understanding of general Police Liaison Officer work, which is seen as an advantage for this research (Greene, 2014b). Gaining access to gatekeepers of regional Police Liaison Officer systems was achieved through already established personal networks. Establishing trust between interviewer and interviewees was achieved relatively quickly due to the fact that the author of this research is a member of the Austrian Police force. Throughout the entire research, the author ensured that negative perspectives of insider research did not affect the outcome of this

paper and that the research was conducted in a methodologically and ethically sound way. The researcher always acted in a professional and objective manner during the literature review, the data collection, as well as the data analysis. The author ensured that interviewees' answers given to questions were accurately transcribed without any interpretation or influence from the author's prior knowledge. In addition, in cases of ambiguous answers, questions were asked to clarify the response. Other steps undertaken to ensure the credibility of the research not being influenced by insider status included the use of mixed methods of qualitative and quantitative techniques for analysing data (Greene, 2014b). Maintaining contact with the PhD supervisor throughout the data analysis process and practising constant self-reflexivity in considering research consciousness ensured that the researcher's potential biases and assumptions did not influence the research. Research obstacles, including identifying and contacting gatekeepers and interviewees, were resolved through already established personal contacts of the author within the Police Liaison Officer network. Trust-related obstacles also did not occur because invitations were sent from official duty emails, which indicated that the researcher is a member of a European Police force.

In line with the Liverpool John Moores University Research Code of Practice and the guidelines on the responsible use of generative AI tools, I wish to clarify that I have used generative AI ChatGPT solely for language enhancement purposes. This included support with grammar correction, sentence structure refinement, and improvements to academic writing style. At no stage was generative AI used to generate or replace the scholarly content, arguments, or analysis presented in this research. All critical thinking, data interpretation, and academic contributions are my own. The use of AI was carefully limited to augment my writing clarity, without compromising the credibility, originality, or integrity of the research process.

Presentation of Findings of Benelux and Nordic PLO Systems

This chapter presents the findings of the fieldwork in the Benelux and Nordic region. Findings of the research are used to form a best practice model, which is then used in order to estimate the feasibility of the research question regarding the implementation of an EU-wide Police Liaison Officer system. Findings are also used to gain in-depth knowledge from practitioners about information sharing obstacles in their daily work, their motivation for being a PLO, as well as their opinion on an EU-wide PLO system. Findings of both PLO systems are loosely structured based on the literature review structure, and data are presented in a comparative manner. The *Data Presentation* section begins with a short comparison of the history of the creation of both regional PLO systems.

The section continues with a comparison of the organisational differences, such as working language, evaluation of PLO destinations, maintaining contact with PLOs working abroad, recruiting and motivation, as well as exit strategies for PLOs. The *Data Presentation* section continues with a comparison of the role of a PLO in the two different systems and the possibilities of being tasked by Member States in the context of the daily work of a PLO. This is followed by the presentation of data in the form of opinions from interviewees in the context of an EU-established and controlled PLO system. Subsequently, the *Data Presentation* section continues with information exchange findings. This part of the *Data Presentation* is divided into three subsections. Section one presents data regarding information sharing with colleagues of the same PLO system, PLOs of other EU Member States, and host countries. Section two presents data in the context of information obstacles, and section three presents the findings on information sharing reciprocity. The *Data Presentation* then continues with findings in regard to cultural awareness and cultural preparation for PLOs. This section is followed by the presentation of data in the context of trust implications in relation to information sharing. The section *Summary of Data Presentation* completes this part of the thesis.

Differences in motivation for founding and between the two compared systems

Research participants of the Benelux system said that the system was the product of a formal intelligence-sharing agreement between Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. By the terms of the Benelux treaty, the Member States are permitted to share information amongst themselves and with Benelux Police Liaison Officers (BPLOs) working abroad. There are three national liaison offices: one in the Netherlands and one in Belgium. Luxembourg is an active partner and also has a Police Liaison Officer support office, but it does not have its own Police Liaison Officers, choosing instead to use the services of the other two Members. Each office is bound to its own national laws, juridical,

and administrative regulations (Participant IP0131, 2021). In contrast to the Benelux system, participants of the Nordic system stated that their system was the product of the development of the Nordic Police and Customs cooperation, which was implemented in the 1950s by Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Iceland. The Nordic Police and Customs cooperation promotes harmonisation of crime and police laws and procedures throughout the participating Member States and fosters the sharing of information amongst themselves and with Nordic Police Liaison Officers working abroad (Participant IP0115, 2021). There are five national Police Liaison Officer support offices, one in each participating Member State, but only Finland, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway send Police Liaison Officers to host countries abroad. Iceland is an active partner but does not have its own PLOs, choosing instead to use the services of the other four Members. Each office is bound to its own national laws, juridical, and administrative regulations. Participants of both systems acknowledge that differences in how police systems are organised and operationalised in the participating Member States are reflected in their national offices. Though they share many common features, there are differences in how the two offices are staffed, organised, and managed (Participant IP0117, 2021; Participant IP0172, 2021). Participants of both PLO systems stated that although some of the systems and processes differ, in terms of operational tasks, the offices were very similar with minimal variation (Participant IP0115, 2021; Participant IP0172, 2021).

In the Benelux system, the Member States manage all their bilateral police liaison arrangements through this system. At the time of the research, the organisation employed 46 accredited Police Liaison Officers, and the majority of those officers were Dutch. The Netherlands sends out 35 Police Liaison Officers and Belgium sends out 11. To extend the reach of the Police Liaison Officers, all are accredited for multiple countries. The Nordic Member States also manage all their bilateral police liaison arrangements through this system. The organisation employs 32 accredited Police Liaison Officers. Finland provides 11, Norway 10, Sweden 6, and Denmark 5 Police Liaison Officers for the Nordic system. Sixteen of the Nordic Police Liaison Officers are accredited for multiple countries. In both systems, in most cases a single Police Liaison Officer is deployed to a host country, but in some cases, where there is a heavy workload or the interests of a Member merit it, or the significance of the host nation (as a trading or other kind of partner) to a Member State, a second officer may be deployed (Participant IP0108, 2021; Participant IP0120, 2021; Participant IP0121, 2021; Participant IP0138, 2021; Participant IP0124, 2022).

Findings in terms of an agreed working language show that the Nordic Police Liaison Officer system participating Member States agreed to use English as the working

language in the system. It was agreed amongst participating Member States to use English as the working language in the Nordic Police Cooperation to simplify request and response processes within the system (Participant IP0109, 2021). In contrast to the findings of the Nordic system, the Benelux system lacks an official common language, and this can present challenges. Each Member State communicates with the Police Liaison Officer of another participating Member State in their official language, which then must be translated into a language the receiving Police Liaison Officer understands. Though that appears to be a suboptimal method of transferring information, participants stated in this regard that these challenges could be overcome: ‘they and their colleagues had ways to, help one another to make it work anyway’ (Participant IP0122, 2021).

Evaluation processes of PLO destinations are handled similarly in both PLO systems. Each Member State of both PLO systems carries out its own evaluation of existing host destinations and potential new destinations for its Police Liaison Officers. As part of that process, each Member elaborates a list of host destinations according to their national interests (Participant IP0115, 2021; Participant IP0131, 2021). Notably, EU priorities are not taken into consideration when it comes to selecting Benelux or Nordic Police Liaison Officer destinations. Following the evaluation of national interests, participating Member States hold an evaluation meeting of the steering committee. Routinely, this meeting is held in the Benelux system every four years and in the Nordic system annually. At this meeting, Member States negotiate the continuation or closing of existing destinations and the opening of new ones. The decision to open, close, or continue a destination is based on the national interests of one of the Member States (Participant IP0131, 2021; Participant IP0104, 2022). Similar processes are implemented in both systems in the context of keeping contact with PLOs working abroad. Police Liaison Officers working abroad have regular contact with their sending authorities via video chat or duty trips back to their sending country. During those meetings, their performance is evaluated and feedback is provided. In cases of weak performance, the sending authorities can repatriate the officer and fill the position with another Police Liaison Officer (Participant IP0109, 2021; Participant IP0131, 2021).

Both regional PLO systems have in common that there is no single, standardised selection process for the Police Liaison Officer role, neither for the Benelux system nor for the Nordic system. For example, in the Benelux system in Belgium, Police Liaison Officers are recruited from the Federal Police, while in the Netherlands, they are recruited from the National Police. Also, responsibility in terms of criminal police and immigration is divided differently in each office. Whereas the Benelux recruitment process emphasises

rank and established authority – for instance, Belgium only considers high-ranking officers from the Ministry of the Interior, valuing their experience in international policing – the Netherlands takes a more inclusive approach by selecting officers of varying ranks based on skills and relevant experience, especially in investigations. Both countries restrict applicants to active police officers, requiring a higher school certificate and police diploma as minimum qualifications (Participant IP0131, 2021; Participant IP0172, 2021). In contrast, the Nordic recruitment system prioritises a mix of academic background, investigative experience, and destination-specific suitability over hierarchical position. Norway requires academic credentials, such as a Bachelor's degree in Policing or a Master's degree in Law, combined with ten years of experience. In the Nordic system, Denmark focuses on recruitment of high-ranking officers, whereas Sweden and Finland focus on investigative capabilities and destination-specific requirements, selecting officers who can serve as generalists capable of representing their entire police force abroad. Denmark also recruits officers from managerial levels or higher (Participant IP0109, 2021; Participant IP0115, 2021; Participant IP0117, 2021; Participant IP0113, 2022). Similarities found in both systems are that an assigned PLO must have a police background.

While both systems lack formal motivational tools, Police Liaison Officers from both regions find intrinsic motivation in the opportunity to work abroad, gain new perspectives, and immerse themselves in different cultures. Benelux officers are driven by the personal growth and challenge associated with navigating a new environment, as well as the practical problem-solving demands of the role. The same applies for Nordic officers, who express similar motivations. Whereas PLOs from the Benelux system state that 'challenge to broadening your view on police' (Participant IP0107, 2021), 'perfect job to combine your professional skills with an extraordinary personal new challenge' (Participant IP0121, 2021), or 'I like the experience solving problems as a main part of my job' (Participant IP0140, 2021), PLO's from the Nordic system mention, among others, that it is 'fascinating and a challenge to work in in another country' (Participant IP0120).

A significant shared challenge in both systems is the absence of a structured exit strategy for Police Liaison Officers completing their international assignments. In the Benelux system, returning officers often resume their previous roles without utilising the international skills and contacts they have acquired, which is seen as a setback and limits career advancement. Some of the Benelux PLOs see their appointment 'in a foreign country, it is bad for your career' (Participant IP0140, 2021), whereas others try to deal with this challenge and state that 'some consider this as a disadvantage' (Participant IP0107, 2021). Others again from the same system feel that their work abroad is not valued

in their home systems, in the sense that their home administration ‘think I am on holiday 100% of the time and have concerns in the case ‘what will happen when I come back’ (Participant IP0132, 2021). In the Nordic system, officers face a similar struggle. Upon returning, they are typically left to seek new roles independently, often feeling disconnected from changes within their home police force. PLOs from this system are well aware of the fact that there is no orderly exit strategy and state in this regard:

> […] They are talking about career planning and everything like that, but I think it is only smooth talking. This is nothing that is realised. The normal approach when you come to the end of your tour is coming back and being put somewhere where there is an empty office (Participant IP0126).

Another similarity in both systems is that all Police Liaison Officers are considered generalists, meaning that they deal with the whole spectrum of policing issues, even if they can draw on previous specialist knowledge and professional experience (Participant IP0126, 2021; Participant IP0124, 2022). Officers of both systems must adapt to their host country requirements, so that, for example, if a host country does not allow Police Liaison Officers to carry out operational work, then the role becomes more diplomatic. The work then is concerned more with strategic activities than operational information exchange (Participant IP0126, 2021; Participant IP0124, 2022). Participant IP0124 (2022) states that they would describe themselves as ‘a generalist who has to be a diplomat sometimes, and who consults specialists if needed’. Participant IP0135 (2021) argues that the work is a combination of generalist, specialist, and diplomacy:

> I need to have experience regarding international cooperation, I need to be a generalist regarding overall police work. I have to be a diplomat in relation with a difficult country and I am a specialist in context with the complexity of serious crime cases (Participant IP0135).

Similar processes are implemented in both PLO systems in the context of tasking a regional PLO of their system. Once an officer takes up their liaison role, they can be tasked by any of the Member States of the individual system. One of the merits of this is that the sphere of actions is enlarged while the costs for the individual Member State stay the same. Moreover, officers can exploit historical, geographic,and political connections to their own State’s advantage (Participant IP0117, 2021; Participant IP0172, 2021). Both Benelux and Nordic Police Liaison Officers engage in a broad range of criminal investigation topics, encompassing major areas like organised crime, drug smuggling, human trafficking, and financial crimes, including money laundering. The scope of their work requires them to handle complex, case-related information sharing to support investigations across these serious crime areas. In both systems, flexibility and adaptability are crucial, as Police Liaison Officers must also address emerging or evolving crime areas,

such as migration issues and cyber-related crime, which may not have been traditional priorities in their respective countries. Participants of both PLO systems state that the nature of the work is usually determined by the extent to which it fulfils the needs of the Member States. Participant IP0135 (2021) states in this context that his major role was to facilitate the visits of high-level delegations to the host country: ‘around 20 incoming delegations per year of all levels, Prime Minister, Commissioner, Deputy Commissioners’, and ‘to write strategic reports, about what is going on in my host country’. Whereas Participant IP0135 (2021) argues that the nature of his work is primarily transnational organised serious crime, he also states that his major work concerns organised and economic crime. In contrast, Participant IP0108 (2021) reports that his work relates mainly to human and drug trafficking. Likewise, Participant IP0103 (2021) said that his work is mainly related to counter-terrorism and investigations involving freedom fighter.

Opinions of practitioners regarding a common EU PLO system

On the subject of the creation of an EU Police Liaison Officer system that would replace national PLO systems, research participants had different opinions, but similar obstacles were identified from participants of both PLO systems. Whereas Benelux officers working in the support office believe an EU-wide system cannot be achieved or bring added value, the Benelux PLOs working in the field have a contrary opinion on this topic. Benelux support office Participant IP0131 (2021) stated that the task for an EU PLO would be too difficult because of the ‘large scope of those countries in international involvement’. Support office Participant IP0122 (2021) believed that using already established EU sharing platforms would be a better way of developing the PLO network. They did not believe that an EU Police Liaison Officer would add value. Support office Participant IP0172 (2021) believed that the 27 different police systems established in the EU Member States could not be represented by one EU Police Liaison Officer, but they conceded that perhaps an EU Police Liaison Officer system could be effective if it was focused on one specific topic (such as counter-terrorism).

Benelux PLOs working in the field believed that their EU PLO colleagues in the field would help them to present a united front, and five out of the six interviewed PLOs said that an EU Police Liaison Officer system could be achieved. However, the interviewed PLOs also stated that they believe an EU PLO system would have significant limitations and problems. Participant IP0107 (2021) thought that though the EU PLO could be the future of Police Liaison Officer systems, the political and national interests of the EU Member States would present the biggest problems to establishing it. Participant IP0121 (2021) said that they believed that a Police Liaison Officer could work for other

EU Member States if ‘difficulties and differences’ could be resolved. Participant IP0132 (2021) was the dissenting voice of the six. They dismissed the notion on the basis that ‘the questions people ask, in my home country are already different from the questions people ask from the other countries I represent’ (Participant IP0132).

Findings of the research in the Nordic system, on the other hand, show that officers working in the support office believe that an EU-wide PLO system could work, whereas the majority of Nordic PLOs working in the field believe that a holistic EU Police Liaison Officer system cannot be implemented. The majority of officers working in a Nordic support office believe an EU-wide Police Liaison Officer system could work, although with limitations. Participant IP0109 (2021) states in this regard the different legal frameworks of EU countries and associated legal problems, whereas Participant IP0106 (2021) foresees coordination problems of EU-wide Police Liaison Officers with Member State requests. As reasons against the implementation of an EU-wide Police Liaison Officer system, conflicting interests between Northern and Southern European Member States were mentioned by Participant IP0113 (2022), while Participant IP0117 (2021) states the workload and the case-specific nature of work for Police Liaison Officers. Although all Nordic Police Liaison Officers working in the field are able to see the advantages of a common EU Police Liaison Officer system, seven out of 12 interviewed Police Liaison Officers believe that the implementation of such a system is not possible. Participant IP0130 (2021) states that an EU-wide Police Liaison Officer system depends also on the acceptance of the host country, which he believes is not always the case, and that some host countries prefer unilateral cooperation with individual EU countries as opposed to multilateral cooperation with the entire EU as a whole. Participant IP0126 (2021) believes that different legal frameworks implemented in EU Member States and the resulting problems in sharing information cannot be overcome in an EU-wide system. Participant IP0135 (2021) states that cultural differences between requesting EU Member States and the understanding of such cultural diversity by a Police Liaison Officer working for the EU, not coming from the same cultural background as the requesting State, can create difficulties. Participant IP0123 (2022) believes that diverse national interests of EU Member States bear an insurmountable obstacle in implementing an EU-wide Police Liaison Officer system.

Information exchange within RPLO, among PLOs and with host countries

Both the Benelux and Nordic systems for information sharing among Police Liaison Officers employ a structured, multi-layered approach that emphasises trust, organisational similarities, and cultural alignment. Each system's layered structure addresses varying levels of sensitivity and the reliability of partners in information exchange, adapting the degree of openness based on these factors. However, both systems face similar obstacles, particularly regarding data protection laws, procedural inconsistencies, and the legal limitations when sharing information with non-EU countries. In both systems, the first layer of information sharing operates smoothly within their respective networks—Benelux or Nordic Police Liaison Officers—where all types of information, including sensitive case-related details, can be freely exchanged on a need-to-know basis. This layer depends on a high degree of trust and alignment within the respective regional framework, allowing open and secure communication among officers from closely related countries. The second layer extends to trusted Police Liaison Officers from neighbouring EU countries or like-minded nations. Here, information sharing includes general and case-related details but is limited to trusted allies and is still subject to a need-to-know prerequisite. This layer broadens the scope of cooperation but requires careful assessment, as officers navigate different national legal frameworks and data-sharing regulations. The third layer encompasses all other Police Liaison Officers in the host destination, where information sharing is restricted to general insights, best practices, and non-sensitive knowledge. In both systems, this layer maintains a broader professional network but avoids detailed case information, reserving specific operational data for closer partners only (Participant IP0107, 2021; Participant IP0108, 2021; Participant IP0120, 2021; Participant IP0121, 2021; Participant IP0130, 2021).

In both systems, annual meetings play a central role in facilitating information exchange, updates on best practices, and insights into criminal trends. The Benelux system hosts meetings where Police Liaison Officers can share experiences, with Belgium even including foreign Police Liaison Officers based in the country. Additionally, the Netherlands organises annual regional meetings, where backup officers travel to regions with Dutch Police Liaison Officers, further strengthening ties. Luxembourg, though it has no Police Liaison Officers of its own, participates in working groups held multiple times a year in Brussels, promoting cross-border cohesion within the Benelux framework (Participant IP0140, 2021; Participant IP0124, 2022; Participant IP0144, 2022). Similarly, Nordic Police Liaison Officers are called back annually to their home countries for briefings and updates. However, the Nordic system takes a more formalised approach by

also implementing a comprehensive tour for newly appointed officers, introducing them to SPOC staff in each participating country. Additionally, a triennial PTN (Nordic Police and Customs Cooperation) congress brings together all Nordic Police Liaison Officers, PTN leaders, and support personnel, providing an opportunity for wider-scale best practices exchange and inter-departmental networking (Participant IP0108, 2021; Participant IP0123, 2022).

Both the Nordic and Benelux systems require Police Liaison Officers to submit structured reports, including annual and ad hoc reports, aimed at sharing essential information about their host countries. The reporting requirements are similar in both systems, though there are subtle differences in distribution and data-sharing practices. In both systems, annual reports include comprehensive details about the host country, covering topics such as political structures, best practices, and the activities undertaken by the Police Liaison Officer throughout the year. These reports are designed to provide general context and updates for participating Member States and are sent to the support office, which then distributes them to other Member State support offices. This structured, routine reporting serves to keep all involved parties informed on developments within the Police Liaison Officers' jurisdictions. Ad hoc reports in both systems are more reactive and are generated in response to specific, significant events in the host country, such as governmental changes, crises, or unusual criminal activity. These reports are similarly sent to the support or backup office but are distributed more selectively, only reaching interested parties within the relevant Member State rather than all Member State offices. This approach maintains a degree of discretion, ensuring that only pertinent information reaches appropriate stakeholders without overloading the entire network. Both systems exclude personal data from all shared reports, allowing them to be freely shared within the Police Liaison Officer network without privacy concerns. Reports shared in the wider spectrum of the participating network of both systems are focused on non-sensitive information intended for broad distribution (Participant IP0107, 2021; Participant IP0120, 2021; Participant IP0130, 2021; Participant IP0132, 2021).

Information sharing methods differ notably between the two systems. The Benelux system maintains strict control over the flow of information; data collected by Benelux Police Liaison Officers generally stays within the system unless special permission is granted for external sharing, particularly with EU databases. Information is handled cautiously, with legal compliance and bilateral–multilateral separation emphasised to protect jurisdictional integrity. In contrast, the Nordic system leverages a common information-sharing platform, the Customs Enforcement Network Communication

Platform (CENcomm), created by the World Customs Organisation. This platform enables the sharing of general, non-sensitive information among Member States and facilitates quarterly and annual report dissemination. Although the Nordic system encourages sharing information with EU databases when appropriate, technical and logistical challenges often limit this capability (Participant IP0108, 2021). In the context of information request balance within a regional PLO system, PLOs from the Benelux findings span from 'there is definitely more demand from my home country' (Participant IP0131, 2021) and '…we have an increasing number of cases in the recent past from one other participating Member State, but percentage wise, it is not that big' (Participant IP0107, 2021) – to 'it is very little, I have been working here for years but I never had a question from a particular participating Member State" (Participant IP0124, 2022). In contrast to the Benelux system, the request, from participating Member States within the Nordic system are more balanced:

> When it comes to solid cases, like cases, where we actually do police work, I estimate between 70 and 80%, from my home country, but when it comes to adversary activity, I think it's about 50% from my home country and 50% from the other Member States (Participant IP0138, 2021).

Single Points of Contact (SPOCs) play a crucial role in both systems, centralising information flow and providing a support network for Police Liaison Officers working abroad. In the Benelux system, each national SPOC coordinates information requests, forwarding them to specific Police Liaison Officers and ensuring legal compliance. Occasionally, Benelux Police Liaison Officers may communicate directly, but the SPOC remains the primary relay, particularly for inter-country requests. The Nordic SPOCs perform similar functions but have the added responsibility of disseminating general reports and directing specialised information to relevant national units, such as intelligence or cybercrime.

In comparing the Single Points of Contact and support offices for Police Liaison Officers in the Benelux and Nordic systems, several similarities and distinctions emerge, particularly in the ways each system manages information requests, supports officers, and facilitates cross-border cooperation. Both the Benelux and Nordic systems have established SPOCs within each participating country. These national offices serve as centralised hubs for managing communication and support for Police Liaison Officers working abroad. In each system, the SPOC functions as an intermediary, funnelling requests from the home country to the Police Liaison Officer and vice versa. For cases requiring further clarification, both systems' SPOCs play a supportive role by connecting Police Liaison Officers with national investigators or counterparts from other Member States, ensuring continuity and collaboration on complex cases. Furthermore, the SPOCs link their Police

Liaison Officers to international resources like INTERPOL and EUROPOL databases, providing essential support and information sharing in cross-border investigations.

The Benelux system operates in a structured, centralised manner, where all information requests are processed through the SPOC to ensure legal compliance with each officer's national laws before reaching the Police Liaison Officer. This structured approach includes harmonisation efforts, where recurring meetings between Member States are held to standardise practices and continuously improve coordination. Such regular evaluations help streamline practices across Benelux countries, fostering more consistent communication and alignment within the system (Participant IP0107, 2021; Participant IP0108, 2021).

In contrast, the Nordic system shows flexibility in communication and request handling. While some Nordic Member States follow a centralised SPOC process similar to Benelux, others allow for more direct communication between requesting parties and Police Liaison Officers, minimising bureaucratic delays and enhancing processing speed. In one Nordic Member State, for example, requesting officers can directly call any Nordic Police Liaison Officer to make a support request, reducing potential communication errors (Participant IP0107, 2021; Participant IP0108, 2021; Participant IP0126, 2021; Participant IP0132, 2021).

The Benelux and Nordic systems for international Police Liaison Officer information exchange share commonalities in the structure, purpose, and organisation of meetings, with some variations in the role of the EU and in the types of information exchanged. In both systems, regularly organised meetings facilitate information sharing among Police Liaison Officers stationed in host countries. These meetings, typically organised by the Police Liaison Officers or embassies with Police Liaison Officers, vary in formality based on the country and participants' backgrounds. Some meetings follow an agenda and feature guest speakers from the host country discussing topics like counter-terrorism, drug trafficking, and other relevant subjects. Other meetings are more informal, often connected to social events, promoting network-building and open dialogue within the Police Liaison Officer community.

Benelux and Nordic Police Liaison Officers report that these meetings are primarily organised within their community, with limited EU involvement, although in some instances, the EU leads meetings on specific topics like terrorism or migration. The meetings serve a largely general, non-operational information-sharing purpose, covering topics such as cooperation with the host country, crime trends, analysis, and best practices.

Case-related information exchange is typically not included in these larger meetings. Instead, operational or case-specific information sharing occurs in smaller, more targeted meetings, involving only Police Liaison Officers directly linked to a particular investigation. Both systems recognise the importance of separating general information from specific case details to maintain focus and security. The EU has little or no influence in such meetings because they are often organised by LOs serving in the host country or their embassies. On occasion, the EU organises meetings on specific issues like terrorism or migration, depending on the destination, bringing together Police Liaison Officers across the region to discuss these focused topics.

> I think we have a total of 40 people there and we as police officers have our own group and we exchange information quite openly. But the EU has a group as well. It is a mixed group of police officers and political secretaries and in that group, which is led by the new EU chair, you see less information has been exchanged (Participant IP0140, 2021).

> I was one of the vice presidents in that which is called the 'FLOC' foreign Police Liaison Officer community. It was recognised as such as an organisation by the host country and we made more or less social visits when we attended. But within that, there is no real way of exchanging information… of course, when you speak about, for example, European colleague from other EU countries, we discussed about exchanging information, what hub, what legal framework are we using there and so on (Participant IP0157, 2022).

In both the Benelux and Nordic systems, information exchange between Police Liaison Officers and host countries largely relies on established Single Points of Contact, although the application and flexibility of these SPOCs vary across host countries and between the two systems. Both systems prioritise efficient, legally compliant communication channels, adapting to the structure and size of the host country's information-sharing infrastructure.

For Benelux Police Liaison Officers, the default approach is to channel all requests through a designated SPOC in the host country. In some larger or specialised host countries, there may be multiple SPOCs, each dedicated to specific areas like organised crime or human trafficking. When multiple SPOCs are available, the Benelux Police Liaison Officer evaluates the information request and chooses the appropriate thematic SPOC, ensuring that requests are directed effectively. In cases where no SPOC exists, the officer has to identify the most relevant counterpart at a central, regional, or city level to handle the request. This centralised SPOC requirement generally ensures consistency in information exchange and accountability, as all requests and responses are logged within the Benelux system.

Nordic Police Liaison Officers operate within a more flexible, three-tiered system of information exchange based on the host country's setup and the officer's established network. The first tier mirrors the Benelux system, where information must be sent through a designated SPOC. Similar to the Benelux system, larger countries or those with specialised departments may have multiple SPOCs for specific topics, and Nordic Police Liaison Officers must carefully direct their requests to the relevant SPOC. However, in the second tier, some Nordic Police Liaison Officers have more flexibility, using their personal networks and experience to choose the most appropriate contact without necessarily going through a formal SPOC. This approach allows officers to leverage relationships they have built, expediting certain requests by bypassing formal channels when appropriate. The third tier combines both approaches, where certain types of information require routing through a SPOC, while others can be sent directly to chosen contacts. This mixed approach allows Nordic Police Liaison Officers to adapt based on the nature of the request and the relationships they have within the host country, giving them discretion while maintaining formal pathways for more sensitive or legally constrained information.

Obstacles in information sharing

Obstacles in information sharing are common to both systems, particularly when dealing with countries outside the EU or those with different privacy and legal standards. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and bilateral cooperation agreements often create barriers to sharing sensitive data with non-EU countries, limiting cross-border efficiency. The Benelux and Nordic Police Liaison Officers note increased caution when sharing information with nations perceived as less aligned in values or trustworthiness, such as Russia, China, and Iran. Both systems highlight that cooperation is often smoother and more open within EU or Western-oriented countries, with shared values and legal frameworks facilitating easier exchanges, especially through platforms like Europol.

Additionally, both systems demonstrate regional nuances in sharing information within the EU. For instance, Benelux Police Liaison Officers indicate ease of information exchange among their Member States: '… there is a deeper information exchange between the Benelux Police Liaison Officer and myself based on the Benelux agreement"' (Participant IP0121, 2021), while Nordic Police Liaison Officers report similar fluidity with other Nordic countries and trusted EU states, though they face restrictions as non-EU members in some cases.

Both systems indicate closer bilateral cooperation between like-minded EU and Western partners, while exchanges with Eastern European or non-EU countries tend to be

more cautious: ‘I share information with my international colleagues, yes but I do not automatically share with certain colleagues from like Albania and Kosovo. There are only a few trustful partners there’ (Participant IP0123); another interviewee stated in this regard that ‘there are a couple of likeminded trusted partners that we exchange very easily with and that is not a surprise’ (Participant IP0124, 2022), which was confirmed by another participant of the research: ‘besides that, I will say that all Western orientated countries like USA, Canada, Australia, all the European countries, work closely together’ (Participant IP0120).

Both Benelux and Nordic Police Liaison Officers encounter diverse obstacles when sharing information with host countries. These challenges, although varying by host country, reflect common themes around privacy laws, cultural differences, institutional structures, and logistical barriers, all of which complicate effective information exchange. For Benelux Police Liaison Officers, a significant barrier is the political structure and control of the police in certain host countries. Privacy laws in their home countries, especially those that are strict regarding data protection, limit the types of information they can share. There is also concern over how the host country might use or even abuse shared information, as well as specific issues related to human rights. For instance, some Police Liaison Officers hesitate to share information if it could lead to human rights abuses, such as the death penalty, in the host country. Language barriers and the host country’s reluctance or outright refusal to share information also add to the difficulties faced by Benelux Police Liaison Officers in maintaining smooth information flows.

Nordic Police Liaison Officers report similar challenges but highlight cultural differences as a primary obstacle. The need for clarity in communication is emphasised, as open-ended questions, typical in Nordic information requests, are often misunderstood in certain host countries. The disparity in information-sharing infrastructure presents another barrier; in some countries, sensitive information is shared only on paper or through unofficial email systems, which can be unreliable or insecure. The COVID-19 pandemic added a further obstacle, as isolation measures limited in-person meetings, which are critical for building trust and facilitating information exchange in some host destinations. Additional barriers include fragmented police systems, lack of formal information-sharing agreements, and workload constraints that delay host-country responses (Participant IP0107, 2021; Participant IP0108, 2021; Participant IP0120, 2021; Participant IP0121, 2021; Participant IP0130, 2021).

Both Benelux and Nordic Police Liaison Officers predominantly receive information requests from their home or sending countries, creating an asymmetrical

exchange where the majority of requests (50%–80%) originate from the home country rather than the host country. For Benelux Police Liaison Officers, the home-country dominance in requests sits at approximately 80%, with a minimal number of requests from host countries or even from other Benelux countries (Participant IP0107, 2021; Participant IP0121, 2021; Participant IP0132, 2021).

Benelux Police Liaison Officers have proactively addressed this imbalance by implementing compensatory tools to foster more engagement with host countries. These tools include organising joint police projects, supporting the host country in securing EU-funded initiatives, facilitating study visits, and conducting seminars that incorporate Benelux expertise. Additionally, they distribute newsletters to keep host country counterparts updated on the latest developments within the Benelux police framework. However, operational requests from other Benelux Member States remain rare, leaving most Police Liaison Officers primarily focused on their home countries' information needs.

Similarly, Nordic Police Liaison Officers report a predominantly one-sided flow of requests, with 60% to 90% of inquiries coming from their home countries. Nordic Police Liaison Officers use varied compensation tools to build rapport with their host countries, including inviting host police officers to embassy events, organising capacity-building sessions in collaboration with international organisations, and participating in seminars and events hosted by the local police academy. Unlike the Benelux Police Liaison Officers, Nordic PLOs sometimes receive requests from other Nordic countries, though these are typically low-priority cases (Participant IP0120, 2021; Participant IP0126, 2021; Participant IP0138, 2021). For cases with higher investigative value, Nordic countries still prioritise requests through their own Police Liaison Officers stationed in the host country.

Both systems recognise and address the one-sided nature of information exchange through proactive outreach and collaborative events in host countries. However, the approach varies slightly: Benelux Police Liaison Officers focus on EU-aligned projects and structured police initiatives, while Nordic Police Liaison Officers emphasise broader engagement through international partnerships and academic involvement. Additionally, Nordic PLOs experience some intra-regional cooperation with other Nordic countries, whereas Benelux officers report minimal interaction with other Benelux Member States, reflecting a difference in regional collaboration.

Findings related to cultural differences and cultural awareness

Both Benelux and Nordic Police Liaison Officers share a sense of cultural similarity within their respective systems, yet face significant cultural adaptation challenges when working in foreign host countries. Both systems recognise the importance of cultural awareness for effective operation and trust-building in host countries, though their approaches to training and preparation differ.

Within the Benelux system, Police Liaison Officers report that the three participating countries share a similar cultural background, with only minor differences that do not interfere with collaboration. Officers note, for instance, that Dutch counterparts tend to be direct, while Belgians favour more relationship-building in their interactions. Benelux officers state that cultural adaptation becomes challenging when they are stationed abroad. Officers report that host countries often have vastly different values, hierarchies, and operational structures, impacting their work. For example, officers stationed in certain countries face issues like a focus on preserving ‘face’ and a hierarchy-driven approach to police promotions based on seniority or nepotism, which contrasts sharply with the meritocratic values of the Benelux countries. Participant IP0121 (2021) states in this context that not losing face is of utmost importance, and that promotions in his host country are not based on merit but often on seniority, nepotism, influence, or money. The participant states further that he sometimes has difficulties motivating host country counterparts to support his requests in areas that are not considered a high priority in their country.

Most Benelux officers report having received minimal cultural awareness training, and some advocate for more robust preparatory programmes. While one officer had the benefit of studying the local language before deployment, others felt disadvantaged by the lack of formal preparation. Participant IP0121 (2021) states in this context that he would have wished, especially for his host country, to have received some cultural awareness in the form of language training, which would have helped him to understand cultural aspects. Participant IP0140 (2021) has a similar opinion and stated that he did not receive any cultural preparation for his destination and that he thinks this is an issue that needs to be addressed by his sending authorities. Participant IP0124 (2022), in comparison, states that he did not receive cultural awareness training because, before his deployment, he had already undertaken many working visits in the host country.

Similarly, Nordic Police Liaison Officers view their Member States as culturally aligned, with shared values, language similarities, and a similar approach to policing,

despite minor procedural differences, such as whether the police or prosecutors lead investigations. Participant IP0132 (2021) believes that the Nordic countries are quite similar and much the same. He believes further that although the Nordic countries have different ways to do things, they have great similarities in terms of background, culture, way of thinking, and shared values and integrity. Participant IP0140 (2021) believes that there are no major cultural differences in the Nordic countries, only one operational difference, which is that in Finland the police lead investigations and in other Nordic countries the prosecutor leads the investigations.

When Nordic Police Liaison Officers are deployed abroad, they encounter substantial cultural contrasts. They highlight differences in work quality, responsiveness, and openness, particularly in more closed countries where requests may be met with minimal information or bureaucratic delays. Like their Benelux counterparts, Nordic Police Liaison Officers often face barriers in gaining full cooperation from host countries due to these cultural gaps. Participant IP0121 (2021) recognised differences between the host countries he served and his home country, in the sense that his host countries were quite closed systems because of the political leadership. Participant IP0140 (2021) argues in this context that there are many cultural differences between his host country and his home country, especially in response to requests. He states further that his host country answers a request consisting of five questions by replying to only one, without any explanation about the other four. After following up on the remaining questions, the host country might answer another, and so on.

Unlike Benelux, the Nordic system has no specific cultural awareness programmes but relies on mentorship during the handover period between outgoing and incoming PLOs. Some PLOs with host-country connections or language skills gain a degree of preparation through personal experience. Most Nordic Police Liaison Officers express the need for cultural awareness training to aid in smoother adaptation, with some suggesting that such programmes may be unnecessary within EU postings or for Police Liaison Officers with prior cultural experience.

Common challenges arise for both systems in host countries where cultural norms differ markedly from their own. Police Liaison Officers encounter obstacles related to hierarchy, different approaches to law enforcement priorities, and the influence of political structures. For instance, both Benelux and Nordic Police Liaison Officers find that host country priorities, such as a focus on state security or party loyalty, can complicate information sharing, particularly in contexts where human rights or transparency are less

emphasised. ‘That's my job, I am a buffer between those two countries and I have to be aware of cultural differences’ (Participant IP0140, 2021).

Despite the lack of formalised cultural preparation programmes, both Benelux and Nordic Police Liaison Officers agree on the importance of cultural awareness in their roles: ‘I think it is very important to know the cultural differences when you are Police Liaison Officer’ (Participant IP0103). Understanding cultural nuances is critical for effective relationship-building and information exchange in host countries: ‘you need to be aware of the cultural differences to be able to quickly get good results in the host country’ (Participant IP0135). Police Liaison Officers of both systems emphasise the value of on-the-ground experience, personal connections, and adaptability to local norms as essential tools for navigating these cultural differences. Many Police Liaison Officers believe that stronger cultural training would enhance their ability to integrate and establish networks more efficiently in host countries, particularly in culturally distinct environments.

Trust-related aspects of information sharing

For Benelux Police Liaison Officers, trust-building tools include organising working visits with host country law enforcement agencies to establish personal contacts and assess potential partners. They also arrange visits from high-ranking officials from their home Ministry of the Interior when a new Police Liaison Officer starts, helping to establish authority and rapport. Non-work-related events, such as social gatherings, are also important in certain countries to build informal connections with host counterparts.

Additionally, Benelux Police Liaison Officers offer support in host countries by assisting with EU project applications, offering training, and sharing best practices, particularly where information requests are disproportionately from the home country. Most Benelux Police Liaison Officers feel they have earned partial but not complete trust from their counterparts: ‘we do not have their full trust’ (Participant IP0140, 2021). Many officers believe their host counterparts withhold sensitive information, especially in critical cases: ‘I have their trust, but that does not mean that they share all the information with me’ (Participant IP0132, 2021), leading Benelux Police Liaison Officers to build smaller, trusted networks within the host country for more secure exchanges.

Nordic Police Liaison Officers utilise similar trust-building measures, including inviting counterparts to events, offering coffee or lunch meetings, and maintaining an approachable, professional demeanour. They emphasise in-person interactions over emails to build rapport, showing dedication to their role by providing quick, thorough responses and actively participating in meetings. In host countries with an information imbalance,

Nordic PLOs go beyond by providing more information than they receive, planning study visits, or holding lectures at local police academies.

The Nordic Police Liaison Officers also feel they have only partial trust from their host counterparts. Some even face significant obstacles, especially in countries with restrictive laws that hinder intelligence sharing with foreign police officers: ‘they did not trust us and they did not share with us any in-house information. It is a crime in their country to share intelligence with us and also answering requests’ (Participant IP0192, 2021).

Similar to the Benelux system, trust-building in the Nordic system is a gradual process, with counterparts often ‘testing’ officers before they become fully integrated into a trusted network: ‘I would say that it took some time and one can expect that they will test you and if you succeed in that test, you are on a good path to make very good relationships with your counterparts’ (Participant IP0157, 2022).

In both systems, trust remains conditional. While the majority of officers believe they have cultivated meaningful professional relationships, they are acutely aware that full transparency from host counterparts is rarely achieved. Both Benelux and Nordic Police Liaison Officers acknowledge that sensitive information may be withheld, which can create limitations in effective information exchange.

Summary of data presentation

The chapter presents findings from interviews with Police Liaison Officers from the Benelux and Nordic systems, exploring how these systems function and their differences, the designated role of PLOs in the two different systems, their tasks and challenges, their opinion of an EU-wide PLO system, information exchange-related findings, and cultural and trust-related implications in this context. The Benelux and Nordic PLO systems operate based on regional cooperation agreements, facilitating intelligence sharing while adhering to each country's laws. Both systems deploy PLOs abroad to manage bilateral police matters and address transnational organised crime. PLOs in each system act as generalists, covering a range of policing issues while adapting to the operational constraints of their host countries. Annual performance evaluations ensure PLOs maintain strong relationships with their sending authorities. Both systems lack standardised recruitment processes but prioritise experienced police officers. Despite limited structural incentives, officers are highly motivated by the opportunity to work abroad, gain new perspectives, and tackle unique challenges. A key limitation is the lack of structured exit strategies, with many officers returning to their same assignment as before the appointment

to a PLO and struggling with reintegration upon their return. The chapter reveals mixed opinions on a proposed EU-wide PLO system. While Benelux support officers largely oppose it, citing complexity and limited added value, Police Liaison Officers working in the field see potential if legal and procedural obstacles are addressed. In contrast, Nordic support officers are open to the idea, though Police Liaison Officers working in the field are more sceptical, highlighting challenges like host-country acceptance and divergent national interests. Both systems rely on Single Points of Contact to centralise communication between home countries and deployed PLOs. While Benelux enforces a strict policy on SPOCs, the Nordic countries handle this topic more loosely. To share information within the systems, the Benelux uses generally established exchange platforms among the participating Member States, whereas the Nordic system uses the CENcomm platform for broader, non-sensitive exchanges. However, both systems focus on systematic information-sharing practices and both systems have in common that their information demand predominantly originates domestically. Cultural awareness is also crucial, yet formal training is limited. Both systems face common challenges in information exchange, including privacy laws, structural differences, and varying levels of cooperation with non-EU countries. Trust-building is essential, with both systems using relationship-building events, quick response times, and offering training to host countries to foster rapport. Both systems face the challenge that sensitive information is often withheld by host counterparts. In summary, the chapter highlights both shared and distinct challenges in the Benelux and Nordic systems, emphasising trust, adaptability, and the complex landscape of information sharing as critical factors for Police Liaison Officers working internationally.

Discussion

This research study examines regional EU PLO systems, and data obtained through qualitative interviews were analysed and divided into main groups based on topics. Data of this study were then analysed in more depth and subgroups were formed for the various main groups. In the discussion section, the findings of the main and subgroups that emerged from the analysis are discussed in a way to compare the two systems with each other to identify their commonalities, merits, and limitations with a focus on established information exchange procedures and trust-related implementations. In further consequence, the results are discussed in the context of the literature previously highlighted, and in a wider context of police information sharing and the perspective of an EU-wide PLO system. The section discussion starts with a table highlighting key findings of the research as well as important supporting findings to answer the research question. Key findings of this research are in context with the reason for founding regional PLO systems and adaptations made to the system. Followed by key findings of this research in context with information exchange-related topics, information imbalance with host countries, as well as cultural aspects in context with information sharing. The next section in the discussion deals with supporting findings and starts with the PLO host destination selection process, PLO recruitment processes, PLO exit strategies, and PLO efficiency measuring. Followed by the section of findings in context with comparison of opinion of interviewees in context with an EU-wide PLO system, different levels of information exchange, obstacles of information exchange with host countries, and the summary of the discussion.

Table 1 - Key and important supporting findings of this research

Key findings	Benelux System	Nordic System
PLO Systems	Similar to Nordic system	Similar to Benelux system
Information exchange with host countries	Depend vastly on host countries	Same
Information imbalance	To the detriment of host country	Same
Trust Structure	Three layers: internal, EU and like-minded, global	Same

Cultural Preparation	Inconsistent, seen as important	Mentoring, varies by destination, mixed view
Supporting findings of this research	**Benelux System**	**Nordic System**
Selection of host destinations	National interest of individual Member State	Same
Number of PLOs	46, multiple accreditations	32, some with multiple accreditations
Recruitment	No standard; country-specific	Same
Motivation of PLOs	Foreign work, challenge	Same and salary, new perspectives
Exit Strategy	Not implemented	Same
Efficiency Measurement	Challenging, no fixed model	Same issue
Language	No common working language	English as common language
Information Exchange internally and with other Member States	SPOC, support office, national DB access	CENcomm, SPOC, support office, national DB access
SPOC System	Centralised, mandatory via SPOC	Flexible: direct or via SPOC, depending on country
Reporting	Annual + ad hoc via SPOC	Semi-annual and ad hoc via CENcomm
Information exchange practices externally	Three-layer model based on trust	Same
Trust Compensation tools	Trainings, projects, high-level visits	Honesty, representation, events

Key findings of this research

Differences in motivation for founding and between the two compared systems

The Benelux countries started with customs unions in the 1940s and joint trade policy in the 1950s. At the beginning of the 1960s, the Benelux Police Cooperation was implemented as a formal intelligence-sharing agreement between Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg to promote information exchange between the Member States, and later, the Benelux Police Liaison Officer system was added to the cooperation agreement (Advisory Council on International Affairs, 2007). In comparison to the Nordic system, because of the common labour market of the five Nordic countries, it was recognised that the cooperation of these countries needed to be enhanced. The Nordic Police and Customs cooperation was implemented in the 1950s to promote harmonisation of crime and police laws and procedures throughout the participating Member States. Within this cooperation, the objective is to share information between themselves and with Nordic Police Liaison Officers working abroad (Hufnagel, 2013a). This research's findings have shown that the Benelux and the Nordic systems were developed in different environments and based on diverging necessities in the late 20th century. The creation of the Benelux and Nordic systems predates the invention of the EU. These invented solutions are based on specific problems occurring in specific regions and act as compensation tools, tailored to a specific region, because of the lack of existing police cooperation tools in Europe at the time. Some of those regional compensation tools influenced, in further consequence, EU law in the context of police cooperation, as elements of the Benelux police cooperation can be found in the Schengen Agreement (Hufnagel, 2013a). Both regional PLO systems were created out of specific occurrences and the need to react to those occurrences which appeared at the time and the lack of adequate policing tools in place. Looking at police cooperation EU inventions, similar behaviour can be observed, meaning actions are taken reactively and in very few cases proactively, e.g. Treaty of Maastricht, establishment of EUROPOL, police of the Schengen acquis (Davoli, 2024). If we take the example of Migration Liaison Officers (MLO), we can see that the EU had been trying for years to coordinate Member State MLOs until the EU migration crisis in 2015. With the occurrence of the migration crisis, the EU decided to establish its own EU MLO system to be able to react to the crisis and coordinate Member State MLOs.

Findings of this research also show that both systems gained a certain independence between politicians and bureaucrats. Meaning, politicians reacted to emerging needs for cooperation with other police institutions, and bureaucrats, in the form

of professional administrative apparatuses, implemented such systems to be efficient (Peirce, 1981). A key finding of this research is the insight into adaptability, which is one of the biggest challenges administrations face in the 21st century (Kettl, 2000). Depending on the diversity of the systems within the regional PLO system among Member States as well as with host countries, the overarching PLO system needs adaptation. This includes working processes, legal adaptation or compensation tools, and other elements to be able to establish cooperation within the regional system and also with host countries. The Benelux system does not have an overarching harmonisation process in place to foster alignment of the three individual systems of participating Member States on a legal basis, e.g. criminal law, criminal procedure law, and so on. The Benelux PLO system uses, if necessary, compensation tools to adapt to the different individual legal circumstances of their Member States, to make requests and answers fit for cooperation. Meaning, requests for PLOs and answers from PLOs are not sent directly to the PLO or directly back to the requester, but are sent to a SPOC who oversees the legal accuracy of requests and responses. The same applies for adapting to the absence of a uniform communication language. The Nordic system, in comparison, has an ongoing harmonisation process in place, which promotes a permanent approximation of the legal situations of the participating Member States. This, in combination with the use of English as a communication language, fosters fast and smooth exchange of information between requesters and PLOs. An EU-wide PLO system, consisting of 27 individual EU countries with sometimes very different legislation in various areas, would need much more adaptation to an overarching PLO system than the two regional systems. Before an EU-wide PLO system can be implemented, solutions for compensation tools to balance various legal requirements need to be evaluated, and solutions found to ensure that all 27 Member States can use an EU PLO based on a sound legal foundation.

Another key finding of this research is that both systems, if comparing the Benelux with the Nordic system, have many similarities and only a few differences in terms of overarching PLO organisational structure, although the reasons for implementing these systems were different and occurred at different times. The Benelux Police Liaison Officer system includes 46 Police Liaison Officers, all of whom are accredited for more than one country to extend the reach of the system. In comparison, the Nordic Police Liaison Officer system includes 32 Police Liaison Officers, and 16 are accredited for more than one host country (Block, 2010).

The Benelux and Nordic systems also share the feature that once an officer assumes their liaison role, they can be tasked by any of the participating Member States.

Each Member State of both systems recognises the added value of a common Police Liaison Officer system, which enlarges the sphere of action while the costs for the individual Member State remain the same. One of the similarities between the two systems is that each includes one Member State which does not provide Police Liaison Officers. In the Nordic system, Iceland does not send out Police Liaison Officers, and in the Benelux system, Luxembourg does not send out Police Liaison Officers. In both systems, the role of countries not providing Police Liaison Officers is to participate in the evaluation and steering processes of the regional system. That contribution is rewarded through the receipt of recurring reports and updates from different Police Liaison Officer destinations within the systems (Nadelmann, 1993), as well as having all Police Liaison Officers of the system at their disposal in case there is a need for information exchange with one of the foreign destination countries (Participant IP0120, 2021; Participant IP0121, 2021; Participant IP0138, 2021; Participant IP0124, 2022). The Benelux and the Nordic systems have more similarities than differences in their organisational structures. The regional PLO systems of the Benelux and Nordic therefore prove the possibility of having one PLO for different countries which are not entirely aligned and harmonised in legal and organisational terms. Member States in both systems have similar settings in terms of legal and organisational background, which makes it easier for PLOs of the system to represent all Member States. To what extent one PLO can represent Member States with deviating systems and how large the spectrum of deviation can be was beyond the scope of this research.

Although the Benelux and Nordic PLO systems have many commonalities, participants of both systems recognise that there are differences in how police systems are organised and operationalised in the participating Member States, and these differences are reflected in their national offices—such as how the national offices of their Member States are staffed, organised, and managed (Governments of Belgium Netherlands Luxembourg, 2008; Kleiven, 2013). The research reveals that although there are differences within each system, liaison offices of the Member States of the Benelux Police Liaison Officers work similarly, with minimal variations (Participant IP0172, 2021). The same applies for PLOs of Members of the Nordic Police Liaison Officer system (Participant IP0115, 2021). This is unsurprising, as both systems seek to achieve goals such as ‘directly (horizontally), sometimes informally, exchange information across borders and coordinate cooperation efforts mostly in criminal investigations’ (Block, 2010, p.3).

From the research data, a certain standard for PLO systems can be inferred in the context of organisational and bureaucratic setup, information sharing, and other aspects. However, research data also confirm deviations between the two different systems, and in

some areas, no standards at all—e.g. recruitment, exit strategies—which are discussed in detail later in this part of the thesis. However, the findings of this research in the context of a possible EU PLO system suggest that countries with legal and police organisational similarities and differences, assuming compensation tools for these differences are provided, can foster the implementation of a PLO system which may encourage an EU-wide PLO system. Although the data of this research show that different individual states can be represented by one PLO in host countries, which encourages the idea of an EU-wide PLO system, this does not mean that these results can be transferred directly to an EU-wide system. Other factors beyond organisational similarities or differences or certain standards in cross-border cooperation are important for a functional EU-wide PLO system, such as political will, trust, and a shift of power towards the EU, which are discussed later in this part of the thesis.

Information exchange-related topics and PLO main related duties

Data from this research reveal that with respect to Police Liaison Officer support offices, both regional EU Police Liaison Officer systems have in common that every Member State has established a support office and a Single Point of Contact system. The differences in SPOC implementation in the two systems are discussed in more detail later in this section. Both systems share the feature that their Police Liaison Officers can generally access their national police databases from abroad, just as if they were working in their home countries. In cases of information sharing beyond their own participating Member States, the Benelux system uses its SPOC systems. In contrast to the Benelux system, the Nordic Police Liaison Officer system has elaborated instructions for Police Liaison Officers, which serve as guidelines for Police Liaison Officers working abroad and regulate information sharing between participating Member States, as well as reporting requirements from Police Liaison Officers (Participant IP0109).

Because not all participating Member States of the Nordic system are EU Member States, and therefore not every Member State has the same access to EU databases, the Nordic Police Liaison Officer system uses a common information sharing platform called the Customs Enforcement Network Communication Platform (CENcomm) (World Customs Organization, 2023). This information sharing platform is used to share general information, and not specific case-related or sensitive information. In contrast to the Benelux system, the Nordic support offices in some Member States have divergent tasks to fulfil, depending on how the individual Member State has implemented the Police Liaison Officer system.

Similarities of both systems are that the main task for a national support office is backing up the Police Liaison Officers if there are questions and/or needs for clarification in specific national or participating Member State cases. In such cases, the backup office establishes contact with the national investigation unit or with the national investigator and connects them with the Police Liaison Officer. Additionally, national backup offices also serve as a link for their Police Liaison Officers working abroad with regard to access to INTERPOL and EUROPOL databases.

Another commonality identified by this study is the attention to the improvement of the systems. The Benelux Police Liaison Officer system is coordinated and monitored by participating Member States, and regular meetings are held to improve such cooperation. Also, practical inputs from this cooperation are considered and implemented in the individual systems of the participating Member States. This shows that the Benelux Police Liaison Officer system contributes to harmonisation of national organisational practices of participating Member States (Participant IP0131; Participant IP0172, 2021). The Nordic Police Liaison Officer system has a development group in place, tasked with the coordination of the Nordic Police Liaison Officer system. The coordination group meets on a regular basis to harmonise the established cooperation (Participant IP0115).

Both systems have established a SPOC system for their Police Liaison Officers that connects them to SPOCs of other Member States or to other departments of the national police system. The Benelux Police Liaison Officers system uses their backup offices as SPOC, and all information requests are expected to be routed through the national support office to the Police Liaison Officer, and the response will be sent back from the Police Liaison Officer to the support office. Another task for the support office is to ensure, and if necessary, adapt the information requests from other participating Member States so that they are compliant with the Benelux Police Liaison Officer's national legal requirements, to make sure that the request can be lawfully processed according to the Benelux Police Liaison Officer's own country laws.

Data from this study show that, in contrast to the Benelux system, information requests to Nordic Police Liaison Officers can be made in different ways, depending on the Member State. In one Nordic Member State, every request is funnelled through the international desk, which acts as SPOC, whereas in another participating Member State, their SPOC is responsible for establishing contact between requesting parties and Nordic Police Liaison Officers, and further communication is conducted between those two parties. Another Nordic Member State handles requests so that a requesting Police Officer can call any Nordic Police Liaison Officer in the system and make a support request by

phone. The remaining two Member States handle their information requests in a mixed method approach so that requesting parties should funnel their requests through the national SPOC, but give requesting Police Officers the option to directly contact a Nordic Police Liaison Officer as well (Participant IP0115; Participant IP0104; Participant IP0117).

The findings of this research are in line with the outcome of the study on the implementation of the European Information Exchange Model (EIXM) for strengthening law enforcement cooperation, which states that 'while progress made in the past few years is very positive, progress with and a common understanding of the SPOC concept and the choice of channel are hindered by the lack of binding rules in these areas' (Deloitte, 2015). Data of this research reveal that both systems have their advantages and disadvantages. Advantages of a strict SPOC policy are that all information is funnelled through one point in the system, which gives the SPOC an overview of the information flow from the requester to the PLO and back. This practice ensures that information is not duplicated or lost. Another advantage is that similar requests on the same topic can be answered from the SPOC directly, because the needed information is already available, which shortens response times for such requests. In systems where there is the need to ensure that requests comply with the respective legal systems, or where there are no official language agreements for requests and answers in place, like in the Benelux system, a strict SPOC policy is an indispensable necessity. The disadvantage of such a system is the loss of flexibility, meaning clarification and possibilities to contact the PLO directly can support swift information exchange, especially in complex cases, which are prolonged by a SPOC layer.

A SPOC for an EU PLO system could be naturally placed within EUROPOL, since EUROPOL already acts as the information hub for EU police institutions. This solution also has the advantage of interconnecting information with already existing EU databases. Additionally, to the strict SPOC procedure, there should be a solution implemented for urgent and exceptional cases of contacting directly an EU PLO for swift clarifications or in time-sensitive cases. This would give the EU PLO system the necessary flexibility and also utilise the full potential of a PLO system. However, such a system must implement procedures that also have the ability to log such direct requests and their respective answers, to avoid information loss.

In the Benelux system, meetings are implemented annually where Benelux PLOs return to their home country to meet with Benelux PLOs from other Member States to exchange information, experiences, and expertise. In Belgium, for example, foreign Police Liaison Officers based in Belgium from other countries are also invited to such annual

meetings. The Netherlands additionally organises an annual regional Police Liaison Officer meeting. During such regional meetings, backup Officers from the Netherlands travel to a specific region in the world and conduct a meeting with Police Liaison Officers from the Netherlands based in this region.

The Nordic Police Liaison Officer system, in contrast, implemented a tour for newly appointed Police Liaison Officers through all five participating Member States to meet national SPOC employees and to introduce themselves to counterparts in the participating Member States, to facilitate smooth information exchange (Participant IP0113). All Nordic Member States recall their Police Officers annually to their home countries for meetings, updates on best practices, as well as information about newly discovered criminal trends in their home countries (Participant IP0117). Additionally, every three years, the Nordic Police and Customs (PTN) cooperation chairman organises a PTN congress for information exchange with the participation of PTN chiefs, deployment groups, personnel involved in PTN, and all Nordic Police Liaison Officers (Participant IP0109). At this event, Nordic Police Liaison Officers have the opportunity to meet Nordic Police Liaison Officers from other participating Member States and exchange best practices (Participant IP0104), as suggested in the cross-border cooperation in the combating of organised crime, Best Practice Survey No. 5 (EU Council, 2003).

To oversee the information exchange and collecting, as well as ensuring the connection to the sending authorities, Bowling and Bowling (2010) state in this context that the work of a Police Liaison Officer is done ‘within the confines of the management structure of the police force in the Caribbean territory concerned through regular meetings with senior management’. During Benelux and Nordic PLO meetings with their sending authorities, their performance is evaluated and feedback is provided. In the case of weak performance, the sending authorities can repatriate the officer and fill the position with another Police Liaison Officer (Participant IP0109, 2021; Participant IP0131, 2021).

This research data show that recurring online meetings and annual meetings in person are a prerequisite to stay connected with PLOs working abroad. Data of the research also provide evidence that evaluation processes and feedback about the work of a PLO are a necessity in a PLO system. In an EU PLO system, attention should also be paid to ensuring that PLOs know each other and stay in contact, especially when they are working in neighbouring countries. This promotes an exchange of information between two PLOs who know each other in person, and communication between PLOs working in a region can, through such measures, be enhanced. Additionally, meetings could be hosted by EU Member States with a focus on updating all EU PLOs about legal changes as well

as the latest criminal trends discovered in the EU. These meetings could also be used to give PLOs and officers working in the support office the opportunity to meet PLOs working in the field in person.

Participants interviewed for this research from both regional Police Liaison Officer systems gave similar answers in the framework of participating in and information sharing during meetings with Police Liaison Officers from other countries. The organisation of such meetings is mostly undertaken by a member of the Police Liaison Officer community, and there is little to no initiative from the EU. The findings of this research confirm the results undertaken by Block (2010), that the EU has until now not engaged in a more active role when it comes to coordinating EU Member States' Police Liaison Officers abroad. Data from this research also show that the size and the content of the meetings differ in every host destination of the interview participants. Interviewees from both the Benelux and the Nordic systems stated that some meetings have an agenda and guest speakers from the host country, making presentations on counter-terrorism, drug trafficking, webinars, or various other topics. Other meetings are more loosely organised in connection with social events. Research data show that international Police Liaison Officer meetings are a host-destination-specific arrangement and cannot be linked to the regional Police Liaison Officer systems.

Another commonality of Police Liaison Officers from both systems is the experience that, in general, Police Liaison Officer meetings are used to exchange information on a more general level, e.g. general cooperation with the host country, crime analysis phenomena, cooperation problems that have occurred with counterparts in the host country, as well as exchange of information about best practices in the host country. Case-related information sharing is not part of those meetings. Specific information exchange in criminal case investigations is shared in smaller meetings. Such meetings are organised by one of the Police Liaison Officers involved in the criminal investigation information exchange and invitees are only Police Liaison Officers whose countries are linked to the criminal investigations.

Research data of this study have shown in countries where the interviewees reside that the EU plays only a minor role when it comes to coordination of PLO activities. PLOs from the EU could take on a leading role in this context and start coordinating international PLO gatherings in foreign countries. This would give EU PLOs the possibility to influence event agendas according to EU interests. On the one hand, it would also show that the EU has an interest in information exchange with all PLOs, not only EU Member State PLOs, and on the other hand, this gives EU PLOs the possibility to set up networks, establish

contacts and influence, to a certain degree, the information exchange during such meetings according to the interests of the EU.

Comparison of research data of this study regarding information exchange by interviewed participants shows that there is no uniformity within the different systems in how to exchange information with host country authorities. Data from this research show that Police Liaison Officers have to adapt to the host country systems and need to implement the procedures of their host country in terms of information exchange with foreign Police Liaison Officers. The majority of participants from the Benelux system stated that information exchanged with counterparts in the host destinations is predominantly channelled through an established SPOC in the host country, which is responsible for sending and receiving information requests. Depending on the country as well as on the size of the host country's police organisations, there could be more than one SPOC, as some countries have established Single Points of Contact related to specific topics. Depending on the country, there can be a SPOC for organised crime and another SPOC for human trafficking, and so on. In those cases, the Benelux Police Liaison Officer has to evaluate the information request, conduct a pre-selection process and choose the thematically appropriate SPOC in the host country. Only one interview participant from the Benelux system stated that there was no SPOC established in the host country, and it is up to the Police Liaison Officer to identify the appropriate counterpart in the host country to answer the request, which could be at central, regional, or city level. All requests from Benelux Police Liaison Officers are logged in the Benelux system, as well as the responses received from host countries.

Research data from Nordic Police Liaison Officers show that information exchange with host countries can be divided into three information exchange methods. The first method is similar to the majority of the Benelux system, and the information is channelled through one established SPOC in the host country, and all information has to be routed through this specific SPOC. A subcategory in this regard was identified, with the variation that in some host countries, different departments in the Ministry of the Interior also have a SPOC for requests from foreign Police Liaison Officers. Police Liaison Officers must, in this case, send their requests to the thematically relevant SPOC in the host country. The second method identified is the possibility for the Police Liaison Officer to choose the contact to whom the request is sent. The decision about to whom to send a request is mostly based on experiences and established networks of the Police Liaison Officer. The third method in this sphere is a mix of the above-mentioned systems. Certain

requests need to be sent to a designated SPOC, but others can be sent to chosen contacts of the Police Liaison Officer directly.

Comparison findings from this research suggest that information exchanged with counterparts in the host destinations where Nordic Police Liaison Officers or Benelux Police Liaison Officers are based depends on which information is requested, as well as on the information systems established in the host country. The information exchange method with host countries cannot be traced back to the Police Liaison Officer systems, because the information exchange systems vary from country to country, and each host country primarily focuses on its own established systems. Furthermore, it shows that Police Liaison Officers have to adapt to specific established methods in their host countries. Deloitte (2015) argues that the SPOC concept, although fostered by the EU, is not implemented in all EU countries or even high on the priority list of implementations. Research data of this study show that the same can be stated for certain host countries where PLOs from the regional PLO systems are based. A key finding of this research is that information exchange processes depend vastly on established information procedures of host countries, and that PLO information exchange systems of the sending country have only marginal influence in this area.

This will also apply for EU PLOs, and in this context, skills and adaptability of EU PLOs are required to ensure smooth and quick information exchange between requesting Member States and host countries. However, since an EU PLO represents all EU Member States, a uniform information exchange process, which should be made mandatory for Member States, could be introduced and implemented on the EU side. Such a process could be groundbreaking for future information exchange activities among police institutions within the EU. However, a circumstance that should not be underestimated is the diversity of host country systems, which can pose a challenge to standardising processes within the EU PLO system. Also, a centralised information-sharing approach can undermine the principle of flexibility and thus negate a significant advantage of a PLO system. Additionally, the implementation of an EU-wide information-sharing system would require extensive coordination of resources, as well as political will within the EU and the capacity to balance different variations and technological possibilities of established information-sharing mechanisms of EU Member States.

Measuring and comparing the usage and efficiency in terms of usage of PLOs from other participating Member States in the different systems was not an objective of the research. However, according to the participants of both systems, the main information requests come from their home country and depend on the host country, with a certain

number of requests from other participating Member States in both systems. The number of requests from other participating Member States of the different systems varies from destination to destination. Another commonality is that gathered information from neither the Benelux system nor the Nordic system is automatically shared with EU databases.

In the Benelux system as well as in EU systems, ownership of the information as well as the separation of bilateral and multilateral information channels constitutes obstacles in sharing with EU databases (Kartalova, 2024). The Nordic system discovered technical obstacles with sharing their information with EU databases (Participant IP0117). Results of the study on the implementation of the European Information Exchange Model (EIXM) for strengthening law enforcement cooperation point out, in the context of interoperability, that a holistic approach involving EU Member States, EU countries, and EU institutions needs to be taken to enhance the existing information exchange between different entities within and outside the EU (Deloitte, 2015).

As data from this research indicate, the information flow depends on the sending country as well as on the host country, and in the case of regional systems, it is mostly unbalanced to the detriment of the host country. This observation is based on the sending country's predominant interest in information from the host country. From this research, the amount of information exchange flow between EU PLOs and host countries cannot be predicted. However, an influencing circumstance to neutralise the imbalance of the information flow from the sending country to the host country could be that EU PLOs represent 27 EU countries, and therefore a natural increase in host country requests seems logical or can at least be expected. For an EU-wide PLO system, regulations for information exchange need to be elaborated which take EU standards into account as well as data protection guidelines. An EU-wide PLO system must include data security to protect information within the system as well as outside the system, to avoid data security breaches or misuse of data. The advantage of an EU-wide PLO system is that EUROPOL has already implemented such information exchange networks with EU Member States, which could be utilised or amended for an EU PLO system.

Comparison of data from this research on the two systems suggests that Police Liaison Officers deal with a vast array of criminal investigation-related topics. Police Liaison Officers of both systems are considered generalists, and therefore they have to deal with a myriad of criminal investigation-related topics, ranging from case-related information sharing in organised crime, drug smuggling, and human trafficking cases to financial crimes including money laundering. A key finding of the research data of this study has shown that the field of information sharing topics varies from one host

destination to another. Because regional Police Liaison Officers of both systems are considered generalists, they must also be able to handle information sharing in fields which have not been an information sharing priority in the country before, such as migration or the appearance of cyber-related crime. The function of generalists for the Nordic and Benelux Police Liaison Officers is mentioned in the academic literature and is confirmed through the findings of this research (Larsson, 2006; Hoigard, 2011).

For an EU-wide PLO system, a pure generalist system seems not feasible because of the 27 different police systems in the EU. Having knowledge about every single system, as well as all of its variations between the systems, seems unrealistic, and therefore one EU PLO or an EU PLO team cannot represent the entire spectrum of 27 police systems in a host country. Consequently, individual needs assessment and focus must be elaborated for each host destination to define main fields of cooperation interests of the EU with specific host countries. According to the developed areas of cooperation, EU PLOs must have certain background knowledge in these fields to be able to represent all EU countries in a host country. The disadvantage of such a system is that the candidate pool will be narrowed because of the requirement profile tailored to the host country, as well as the inflexibility of the system in terms of covering new emerging crime phenomena in the host country.

Another task which PLOs of both systems have in common is to generate recurring reports from destinations where they have based their Police Liaison Officers. The Benelux Police Liaison Officers produce annual reports and ad hoc reports whenever necessary, and the Nordic Police Liaison Officers create semi-annual and annual reports and, if necessary, ad hoc reports. Both systems use their annual and semi-annual reports to share general information about the host destination country as well as information about the political system, best practices of the destination, and the activities of their Police Liaison Officers throughout the reporting period. Similarities of the compared systems were found in the case of ad hoc reports. Ad hoc reports are written with regard to specific occurrences such as changes in the government or ministers in the host destination, crises in host destinations, occurrences of extraordinary criminal activities, and others. Nadelmann (1993) states in his research that drafting and sending recurring reports to the sending authorities is one of the various day-to-day tasks of Police Liaison Officers. One of the main purposes for PLO systems is to update the sending authorities about events, criminal occurrences, regime changes, and other general information in context with the host country.

Both systems share their annual reports with all participating Member States, the Benelux system via their SPOCs, the Nordic system via CENcomm. Similar processing of ad hoc reports was found in the comparison of the systems. Police Liaison Officers of both systems send their ad hoc reports to their national SPOC. The national SPOC distributes ad hoc reports to interested members of their national system. Ad hoc reports are not automatically shared with all other Member States in the system. Another commonality is that all shared reports with other Member States do not include personal data. The research has shown in this context that case-related files are shared only with entities involved in working the case, and, in the context of general information, not all information is automatically shared with everyone. Furthermore, a distinction is made by national SPOCs in the context of ad hoc reports, and only interested parties are supplied with specific reports. Such a concept of information distribution requires deep and comprehensive knowledge of SPOC employees across the entire spectrum of activities and information needs of a ministry, in order to select only those departments which are interested in certain information. The disadvantage of such a system is that there is a possibility that available information does not reach all concerned parties, e.g. shared responsibilities of a complex topic among two or more departments within a ministry, superficial linking of topics to departments or persons within a ministry, and so on.

Another approach for information distribution could be a conversion from a delivery necessity into a collecting necessity. Meaning, the SPOC could elaborate a daily, weekly, biweekly, or monthly information index of available information the ministry has received, which is made available to everyone. Such information could be saved into a database within the system and made accessible to everyone, with the prerequisite that the information is not classified or sensitive. In cases where the information is sensitive or classified, it is up to the person to demonstrate that the appropriate security clearance level is attained and the need to know for the requested information is applicable. The disadvantage of this system is that information is not addressed personally anymore, and every person has to select the appropriate scope and content at their own discretion. Meaning, before, the information was sent via email and was immediately available. With the collecting system, the necessary information must be selected, and, in further consequence, this information must be accessed from a database, which means that more steps are involved to access information. An advantage of such a system is that there is no flood of all kinds of different emails which may be of little or no use to the recipient.

Research data reveal the necessity for annual, ad hoc, and specific reports created by PLOs. Therefore, the necessity arises for an EU PLO system to also implement a

reporting procedure that satisfies different needs and events with defined topics, interests, and reporting templates, which can then be shared semi-annually or annually with all EU Member States. Additionally, an adequate distribution procedure also needs to be implemented to ensure the flow of information to all EU Member States. The advantage of an EU-wide PLO system in this regard is that, for case-sensitive information exchange, already existing exchange platforms can be utilised or amended, e.g. the EUROPOL information exchange platform. For sharing general information or information on ad hoc events, a specific database could be created, ideally within the information exchange framework of EUROPOL, with nexuses applied to other EU database reports of the same occurrence to provide a complete picture of all available information about an event from more than one reporting entity. Since other EU entities are also reporting about the same specific events, e.g. EU Delegations, EU Military Attachés, EU civilian missions, and so on, each reporting entity has its own views and focus based on their area of expertise. For instance, EU Delegations have a political responsibility in a foreign country, a Military Attaché covers the military component, and an EU PLO is concerned with crime-related information. Having information from different perspectives about the same event can improve the analytical context. A disadvantage of such a system, where information from different interest groups is interlinked, is that it requires a strict reporting procedure as well as precisely defined reporting channels to be able to interlink different information accordingly. Due to the amount of information, anonymisation protocols and interlinking tools need to be applied across different information-monitoring EU entities to avoid misuse or leakage of information. Another disadvantage of this system is that it requires a robust information-sharing environment, which, at this point in time, is not implemented by all EU Member States.

Information Imbalance with Host Countries and Requests within RPLO Systems

In the context of the balance of requests between sending and host countries, research data from this study reveal that both Liaison Officer systems have in common that their PLOs have to deal with more information requests sent from their home countries than from their host countries. The total amount of overall percentages of information requests between home country and host country depends on the host destination. Participants of the Benelux system state the split is approximately 80% from their sending country and 20% from the host country. Participants from the Nordic system put the percentages between 60% to 90% from their sending country and 40% to 10% from their host country (Participant IP0107, 2021) (Participant IP0107, 2021) Participant IP0108; Participant IP0126). Adams, Gill and Fitzgerald (2018) state in this context that

information flow must be a two-way street, and exchanging information is a matter of give and take.

Data from this research suggest that Police Liaison Officers of both systems are aware of the predominantly one-sided exchange of information and, therefore, both systems have developed and implemented similar tools to compensate for this one-sidedness. Police Liaison Officers from both systems use compensation tools such as organising police projects in the host country, supporting the host country when they apply for EU-financed projects, and offering training and study visits for the exchange of best practices. Other compensation tools include actively participating in police events organised in the host country and seminars with participation of experts from the sending country. Additionally, the Benelux system uses the distribution of newsletters with the latest police development of the Benelux as a compensation tool (Participant IP0107, 2021; Participant IP0132, 2021). Since both systems are aware of the information exchange to the detriment of the host country, tools are applied to try to compensate for the one-sided information exchange. The scope and the variety of compensation tools used differ slightly between the two systems. Whereas both systems use professionalism and quick response, the Benelux PLOs also actively support host country counterparts in applying for EU-funded projects.

From this research, it cannot be predicted whether or not an EU-wide PLO system could balance the information flow between requesting Member States and host countries. The likelihood that more information requests from host countries arise is a possibility due to the fact that an EU PLO represents 27 Member States and not only a smaller region. The advantage of having EU PLO standardised information exchange procedures in place is that it improves accountability and could also encourage host countries to engage in a more active role of requesting information from EU Member States. Another advantage of an EU-wide PLO system in this context is the access to vast possibilities of EU support and projects for host countries, which can be used as an incentive for host countries to exchange information more actively or in cases of imbalanced information exchange.

Comparison of data from this research in regard to information requests among Member State countries within a regional system illustrated a slight difference between the Benelux and the Nordic system. Almost all Police Liaison Officers of the Benelux system deal mostly with information requests from their sending country (Participant IP0132, 2021), which also applies to the majority of Nordic Police Liaison Officers. Block (2010) argues, in the context of the Benelux system, that standard requests are usually not problematic, but if it comes to more complex and sensitive requests, the Benelux system

faces serious cooperation obstacles based on different languages, standards, and procedures between participating Member States of the Benelux system.

In comparison, one Nordic Police Liaison Officer stated that he receives more high-quality cases from his own country, but in cases of low-profile requests, the number of requests is equally divided between Nordic Member States who have an interest in the host country (Participant IP0138, 2021). Another Nordic Police Liaison Officer responded to the question about requests from other participating Member States that the requests are equally divided amongst Nordic Member States who have an interest in the host country (Participant IP0103, 2021). Kleiven (2012, p.63) states in this context that 'The Nordic police liaison cooperation is used as an example of successful and effective sharing of liaison officers which gradually developed on an informal basis over the last 30 years'.

A key finding of this research in this context is that standard requests are generally manageable in both systems, but in contrast, for more complex and sensitive cases, the preferred method of requesting information is to send such requests to PLOs from their own home country and not necessarily to a PLO of another Member State in the regional system. Such implemented procedures are a sign of trust and established familiarities among officers of the same system, respectively within national administrations. If findings of this research are applied to an EU-wide PLO system, that would mean that standard requests are manageable, but sensitive and complex cases are not. Such limitations can be avoided if, for each host country, clearly defined work areas for PLOs, which represent the majority of interests of EU Member States, are established, and the EU PLO has some specialisation in each of these areas. This would ensure that even in highly complex cases, the EU PLO can facilitate an information exchange between EU Member States and host countries. To gain trust and demonstrate the necessary skills for sensitive or highly complex information exchange is predicted to be a slow process until requesting entities of EU Member States are convinced that the EU PLO can handle their cases (James et al., 2016).

Trust related aspects of information sharing

An important key finding of this research is that, in the context of information exchange in PLO systems, one of the main foundations of successful operations is based on trust. The analysed data of this research confirm the findings of Banerjee, Bowie and Pavone (2006, p.305), who state that "…trust is often described as monolithic. In fact, trust is multidimensional and multifaceted. Trust can be discussed on numerous levels and there are myriad types of trust relationships." Data from this research show that, in PLO

systems, trust comes in various different forms and at various different levels. It starts with trust relationships within national borders and their respective administrations and spreads out to regional systems. Within this constellation, different levels may be applied, e.g. full trust towards PLOs from one's own system, and a little less trust towards a PLO from another country of the same regional system, or vice versa.

The next trust constellation is between the sending and the host country, which then narrows down to the PLO, representing a regional system, and its counterparts in the host country. On the one hand, established trust between sending and host country facilitates the exchange of information, but does not guarantee it in cases where the regional PLO and its counterpart have not established a workable trust relationship. On the other hand, information exchange on an informal basis can occur in cases where the sending country and the host country do not have a well-established trust basis, but the PLO and the host counterpart trust each other.

Another trust constellation discovered in this research is the relationship among PLOs within a regional system, among EU PLOs, and with PLOs outside of the EU. Applied information exchange layers of PLOs have corresponding levels of trust distinctions. This means the highest level of applied trust corresponds with information layers where all sorts of information are exchanged, including sensitive and highly complex cases. The lowest information exchange layer corresponds with a very low trust level between sharing counterparts. According to Fleming and Wood (2006) and Adams, Gill and Fitzgerald (2018), trust is a two-way process that must be sustained through ongoing effort. PLOs from the regional PLO systems are aware that the request flow is mostly one-sided, and to establish trust with counterparts, compensation actions are implemented to enhance and sustain trust and to create benefits for the host country counterparts.

The comparison of this research data in relation to implemented compensation tools, where the request for information is not balanced to the detriment of the host country, illustrates that the Benelux and the Nordic systems have some similar tools as well as slightly different approaches. Both systems have in common that trust compensation tools are tailor-made for each individual host country. The Benelux system approach includes various actions, such as organising working visits of different law enforcement institutions from the host country to establish contact with counterparts, visits from high-level employees of the home country's Ministry of the Interior to the host country, and organising non-work-related events to enhance connections outside of work. Other compensation tools used by Benelux PLOs include supporting the host country in

applying for EU-funded projects, raising awareness of possible memoranda of understanding between the host country and the sending country, proposing training for host country law enforcement agencies, as well as study visits and offering best practices. All these efforts are part of the tool set of the Benelux PLOs.

The Nordic system approach is also multi-faceted and includes invitations for counterparts to National Day celebrations or other representational events at the embassy, assisting counterparts with their replies to queries, demonstrating the commitment of the Police Liaison Officer to their work, holding meetings in person, attending meetings, being honest, and showing counterparts that their information is used. Police Liaison Officers from both systems acknowledge, through their implementation, the importance of trust-building measures in the context of information sharing (Ben-Gal, Tzafrir and Dolan, 2015).

Data comparison of this study, with regard to self-assessment of trust levels towards and from host country counterparts, differs between the two regional Police Liaison Officer systems. In the Benelux system, only one participant believes that they have the full trust of their local counterparts and vice versa. The rest believe that they have gained a certain amount of trust and that they trust their host counterparts to a certain extent. In the Nordic system, the majority of the Police Liaison Officers believe that they have gained a good amount of trust from their counterparts and vice versa. Four Nordic Police Liaison Officers believe that they have gained a certain amount of trust and that they trust their host counterparts to a certain extent, and one Police Liaison Officer believes that there is no trust between the counterparts of their host destination and themselves. A similarity in this context, in both systems, is that almost all Police Liaison Officers of the Benelux system, as well as all Police Liaison Officers of the Nordic system, believe that not all information is shared with them in certain cases. Schoorman, Mayer and Davis (2007, p.712) state in this context that, ‘Although trust can frequently lead to cooperative behaviour, trust is not a necessary condition for cooperation to occur’. According to Tyler Tom (2003), trust within organisations can be built on different dispositions, such as organisational trust, interpersonal trust, or situational trust.

The data of this research are not meaningful enough, and therefore not conclusive, to make a statement as to whether the Benelux or the Nordic Police Liaison Officer system's trust measures implementation is sufficient to increase or sustain trust between the PLOs and their counterparts. An EU-wide PLO system would have to address trust-related issues on a broader scale than regional PLO systems. Regional PLOs are born out of necessity and have applied trust to participating Member States of the system. In

comparison, an EU PLO system would need to work on trust-building within its own structure—the EU—to achieve a sufficient level of trust for EU PLOs from all EU Member States. From the literature findings in this research on the comparison of INTERPOL and EUROPOL, it can be concluded that participating Member States of established European police institutions do not apply full trust to all other Member States. Findings from the literature review reveal that the preferred modus operandi for sharing in these police institutions, in cases of sensitive and/or case-related data, is bilateral—even though sharing with all Member States is also a possibility. From this behaviour, it can be deduced that the level of trust among participating Member States is nuanced and not automatically applied fully to all others. These findings, when applied to an EU-wide PLO system, mean that such a system must first work on in-house trust-building measures to gain sufficient trust and support from all EU Member States, irrespective of the country of origin of the liaison officer. In further consequence, an EU PLO system must be created that establishes the trust of all Member States in the newly constructed system. This means a robust and tamper-proof PLO system, including information-sharing capabilities, must be created to inspire confidence among all participating Member States.

Additionally, like every other PLO working in a specific host country, EU PLOs must also develop the best trust-building actions to enhance trust between themselves and different host counterparts. A key finding of this research is that, although trust-building measures applied by regional PLOs are tailor-made for each host country, there are also general trust-building measures in place—such as showing professionalism, showing respect, being honest, and others—which could be a good starting point for EU PLOs to begin the trust-building process with their counterparts. Furthermore, EU PLOs could utilise experiences from other EU institutions already established in the host country to gain more trust from counterparts. This research has also shown that trust-building is an ongoing process, and that trust, once given, cannot be assumed unconditionally or applied in all situations or circumstances.

Cultural aspects of information sharing

Compared data from this research show that participants of both regional Police Liaison Officer systems believe that participating Member States share similar cultural backgrounds within each regional system. Although cultural differences are recognised between different Member States in both regional systems, those differences are described as minor deviations, which are not believed to influence or disturb cooperation between the Member States. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) argue in this context that there

is, according to them, a distinct cut between the north-west European and the Euro-Latin population in regard to analysis, logic, systems, and rationality.

Derived from the results of this research, an EU-wide PLO system would have to divide the 27 EU Member States into groups with similar cultural and administrative backgrounds, as well as similar values and only minor differences, which do not interfere with cooperation according to the findings of this study. Such groups would then need to be represented by one EU PLO or a group of EU PLOs, depending on workload, who are also members of this group. This structure, with cultural considerations, could promote a successful implementation of a common EU PLO system.

With regard to cultural differences between the Police Liaison Officer and the host country, similar data were also found in this study. Police Liaison Officers of both systems state that cultural differences depend on the geographical location and the host country itself. Such differences can range from being similar with some deviation to completely different from their home countries. Deflem and Chicoine (2018, p.429) argue in this regard that ‘When police agencies in two or more industrialised democracies collaborate, there may be organisational and cultural differences between them, but they ultimately establish relatively equal partnerships that reflect their similar economic and political situations’.

In the context of established cultural awareness programmes and preparation, findings of this research show a deviation between the two regional Police Liaison Officer systems. Participants from the support office of the Benelux system stated that there are cultural awareness programmes in place, and both countries have tailor-made preparations for their Police Liaison Officers before deployment. However, the majority of Benelux system participants working in the field state that they did not receive a cultural awareness programme in advance of their posting. Only one interviewed participant was given the opportunity to study the language in the host country for one year before starting the appointment. Nordic system support officers stated, in comparison, that although there are no specific cultural awareness programmes in place, mentoring is provided by the outgoing Police Liaison Officer to the newly appointed Police Liaison Officer during the handover, which lasts one to two months, depending on the destination. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) state in this regard that many multinational companies simply apply successful strategies derived from their work experience in their home country abroad, to the neglect of cultural differences.

The Nordic system compensates for the lack of awareness programmes when choosing candidates with a background related to the host country, by letting the Police Liaison Officer decide what education is needed for the future position abroad, which can include arranging visits to the host country as many times as needed, or working together with the foreign affairs institutions of the sending country to give the Police Liaison Officer a general insight into the customs of the foreign country.

Research data from this study reveal that the majority of Nordic Police Liaison Officers received some sort of cultural awareness information. One participant had lived in the host country before and was already aware of the cultural differences. The minority did not receive a cultural awareness programme in advance of their posting.

Research data also show that opinions from participants of the two regional Police Liaison Officer systems about cultural awareness programmes differ. Another finding in this context is that all participants of the Benelux system state in their interviews that cultural awareness is a very important topic in their work, and all of them believe that training in this field would help them to understand cultural differences between the home and host country more quickly. This, in turn, would support them in integrating and setting up information networks in the host country. Research data show that the Benelux PLOs recognise the added value of cultural awareness programmes, which also contribute towards trust building (Bibb and Kourdi, 2004).

The added value of cultural awareness programmes for Police Liaison Officers is shared by the majority of participants from the Nordic system. Only a minority of Nordic Police Liaison Officers believe that a cultural awareness programme should be connected to the geographical location of the posting, meaning that such programmes are not necessary for postings within the EU. The minority of Nordic participants also believe that if a selected Police Liaison Officer candidate already has some form of cultural awareness knowledge, further programmes are not a necessity. Findings of this study indicate that the majority of Nordic PLOs also recognise the advantages of cultural awareness programmes because, as Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997, p.46) state, ‘Transcultural effectiveness is not only measured by the degree to which you are able to grasp the opposite value. It is measured by your competence in reconciling the dilemmas, i.e. the degree to which you are able to make both values work together...’.

A key finding of this research is therefore the acknowledgment by the majority of interviewed PLOs of the value of cultural awareness programmes in supporting the establishment of trust and information exchange with host counterparts. The advantage of

an EU-wide PLO system is that such awareness programmes could be streamlined and made mandatory for all EU PLOs to prevent cultural missteps and facilitate trust building (Zou, Ma and Lin, 2023). Cultural awareness training for EU PLOs should not only focus on cultural differences; such training should also include practical instruction on local customs and expectations. A comprehensive cultural awareness training programme for EU PLOs can foster quick integration into host country customs, as well as rapidly establish trust and enable more effective collaboration.

Supporting findings of this research

PLO host destination selection and role of PLOs

PLOs fill an important gap in the exchange of information between police organisations of other countries because of their flexibility to set up networks with counterparts at different levels within police organisations in a host country, as well as the possibility to receive detailed information for a request which cannot be added into a query mask bound to the strict forms of available EU databases. The detailed information exchange, which in practice is normally achieved only by operating within rather narrow parameters and based on trust, is shared between PLOs and host counterparts and highlights the importance and justification of Police Liaison Officer networks (Bigo, 2000). Bayer (2013) states in this context that the advantage of Police Liaison Officer information exchange is the peer-to-peer network set up on different levels in the host country, which is confirmed by the data of this research. Furthermore, this study shows that the Benelux and the Nordic Police Liaison Officer systems in general share many of the features found in police intelligence-sharing networks around the world, such as a single point of contact for controlling the information flow (Newburn, 2008; Uthmani et al., 2011; Gilmour, 2013), using their liaison officer as a generalist (Nadelmann, 1993; Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior, 2015), and recurring reports written by their Police Liaison Officers to their sending authorities.

The role of the Police Liaison Officer in both systems is considered a generalist position, with the capability to represent the whole spectrum of policing issues of Member States of each system in more than one country (Nadelmann, 1993; Giacomantonio, 2015). In this context, a commonality of both systems is the change of responsibility of the Police Liaison Officer in the case that a host country does not allow operational information exchange. In this instance, the focus of Police Liaison Officers of the Benelux system, as well as of the Nordic system, devolves to more strategic activities (Block, 2010; Participant IP0138, 2021; Participant IP0124, 2022). Based on the data from this research, the role of an EU PLO is best staffed with a generalist police officer. With the backup of

different EU police organisations, occurring specialist problems could be addressed with visiting experts from EU police organisations in the host destination to support the residing EU PLO.

The findings of this research confirm that both systems prioritise the national interest of individual Member States of the regional PLO system in connection with the opening, evaluation, and closing of PLO destinations for the regional system (Bigo, 2000). Discussions during regularly organised coordination meetings are held in the Benelux and Nordic systems in the context of evaluating existing destinations, opening new ones, or closing current ones. In this context, both systems share the characteristic that national interests of Member States are prioritised in decisions regarding the opening, evaluation, or closing of destinations. Research data from this study suggest that national interests dominate the intention and are the driving force in both systems. Although other Member States have some input in discussions about destination status, this rarely affects the final decision.

The national interests of individual nations, even when acting within a network of other countries, are very strong and are also tied to financial expenditures (BBC, 2018). Since, in regional systems, the costs of a PLO fall on the sending state, the considerations of other Member States influence the decision for a destination only marginally. Therefore, regional PLOs are primarily sent to destinations of interest to the sending state; interests of other Member States within the system are seen as additional benefits. Data from this research show that interests of Member States not sending PLOs are considered only marginally. That is, the systems first evaluate internal priority lists within each Member State, and only afterwards are these compared and updated in meetings with all participating Member States. Even if there is little or no consensus with other participating Member States, a PLO destination will be closed or opened based on the national interest of the sending state, as the Member State with the strongest interest mans the post in the host destination. Both systems share the characteristic that EU priorities are not taken into account in these processes (Participant IP0131, 2021; Participant IP0104, 2022). Deflem (2002, p.5) argues in this context that a ‘neo-realist understanding is grounded in the fact that national interests always play an important role in international police strategies, even in those efforts that are driven by supranational concerns or involve international cooperation’.

Another commonality revealed by this study is that both systems send more than one PLO to a host country, not necessarily from the same Member State, if the workload demands it or if national interests justify the presence of more than one PLO (Agrell,

2006). Since the Member State with the strongest national interest mans the post in the host country, the advantage of the regional PLO system for other Member States, including those not sending PLOs, is that their reach is extended without additional costs. The disadvantage is that, even if a foreign country is high on the priority list of a Member State not sending PLOs, but receives a low priority from other Member States, that country will not be assigned a PLO from the system. Only countries with demand for information exchange from Member States that send PLOs will be staffed with a PLO from the regional system.

With this in mind, an EU-wide PLO system could counteract the national interest of individual EU Member States and act instead on the interests of the majority of EU Member States as well as the EU itself, ideally benefitting most EU countries. This would not eliminate the fact that the EU will only man destinations where the majority of EU Member States have an interest, and that certain destinations where only a minority have an interest may fall outside the scope of deployment. To counteract this and prevent Member States from unilaterally deploying PLOs and weakening coordinated information exchange, a quota system could be applied for EU PLO destinations.

However, the EU could initially begin manning destinations where a certain number of EU Member States—not necessarily a majority—have significant needs for information or cooperation, particularly where those Member States do not already have a PLO stationed in those countries. Such an initiative could mark the beginning of an EU-wide PLO system, which could then gradually expand according to the evolving needs of the majority of EU Member States.

An EU-wide PLO system could benefit the majority of EU Member States in general. Only EU threat scenarios, the interests of the majority of EU countries, or a quota-based selection of host destinations should define the system's limits. In such cases, individual EU countries may still revert to their national PLO systems to open destinations aligned with their specific national interests. Even if these instances occur only sporadically, they must be taken into account in the development of an EU-wide PLO system. Mechanisms must be devised to integrate PLOs deployed by individual Member States into the broader EU-wide PLO system to manage and coordinate information exchange involving all EU PLOs and national-level PLOs.

Recruitment, motivation and exit strategies in PLO systems

In terms of recruitment of candidates for appointment as PLOs abroad, findings of this study support the conclusion that neither Police Liaison Officer system has a

standardised recruitment process in place. Recruitment of Police Liaison Officers depends on specific regulations established in individual sending countries. The minimum common criteria for applicants to become a Police Liaison Officer in the Benelux system are a higher school certificate from a public institution and a police diploma. The minimum common criteria for applicants in the Nordic system are experience in investigations, the ability to serve as a generalist in the host country, and the capability to represent the entire police force of their home country. In the Benelux system, one country prefers high-ranking police officers for the position, whereas another prefers officers of various ranks based on skills, experience, and how well they meet the destination's requirements. Zanders (2013, p.36) argues in this context that measures adopted for the Belgian PLO system 'with regard to the recruitment procedure is a striking example of the increased political intervention in this field. It seems more and more that the appointment of a PLO is rather a "gift" than sending the most skilled person at the right place'.

In the Nordic system, one country selects candidates with an academic background in the form of a Bachelor's degree in Policing or a Master's in Law Studies and ten years of police experience. Another country prioritises investigation skills and experience over rank and selects candidates who best match the specific profile of the destination. Another Member State of the Nordic system requires candidates to be at least at managerial level or higher, while another prioritises destination-specific requirements in its selection process.

A mainstreamed recruitment process and training for a PLO system that uses different PLOs from various police systems to represent different Member States in a host country seems essential to developing a unified approach regarding responsibilities, activities, and information-sharing procedures. A transparent and standardised selection process can promote cooperation and solidarity as well as identity building among PLOs in a system because each PLO would have passed the same selection criteria to attain the role (Couto, 2025). Consequently, a unified selection process can also support trust-building with host country counterparts. Research has shown that there is a level of inherent trust among police officers from different police systems. Therefore, a mainstream selection process should favour the hiring of serving police officers with several years of experience over candidates without police experience. Standardising education and procedures also offers the advantage that PLOs can temporarily substitute for colleagues if there is a need to replace a PLO in a different host destination at short notice.

Undoubtedly, there will be no mainstreamed system fitting all the different requirements of all host countries, but with a mainstreamed base or construct of a PLO system, every PLO can make adaptations to establish a working relationship that satisfies

the specific requirements of individual host country systems. An EU-wide PLO system is subject to EU standards in terms of hiring and establishing systems, and therefore there is a need to elaborate transparent and coherent processes valid for all applicants and subsequently deployed PLOs.

Findings of this research have shown that a one-size-fits-all method is mostly not feasible due to the different variations and diverse needs of host country systems. Therefore, a categorisation of host countries could be carried out with consideration given to host countries' infrastructure conditions, general and specific cooperation interests of EU Member States, and other factors. Based on general requirements, destination-specific requirements can then be further defined for each category of host destination. In consequence, a mainstreamed hiring and education system for EU PLOs can be developed with category-specific input, which takes into account the particular requirements of each position to be filled in a host country. Such a strictly defined employment and education regulation would counteract nepotism, though such a system bears the disadvantage of minimal flexibility in terms of switching between different host country categories. However, certain standards need to be established for all categories, as data from this research have shown. Findings of this research advocate that police experience and investigative experience seem to be common factors in both regional PLO systems and should be considered as must-have requirements for promotion to an EU PLO. These pre-conditional skills can foster the trust-enabling process between PLOs and host country counterparts, which in turn could help establish cooperation between PLOs and host countries relatively quickly.

Another finding of this research is that both EU regional Police Liaison Officer systems have in common that neither system has motivational tools nor exit strategies in place for their Police Liaison Officers during their appointment abroad or when their assignment is due to finish. Interviewed participants of the Benelux Police Liaison Officer system stated that their motivation lies in the personal challenge of living and working abroad in a foreign country and in a different cultural environment. Another motivational aspect for Benelux Police Liaison Officers is the learning experience involved in working in an international environment: the challenges of overcoming problems and the demanding nature of the Police Liaison Officer job itself (Participant IP0107, 2021; Participant IP0121, 2021; Participant IP0140, 2021).

Participants of the Nordic Police Liaison Officer system gave similar responses in their interviews and additionally mentioned that they are motivated by the job itself as well as the salary. Other motivational factors mentioned include gaining new perspectives,

building new cooperation, working with counterparts in other countries, facing new challenges, and having the opportunity to acquire knowledge and experience (Participant IP0103, 2021; Participant IP0135, 2021; Participant IP0192, 2021). The data of this research confirm the outcome of a study that aimed to provide an original perspective on international police cooperation by scrutinising how PLOs perform their duties with foreign national police agencies. Lemieux, Chantal and Patrick (2013, p.80) found that 'the main motivational factors were to work with foreign law enforcement agencies, travel abroad, and take on new investigative challenges'.

Neither of the two regional Police Liaison Officer systems has an exit strategy in place for Police Liaison Officers who return after completing their posting abroad, which is confirmed by the research data in this study. This in further consequence does not contribute to the wellbeing of Police Liaison officers, on the contrary ending an assignment puts additional organisational stress on already existing operational stress on PLO's to find a suitable follow up position in the system (Cox et al., 2024).

There is no organised system or mechanism in place to capitalise on the Police Liaison Officers' experience gained in the field or to use their contacts and networks for the Ministry of the Interior. In both systems, it is up to the returning Police Liaison Officer to actively seek an adequate position where they can use the contacts and networks built over the years in the host country. Another finding of this study is that the absence of exit strategies in both systems is mostly negatively perceived by the interview participants (Participant IP0107, 2021; Participant IP0121, 2021; Participant IP0126, 2021; Participant IP0130, 2021; Participant IP0132, 2021).

Since the EU, in comparison with regional PLO systems, has broader possibilities for the reutilisation or promotion of PLOs, to make use of the knowledge and networks developed abroad, the implementation of an exit strategy for PLOs finishing their appointment in a foreign country seems to be a necessary element of an EU PLO system. In an EU-wide PLO system, the motivational aspect of an assignment must be addressed. One possibility would be to establish a PLO career track within the EU, allowing for continuous deployment to different destinations which can be a motivation for a long-term career choice (Cox et al., 2025). This would also incorporate the possibility for EU PLOs to advance and receive further education in various fields to meet the requirements of different host country groups.

Another motivational tool could be the option for a PLO to choose their next destination rather than being automatically transferred, provided they successfully

complete the personal evaluation exercise for the desired position. The disadvantage of this tool is that even if the PLO performs well, their qualifications may not be sufficient for the chosen next position. Other motivational tools and successful exit strategies could include the opportunity for EU PLOs to continue working internationally for EU organisations after their PLO deployment, where they can utilise their acquired knowledge and established networks, for example with EUROPOL or INTERPOL.

Efficiency Measuring for PLO Destinations and Cooperation Obstacles

Another important aspect in this regard is the measurement of the efficiency of EU PLO destinations in terms of cost-benefit analysis, as well as the performance of EU PLOs. Findings of this study suggest that measuring efficiency in the context of information exchange within a bureaucratic system is difficult and multi-faceted. Measuring the efficiency of PLO destinations purely based on economic factors would fall short for several reasons. For example, information that a certain suspect has connections to particular individuals, or was in a certain place at a certain time, may be highly valuable for an investigator dealing with a related case, but have little or no value for a Member State of the regional PLO systems that has no criminal cases linked to that individual. In contrast, information about planned criminal activities in European countries might hold the same value for all Member States in a regional PLO system, as each can then prepare and organise defensive measures against the known threat. With this in mind, a tool for evaluating information must be developed, as the value of information differs depending on the recipient. A method for evaluating this value must be invented and applied consistently.

However, purely economic evaluation tools do not consider political factors, such as demonstrating support to a host country by deploying a PLO there, or maintaining communication between police institutions during times of crisis (e.g. the war in Ukraine or economic sanctions against Russia). Therefore, the aforementioned economic measuring tools fall short when it comes to assessing the efficiency of a PLO system. A more practical approach could be to count the number of requests received by PLOs from participating Member States and compare these results with those of PLOs in similar destinations. This method, however, does not take into account the time or effort needed to process and obtain the desired information. In some simple cases, a PLO may only need to make a phone call. In more complex cases, such as those involving organised crime, the process may require surveillance activities, seizures, and arrests, meaning that obtaining the information involves significantly greater effort (Block and Den Boer, 2013). Yet both

cases would count equally as a single statistic. Thus, the number of requests alone does not reflect the human labour or time invested.

Another method for measuring efficiency could be to rank different activities undertaken by the PLO for other Member States and include an approximate time frame for these activities. The more time-consuming and labour-intensive the activity is, the higher the rank in the list. This would give greater significance to the statistics. Another aspect to be taken into consideration in this context is the host country side, including their implemented infrastructure for answering information requests and their willingness to cooperate with the PLO.

As the discussion about measuring efficiency shows, this topic is a difficult undertaking in bureaucratic systems, and findings of this study reveal that tools applicable for companies in the private sector cannot be transferred directly one-to-one, to a bureaucratic system (Niskanen, 1971; Peirce, 1981). Measuring output or the efficiency of EU PLOs will also be a topic if an EU-wide system is implemented. Therefore, tailor-made evaluation concepts for EU PLOs must be developed to measure the efficiency and/or output of an EU PLO. Since the activities of an EU PLO go beyond those of Member States and regional EU PLOs, such as coordinating, mainstreaming, representing the entire EU, and others, an evaluation system designed for a Member State PLO system or even for a regional PLO system would not meet the requirements to evaluate the efficiency of an EU PLO. Such a measuring tool must be tailor-made for this system and combine elements of measurement tools from both the private and bureaucratic sectors, as well as best practices from the regional and individual Member State PLO systems (Johnsen, 2024).

It would also be conceivable to group host countries in an EU-wide PLO system into certain categories, e.g. purely operational information exchange, diplomatic representation, supporting host countries, and others. Furthermore, for each of the identified categories, a tailor-made evaluation process needs to be developed to truthfully evaluate the efficiency and value of a PLO destination for all EU Member States.

Findings of this study reveal that cooperation obstacles within the regional PLO systems are multifaceted and wide-ranging. These range from different legal bases in one system to a more harmonised system in the other. They also include systems in which all Member States are part of the EU and others where two Member States are not. This part of the discussion focuses on the communication language of the two different systems, since every Member State of each of the systems has its own language, and both systems have applied solutions to solve this information exchange obstacle. Although both systems

use different native languages across Member States, data from this research show that the Benelux and the Nordic systems differ in their approach to this issue. The Nordic and the Benelux systems distinguish themselves in terms of common working language.

The Nordic system agreed on the use of English as the common language during meetings and for communication between the different Member States and their PLOs, whereas the Benelux system does not have such an agreement in place (Participant IP0109, 2021; Participant IP0122, 2021). However, the Benelux system instead uses a tailor-made compensation tool to bridge the language barrier between participating Member States and their PLOs. To compensate for the absence of an agreed communication language, requesters and PLOs utilise their SPOC system or support each other by translating requests and responses into a language understandable to both the requester and the PLO. As Basic and Yakhlef (2015, p.33) point out in their research on collaboration obstacles and success in the experiences of police and border guards in the Baltic Sea Area, a common language enhances cooperation because ‘officers often encountered language difficulties in their day-to-day work when they needed to contact partners in other countries in Europe in general if officers have limited knowledge of English (or cannot understand each other’s first languages)’.

A finding of this study in this regard is that both systems are highly functional despite the language obstacle in the Benelux system, and PLOs from both systems receive information requests from countries other than their own sending country (Participant IP0109, 2021; Participant IP0122, 2021). How much of an obstacle the language barrier constitutes was not an objective of the research and therefore cannot be verified by the data of this study.

A common language used for information exchange enhances the ability to communicate directly and speeds up the process between requester and responder. A prerequisite for this solution is achieving a standard knowledge level of the common language among all personnel working in the system. A tailor-made approach to bypassing the language barrier is more time-consuming if documents must be sent to a translation service, and it also carries the risk of losing information in translation. In comparison, when the person drafting the request or response does not need to consider the subtleties of a foreign language, communication becomes more efficient. Examples from international organisations show that agreement on two working languages for communication has become the standard, e.g. the United Nations, EU institutions, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Academic literature concludes that a common language fosters and promotes information exchange in organisations and among police agencies.

In terms of an EU-wide PLO system, a common language must be defined, as the EU has many official languages and three working languages: German, English and French. Findings of this research suggest that deciding on one language is a necessity for quick and successful communication between entities with different native languages. Alternatively, more than one language could be used for communication between PLOs and requesters. Such a solution bears several disadvantages, such as limiting the applicant pool because applicants must have knowledge of the operational language. If this operational language is French and German, the applicant pool would be considerably smaller than if it were English only. For the EU PLO system, a language framework needs to be elaborated for request procedures, e.g. under which circumstances which EU language may be used, which language is required for requests, whether the response may be in another EU language, and so on. The creation of translation services must also be considered in case one entity does not have proficiency in the language used. This would add another layer to the information exchange chain and could create considerable time delays or increase the possibility of errors in the translation of requests or responses.

Opinions of Practitioners Regarding a Common EU PLO System

Findings of this study suggest that there is no unanimous opinion among officers working in PLO support offices and PLOs working in the field across the two regional PLO systems. Furthermore, the opinion of officers in the Benelux support office differs from that of officers in the Nordic support office. The same applies to PLOs working in the field. Benelux PLOs working in the field hold a view contrary to that of Nordic system PLOs regarding an EU-wide PLO system. Officers in the support office of the Benelux Police Liaison Officer system believe that a common EU Police Liaison Officer system has no added value. Not only would it be too complicated to combine the international interests of 27 Member States, but also that one EU Police Liaison Officer could not represent all Member State police systems (Participant IP0122, 2021; Participant IP0131, 2021). However, they noted that if the EU Police Liaison Officer were given a narrow focus on one police task only, e.g. terrorism, organised crime or human trafficking, then the system could work (Participant IP0172, 2021).

Contrary to this opinion, Police Liaison Officers of the Benelux system working in the field believe that an EU Police Liaison Officer could work. However, they acknowledge that such an EU Police Liaison Officer or group of Officers would face severe difficulties, including political and national interests of Member States, different work cultures in different Member States, and so on. The Benelux Police Liaison Officers further stated that if these difficulties and problems could be resolved, an EU Police

Liaison Officer could represent the future of Police Liaison Officer systems (Participant IP0107, 2021; Participant IP0121, 2021; Participant IP0132, 2021).

In comparison to the opinion of Benelux support officers and PLOs working in the field, employees of the Nordic system have an antagonistic opinion. Officers working in the support office in the Nordic Police Liaison Officer system believe, in contrast to their colleagues from the Benelux system, that a common EU Police Liaison Officer system could be achieved, although with limitations. In this regard, interviewed participants mentioned different legal frameworks, coordination problems with all Member States, conflicting interests of different Member States, and so on (Participant IP0109, 2021; Participant IP0117, 2021; Participant IP0113, 2022).

Nordic Police Liaison Officer participants working in the field recognise the advantage of a common EU Police Liaison Officer system, but the majority, seven out of twelve, believe that a common EU Police Liaison Officer system cannot be implemented for a variety of reasons. These include different legal systems in the Member States resulting in information-sharing problems, host countries' acceptance of one EU Police Liaison Officer instead of several PLOs from different countries, cultural diversity, divergent work cultures in EU Member State police systems, and so on (Participant IP0126, 2021; Participant IP0130, 2021; Participant IP0135, 2021; Participant IP0123, 2022).

Since in this particular case the opinions differ greatly, not only between the different systems but also between the different interview groups, no meaningful prediction can be drawn from the data of this research. However, employees of both systems foresee common and some specific obstacles in the context of elaborating a common EU PLO system. Despite the absence of a unified opinion about an EU PLO system among regional PLO employees, the host country side must also be considered in this regard.

Depending on the host country’s position towards associations of states in general, and the EU in particular, host states could either welcome an EU PLO or reject such a PLO system. Meaning, a host country may prefer to have bilateral agreements with individual EU countries over one multilateral agreement with the EU as a whole. Especially in host countries where the information flow is mostly one-sided from the sending authorities to the host authorities, and the incentive of having relationships with the EU in its entirety is not high, the host country could decide not to allow one PLO representing the entire EU, which could compromise an EU-wide PLO system in that country.

Levels of information exchange in connection with trust

Data from this research show that both regional Police Liaison Officer systems have similar information-sharing practices with other international Police Liaison Officers. The comparison of the Benelux system with the Nordic system shows that information sharing among Police Liaison Officers is similarly nuanced in both systems, and that Police Liaison Officers in both systems have established different information-sharing layers. In both systems, those layers are based on trust and organisational and cultural similarities between cooperating Police Liaison Officers. Nordic Police Liaison Officers state that information sharing on the first layer is well established and that all sorts of information can be, and are, exchanged with Police Liaison Officers of the Nordic system.

The range of information exchange spans from general information and case information up to sensitive information, if there is a need-to-know basis established. The same applies to the Benelux system. Analogous to electronic networks, in the case of trusting PLOs from the same system, according to Bertino and Crampton (2008, p.73), "[a] trust fabric exists among institutions that allows each institution to identify any other institution in the federation and assign to it a trust level'. In this case, PLOs from the same regional network assign the highest trust level to other PLOs from their own network, based on similar processes, systems, and shared values.

Police Liaison Officers of both systems state that the second layer of information exchange is with trusted Police Liaison Officers assigned from other EU Member States or so-called like-minded countries. The range of information exchange on this layer stretches from general information up to case-related information. A prerequisite for this is also a need-to-know requirement. According to Tyler Tom (2003), trustworthiness is one of the strongest components of trust, and trustworthiness is built on the characteristics and actions of the person to be trusted. In the context of the second trust layer of PLOs, other EU Member State PLOs are presumed to share the same or similar basic values, as well as working in systems based on democratic laws, which is acknowledged through EU membership.

The third layer of information exchange includes all remaining Police Liaison Officers working in the same destination. The range of information sharing in this context is limited to general information, best practices, and experiences with host counterparts. Schoorman, Mayer and Davis (2007) state in this context that expertise and trustworthiness, expectations of how another person will behave, and belief in the professional's competence and integrity lead to more or less trust. In the context of the

third information exchange layer, the expectations of regional PLOs from their counterparts are not well developed and remain rudimentary, with a strong influence from the host country's background and its willingness to share information.

Findings from the data of this study suggest that information exchange within the regional system, as well as with counterparts outside the system, is a finely tuned process, and that individual distinctions are made between sharing counterparts based on various preconditions, which leads to classification into one of three information exchange layers. Findings also show that an EU-wide PLO would not automatically have the full agreement of other EU Member State PLOs, especially since they would represent a competitor in the information exchange field. It is also unreliable to assume that EU PLOs would automatically be included in the first information layer just because they represent the entire EU, have shared values, and similar processes in place.

Acceptance into an information exchange layer higher than the general one is not granted automatically, and the necessary trust must be earned. This would require an active contribution from EU PLOs. To be accepted into a higher information exchange layer than the general one, an EU PLO must demonstrate professionalism, transparency, respect, and engagement in organising regular meetings, ad hoc meetings, briefings, and informal gatherings among EU Member State PLOs, as well as all PLOs stationed in the host country.

Furthermore, an EU-wide PLO could proactively organise information exchange sessions for PLOs on specific host-related topics, as well as provide information updates on EU-wide innovations and/or successes in various crime areas. These and other techniques could facilitate entry for EU PLOs into higher information exchange layers, which in return would enable access to information for all EU Member States.

Obstacles related to information sharing with host countries

Comparison of research data from both regional Police Liaison Officer systems suggests that obstacles in information sharing can be divided into common obstacles and host destination-specific obstacles. Common obstacles in this regard include cultural differences and associated difficulties of translating from one cultural circle into another, political situations or political control of the police system, the structure of law enforcement institutions, and incompatibility with or lack of information exchange infrastructure, e.g. sharing via public email or social media platforms.

Specific host destination information-sharing obstacles include concerns related to human rights violations and the death penalty, a general lack of English language

proficiency in the host country, and the reluctance of the host country to share information, even when trust has been established between the PLO and their counterparts but host country regulations prohibit information sharing. Other host destination-specific obstacles are the existence of official information exchange agreements between sending and host countries that are not implemented in practice due to a lack of trust. Additional obstacles include excessive workloads of counterparts and their limited capacity to follow up on requests as well as uncooperative counterparts assigned by the host country to collect and share intelligence with PLO's (James, 2017)

A potential EU-wide PLO system could address some of the information exchange obstacles but not all (Kemény and Tóth, 2022). With a harmonised and standardised PLO information exchange system, obstacles such as uniform training, cultural awareness, and uniform information exchange agreements with different host countries can be addressed. That being said, there are of course disadvantages to such a system. The wide range in host country contexts could mean that overly strict standardisation might overlook local nuances, limiting the flexibility which is frequently required in most PLO functions. Therefore, a balance needs to be found in an EU-wide PLO system between standardisation and flexibility.

Moreover, reaching agreement between EU Member States on common procedures could be complex and time-consuming, especially in light of diverse national interests and legal structures. Obstacles which would still remain even in an EU-wide PLO system could include ethical implications in the context of information sharing with host countries with lower ethical standards than the EU, sharing information with host countries that have divergent human rights implementation from the EU, and addressing technological and infrastructural challenges associated with information sharing with a host country, among others.

Summary

The discussion section of the thesis addressed key findings of this study, such as the different reasons behind the founding of regional PLO systems and their adaptation over time. Other key findings discussed in this section included topics related to information exchange, the information imbalance with host countries, and cultural aspects in the context of information sharing. This was followed by supporting findings related to the selection of host destinations, motivational aspects of PLOs, exit strategies for PLOs, and PLO efficiency measuring tools. Additionally, findings related to the opinions of interviewees about an EU-wide PLO system were discussed, as well as different

information exchange layers of external information exchange and obstacles in the context of information sharing with host countries.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Research

Conclusion

The present research illustrates the main findings of the comparative study of the Benelux and the Nordic PLO systems and critically evaluates their deep significance, as well as highlighting recommendations for future research with the aim of advancing the theoretical and practical aspects in the field of international cooperation. The study conducted a critical examination and researched practices and interacting dynamics which form the basis of successful cross-border cooperation in the field of transnational crime by conducting a thorough, in-depth comparative analysis of the Benelux and Nordic Police Liaison Officer systems. The study is situated within the wider fields of European security studies, criminology, and organisational sociology. The thesis contributes considerably to the understanding of how structural, cultural, and interpersonal actor interaction can promote or prevent effective cross-border cooperation in complex transnational environments.

This research set out to answer the question: ‘How do structural, cultural, and trust-based factors influence the effectiveness of Police Liaison Officer systems and information-sharing practices in Europe, and what lessons can be drawn from regional models for future EU-wide cooperation?’ In doing so, the study positions itself between theoretical development and practical relevance.

A central finding of this study is the remarkable operational accordance of the Benelux and the Nordic systems, despite the fact that their motivational reasons for founding a regional Police Liaison Officer system were different. The Benelux system was established primarily out of practical necessity to share information among participating Member States based on the increased mobility of people in Europe, which later added the Police Liaison Officer component to the existing cooperation agreement. In comparison, the Nordic system emerged from a long-standing tradition of cultural, administrative, and political closeness, reinforced by historical alliance and mutual trust, with the intention to harmonise, which built the foundation for a more formalised and strategic cross-border collaboration. As a fundamental prerequisite, both systems have in common that their governments expressed their desire to establish an information exchange and demonstrated willingness to share information with other Member States of the system. These prerequisites and the application of trust to outside institutions are essential for an information exchange system to function successfully.

Despite these differing trajectories, the present research reveals that both systems have more operational similarities than differences. Both prioritise flexible deployment models, allowing PLOs to cover multiple host countries and to be tasked by any participating Member State. Both have comparable structures of responsibility, typically balancing national interests with regional commitments through coordinated yet decentralised reporting obligations. Importantly, both systems favour the appointment of generalist PLOs—professionals capable of handling a wide range of investigative topics covering their entire police organisation—rather than highly specialised or purely diplomatic personnel, with the option to adapt to host country necessities if necessary. This strategy highlights the importance of adaptability in the context of cross-border cooperation, which is as much a mixture of knowledge and interpersonal skills as it is technical expertise.

This study offers compelling evidence that in preserving effective information exchange, relational dynamics play an important role. While formal legal agreements, bureaucratic procedures, political will, and institutional frameworks provide fundamental requirements, they are insufficient on their own to guarantee cooperation. The crucial factor for effective cross-border information exchange is the ability of PLOs to build and maintain trust-based networks. Trust building applies not only to host country counterparts but also to Member State counterparts in the regional PLO system. A result of this study in this context is that trust is not static; it must be actively earned and cultivated through repeated interactions, mutual support, cultural sensitivity, and professional credibility. This finding aligns with and extends existing theories in criminology and organisational sociology, which emphasise the importance of social capital and network governance in complex, multi-agency environments.

The study also reveals that trust operates at multiple, overlapping levels: interpersonal trust between individual officers; organisational trust between institutions; and systemic trust embedded in broader political and cultural frameworks (Fischer and et al., 2023; Schilke, Reimann and Cook, 2023). Each level can reinforce or undermine the others. For instance, even where information exchange agreements are in place between a regional PLO system and a host country, active information exchange may not occur due to a lack of trust between the regional PLO and host country counterparts. In contrast, information exchange may be conducted on an informal and personal level based on trust between a regional PLO and host country counterparts even though no official information agreements are in place. A conclusion in this context is that sustained cooperation ultimately requires alignment across all three dimensions.

However, the research also identifies persistent organisational challenges within both systems that threaten their long-term effectiveness. Recruitment processes for PLOs remain fragmented and inconsistent, with each Member State applying its own criteria and standards. While a degree of flexibility is beneficial, the lack of harmonised expectations risks undermining professional consistency and operational effectiveness. The situation is similar regarding motivational strategies, as none of the systems has implemented a consistent, well-planned approach. PLOs are largely self-motivated, drawing satisfaction from the intrinsic rewards of their work, the ability to work in an international environment, and occasional financial incentives. Yet there is little systematic support for their wellbeing, professional development, or career progression, creating risks of burnout, disengagement, or loss of experienced personnel and institutional knowledge.

Perhaps most strikingly, exit strategies are weak or entirely absent. Returning PLOs often find themselves reintegrated into domestic policing structures with little recognition of the skills, networks, and insights they have developed abroad. This represents a significant loss of institutional knowledge and a missed opportunity to strengthen national and regional policing capacities through better knowledge management and organisational learning. These organisational vulnerabilities are not merely administrative shortcomings; they reflect deeper tensions in how international cooperation is valued and institutionalised within national police systems. The findings suggest that while operational cooperation has advanced considerably, strategic integration and organisational learning lag behind (Zenk, 2022).

Moreover, the feasibility of establishing a common EU-wide PLO system is fraught with complexity. Although the Benelux and Nordic systems offer promising models, their success is heavily contingent on specific contextual factors: relatively small numbers of participating states, high levels of cultural and administrative compatibility, applied trust, and strong political will. Scaling such models to encompass all 27 EU Member States, with their diverse legal systems, policing cultures, and political interests, would require far greater institutional innovation, political commitment, and relational investment than has been demonstrated to date.

The comparative analysis suggests that a purely technical approach, such as focusing on standardising procedures, creating new bureaucratic structures, or mandating participation, is unlikely to succeed. A common EU-wide system must identify and seek to implement the relational strengths of existing regional models, such as trust-building, cultural alignment, operational flexibility, and professional adaptability. Achieving this at the European level would require not only institutional reform but a rethinking and cultural

shift in how Member States conceive of sovereignty, cooperation, and mutual accountability in the policing domain, as the EU has shown with the implementation of the EU Migration Liaison Officer in the migration domain.

Finally, the research reflects critically on its own limitations. The focus on two successful regional models may overemphasise the possibilities for cooperation and underplay the barriers faced in more politically or culturally fragmented contexts. Moreover, while the qualitative methodology offers rich, nuanced insights, it inevitably limits generalisability. Future research should seek to broaden the empirical base, incorporate quantitative measures where appropriate, and engage more systematically with the perspectives of host country counterparts and supranational institutions.

Nevertheless, the findings presented here offer a robust foundation for rethinking international police cooperation not merely as a technical or bureaucratic challenge, but as a profoundly relational, adaptive, and culturally contingent endeavour. They provide both a roadmap and a cautionary tale for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars seeking to navigate the complex terrain of transnational security governance.

This thesis has demonstrated that effective cross-border policing cooperation in Europe is less a product of harmonised structures and more an outcome of relational practices, professional versatility, and contextual adaptability. By comparatively analysing the Benelux and Nordic PLO systems, it has shown that trust, cultural affinity, flexible operational frameworks, and professional discretion are far more influential in sustaining meaningful information exchange than rigid adherence to formal agreements or institutional mandates.

At the heart of this research lies a theoretical reframing of transnational policing: from a bureaucratic exercise in compliance with supranational norms to a fundamentally relational and adaptive practice. PLOs are not simply bureaucratic intermediaries; they are relational actors who perform complex diplomatic, operational, and strategic tasks across diverse and often fragmented policing environments. Their success depends on their ability to cultivate trust with counterparts, navigate diverse legal and cultural terrains, and exercise independent judgement in balancing national and regional priorities.

The comparison between the Benelux and Nordic systems reveals several critical insights for the broader field of transnational policing. First, both systems demonstrate that operational convergence is achievable even in the absence of full legal harmonisation. Shared professional values, cultural proximity, and mutual trust can compensate for differences in national laws and administrative procedures. This finding challenges the

dominant EU assumption that deeper integration necessarily requires formal legal convergence, suggesting instead that relational and cultural investments can be equally, if not more, critical.

Second, the analysis underscores the fragility of these cooperation systems. While operational practices are relatively robust, they remain vulnerable to political shifts, resource constraints, and organisational neglect. The lack of harmonised recruitment standards, systematic motivational support, and structured exit and reintegration strategies reflects a broader undervaluation of international cooperation work within national police cultures. Without sustained political and organisational commitment, the achievements of regional PLO systems risk stagnation or erosion.

Third, the research highlights the importance of scale and cultural cohesion in cross-border policing. The Benelux and Nordic systems benefit from a manageable number of participating states, relative cultural homogeneity, and a history of political cooperation. Attempting to replicate these models at the EU-27 level would introduce exponential complexity. The sheer diversity of legal systems, policing traditions, political interests, and cultural norms within the EU presents formidable obstacles to the creation of a genuinely unified PLO framework.

Nonetheless, the findings also point towards pragmatic pathways for progress. Rather than striving for immediate, full-scale integration, the EU could pursue incremental, voluntary models based on existing trust networks among willing Member States. Pilot projects, sub-regional initiatives, and flexible governance structures could provide stepping stones towards broader cooperation. Importantly, such models would need to prioritise relational infrastructure, including trust-building activities, cultural competence training, and professional networking opportunities, as much as formal legal and administrative arrangements.

Beyond their immediate policy relevance, these findings have broader theoretical implications. They contribute to ongoing debates in criminology, organisational sociology, and public administration about the role of networks, trust, and informal practices in complex governance environments. They support emerging critiques of ‘command-and-control’ models of international cooperation, instead aligning with perspectives that emphasise adaptability, negotiation, and relational work as central to effective governance.

The research also highlights critical methodological lessons. Studying cross-border policing requires attention not only to formal structures and official discourses but also to the everyday practices, informal networks, and tacit knowledge that underpin operational

reality. Future research in this field must continue to integrate qualitative, practice-oriented approaches that capture the lived experiences of those working at the coalface of transnational cooperation.

At the same time, the study acknowledges its own limitations. By focusing on successful models, it risks underestimating the difficulties faced in less cohesive regions or politically strained contexts. Additionally, the reliance on interviews with PLOs and associated actors inevitably reflects their perspectives, potentially underrepresenting the views of other stakeholders such as host country agencies or supranational bodies. Expanding the range of perspectives and case studies in future research would strengthen the generalisability and robustness of the findings.

In conclusion, this thesis argues that the future of cross-border police cooperation in Europe will depend not on technocratic solutions or legalistic harmonisation, but on the cultivation of trust, flexibility, and cultural intelligence. It calls for a reconceptualisation of international policing as a dynamic, relational, and negotiated practice; one that acknowledges the centrality of human agency, professional judgement, and adaptive governance in addressing the complex challenges of transnational crime and security.

The lessons drawn from the Benelux and Nordic experiences provide both inspiration and caution. They show what is possible when trust, professionalism, and cultural affinity align. But they also reveal the vulnerabilities that persist when organisational support structures are weak and when political will waivers. For policymakers, practitioners, and scholars alike, these insights offer a roadmap for strengthening transnational policing cooperation: one that is grounded not only in law and policy but in the everyday practices of trust, adaptability, and relational work that ultimately sustain security in an interconnected world.

Recommendations for future research

Building on the findings and reflections developed in this thesis, it is clear that several critical areas warrant further scholarly attention. Future research should not only seek to validate or extend the insights presented here but also deepen the understanding of the complex, evolving dynamics of transnational policing cooperation in an increasingly fragmented and contested international environment.

1. Comparative case studies of other regional models

Future research should expand the empirical base by undertaking comparative studies of other regional policing cooperation models within and beyond Europe.

Examples include the Baltic States' cooperation mechanisms, the Visegrád Group, Mediterranean partnerships, and intergovernmental security collaborations outside the EU framework, such as in Southeast Asia or Africa. Such comparative studies would help ascertain the extent to which the findings from the Benelux and Nordic contexts are generalisable or context-specific. They would also provide richer insight into how different political histories, levels of trust, administrative cultures, and security challenges shape the success or failure of transnational policing efforts. Cross-regional comparison could reveal critical thresholds for cooperation: how much cultural, legal, and political divergence can be accommodated before trust and operational effectiveness erode. Moreover, comparative work could contribute to theory-building by identifying common patterns, contextual variables, and divergent trajectories, offering a more nuanced understanding of the conditions under which cross-border police cooperation flourishes or falters.

2. Longitudinal studies on trust-building in transnational policing

While this thesis highlights the centrality of trust in sustaining effective cross-border cooperation, trust is dynamic rather than static. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to track the evolution of trust relationships over time, exploring how they are built, maintained, strained, or broken. Such studies could examine how major political events (e.g., Brexit, shifts in EU leadership, security crises) impact trust at both interpersonal and institutional levels. They could also investigate how the frequent rotation of personnel, changes in operational priorities, or resource constraints affect relational stability. Understanding the temporal dynamics of trust would offer valuable insights into the resilience of cross-border cooperation arrangements and inform the design of more sustainable trust-building strategies.

3. Organisational learning and knowledge transfer

The research reveals a significant organisational blind spot: the failure to systematically capture and reintegrate the knowledge and networks accumulated by returning PLOs. Future research should explore best practices for institutionalising learning from international deployments. Studies could examine how different police organisations (both within and outside Europe) manage knowledge transfer from liaison officers, military attachés, or diplomats. Research could identify barriers to effective knowledge capture—such as hierarchical inertia, lack of incentives, or operational silos—and propose strategies to overcome them. Improving organisational learning is not just an internal administrative concern; it is vital for enhancing the collective intelligence and adaptive capacity of transnational policing systems (Staller, Koerner and et al., 2022).

4. Impact of cultural competence training on operational effectiveness

While the importance of cultural competence is widely acknowledged, there is limited empirical evidence on its actual impact on PLO effectiveness. Future research should critically evaluate whether and how cultural awareness training influences operational outcomes. Such studies could employ mixed-methods designs, combining surveys, interviews, and case studies to assess changes in PLOs' relational abilities, trust-building capacities, and overall mission success. They could also explore which training formats (e.g. immersive experiences, language training, cultural briefings) are most effective. By establishing a clearer evidence base, future research could inform the design of more targeted, practical, and impactful cultural competence programmes for international police cooperation contexts.

5. Feasibility studies for pilot EU PLO systems

Given the political and operational challenges identified in this research, it would be prudent to approach the creation of an EU-wide PLO system incrementally. Future research should design, implement, and evaluate pilot projects involving a subset of willing Member States. Such studies should rigorously assess legal frameworks, governance models, operational protocols, and relational practices within the pilot initiatives. They should also explore mechanisms for scaling successful pilots without sacrificing flexibility, trust, or Member State ownership. Feasibility studies would provide a crucial empirical foundation for informed policymaking, reducing the risks of politically symbolic but operationally ineffective initiatives.

6. Analysis of informal information-sharing practices

Informal practices play a critical yet under-researched role in international policing. Future research should delve deeper into how informal networks are built, sustained, and leveraged alongside formal institutional arrangements. Ethnographic methods, social network analysis, and in-depth case studies could reveal how informal exchanges operate, what risks and benefits they entail, and how they interact with formal systems. Understanding these dynamics would help policymakers strike a balance between promoting flexibility and ensuring accountability. Moreover, research should examine how informal practices are affected by broader shifts in organisational cultures, political environments, and technological infrastructures.

7. The role of artificial intelligence in future information exchange

As digitalisation and AI technologies reshape law enforcement, future research must critically examine their implications for international police cooperation. Studies should explore how AI tools can support information triage, predictive analytics, and case management in cross-border contexts. However, they must also interrogate the risks of algorithmic bias, data protection breaches, reduced human discretion, and the erosion of trust-based relational work. Balancing technological innovation with relational integrity will be one of the defining challenges for future transnational policing architectures (Jérôme, 2020). Interdisciplinary research combining criminology, data science, ethics, and international relations will be essential to navigate this terrain responsibly.

Final Reflection

The findings of this thesis present a compelling case for rethinking the foundations of international police cooperation. They reveal that while institutional frameworks and legal agreements provide important scaffolding, the true engines of effective cross-border policing are relational: trust, cultural understanding, operational flexibility, and professional adaptability. These human and social dimensions cannot be engineered solely through policy directives or technological solutions; they must be cultivated through sustained interaction, mutual recognition, and shared commitment.

This research underscores that international policing is not a uniform, mechanistic process but a dynamic, negotiated, and often fragile endeavour. Cooperation must be actively constructed and continually reinforced at the interpersonal, organisational, and systemic levels. It is shaped by the everyday practices of individuals, the informal networks they build, the cultural assumptions they navigate, and the political environments they inhabit.

The broader implications of these findings extend beyond policing to the wider field of international governance. They challenge technocratic visions of integration that privilege formal structures over lived relationships. They suggest that effective cooperation in complex, pluralistic systems depends as much on the cultivation of relational infrastructures—trust networks, shared professional norms, cultural bridges—as on the design of institutional architectures.

At the same time, the thesis highlights the fragility of these relational infrastructures. Trust can be built, but it can also be eroded by political shifts, organisational neglect, operational failures, or cultural misunderstandings. Flexibility can enhance cooperation, but it can also create vulnerabilities if not supported by clear

frameworks and resilient networks. Cultural affinity can facilitate understanding, but it cannot eliminate the deep-seated differences that sometimes complicate collaboration.

Looking forward, the future of cross-border police cooperation will likely be shaped by a complex interplay of forces: the continued evolution of transnational crime, technological disruption, shifting political landscapes, and societal expectations around security, accountability, and rights. Navigating this terrain will require a new generation of practitioners, policymakers, and scholars who are attuned to the relational, cultural, and ethical dimensions of international security work.

The findings of this research offer both a warning and a hope. They warn against over-reliance on structural fixes, legalistic solutions, or technological optimism in addressing the challenges of transnational policing. They point to the enduring importance of human agency, professional ethics, and relational work in sustaining cooperation across borders. At the same time, they offer hope that, through deliberate investment in trust-building, cultural competence, organisational learning, and flexible governance, more resilient and adaptive systems of international police cooperation can be developed.

Ultimately, this thesis invites a reconceptualisation of cross-border policing not merely as a technical field of security management but as a profoundly relational and ethical project. A project that requires humility as much as ambition, dialogue as much as direction, and a commitment to building not only stronger institutions but stronger relationships across the diverse communities of practice that constitute the landscape of international policing.

In conclusion, the future of international police cooperation will not be determined solely by treaties, protocols, or technologies. It will be shaped, above all, by the capacity of individuals and institutions to build and sustain trust, foster mutual understanding, adapt to complexity, and remain committed to the shared endeavour of providing security in a fractured but interconnected world.

Final Reflections: Police Occupational Culture and the Role of PLO

A key finding of this study is that Police Liaison Officers (PLOs) occupy a highly distinctive and privileged position within the context of cross-border information exchange. While their role is critical to the functioning of international police cooperation, its value is often only partially recognised by external stakeholders and is frequently not fully understood within their own sending organisations. This section therefore reflects on the unique occupational position of PLOs and considers how their professional value and institutional recognition can be strengthened, particularly within their home organisations.

The findings of this research demonstrate with considerable clarity that effective cross-border information exchange is fundamentally shaped by individuals, trust, and cultural understanding. These elements are decisive factors in determining the success or failure of international cooperation within liaison officer systems. The ability to understand and apply cultural knowledge, combined with the capacity to build and maintain trust in a host country, requires a high degree of sensitivity and professional judgement. Such skills are difficult to formalise or teach and are instead developed through experience. PLOs apply these competencies strategically to establish trust-based relationships and to build resilient information networks across borders.

At the same time, the data show that police occupational culture can transcend national boundaries and facilitate cooperation. PLOs with a policing background often benefit from an initial level of professional trust from their counterparts who share a similar occupational identity. This implicit trust can significantly accelerate the establishment of information exchange. However, this advantage is neither automatic nor guaranteed: it must be consciously recognised and skilfully utilised by the liaison officer. Experienced PLOs appear particularly capable of identifying and exploiting this professional common ground in a targeted and effective manner.

While police culture can support information exchange, the findings also make clear that it is not, in itself, a guarantee of successful cross-border cooperation. Effective information sharing additionally depends on the existence of appropriate legal frameworks, a genuine willingness to exchange information, and confidence that shared information will not be misused. One of the central tasks of the PLO is to continuously balance and develop these conditions in order to establish and sustain efficient information exchange. This requires the ability to recognise where deficits exist—whether legal, relational, or organisational—and to adapt accordingly, as these underlying conditions can change rapidly.

The study further reveals that PLOs are often perceived by sending authorities primarily as functional instruments for the duration of their deployment. Despite the absence of formal motivational mechanisms within both liaison officer systems examined, PLOs consistently deliver high-quality and effective work. This performance is driven largely by sustained self-motivation, as well as a strong sense of professional duty and responsibility towards their organisation. Such motivation, however, should not be taken for granted.

Organisations responsible for designing future liaison officer systems, as well as those currently operating them, must recognise that a highly motivated PLO is not an automatic outcome. The deployment of poorly motivated liaison officers can have a detrimental impact on the reputation and effectiveness of liaison systems as a whole. Effective cross-border information exchange therefore requires careful selection, comprehensive pre-deployment preparation and training, and ongoing motivational support during overseas assignments to ensure sustained performance.

The findings also indicate that the work of PLOs is frequently misunderstood by colleagues within their home organisations. Liaison postings are sometimes perceived as a form of long-term “foreign assignment” with limited operational demands, while the complexity, workload, and challenges associated with the role are overlooked. This misperception can undermine internal appreciation of the role and negatively affect organisational support.

Sending organisations therefore carry a responsibility to increase transparency regarding the activities and achievements of PLOs. Actively communicating the nature of liaison work and disseminating concrete examples of successful outcomes within the organisation can foster greater understanding and acceptance among colleagues. Such transparency contributes to enhanced recognition of the role and reinforces its organisational legitimacy.

Recognition and appreciation also extend to formal acknowledgment of the service performed by PLOs abroad. International organisations such as the United Nations, EU CSDP missions, and the OSCE commonly award medals as visible symbols of professional recognition. Comparable forms of acknowledgment could be considered for PLOs as a means of institutionalising appreciation for their contributions.

The reintegration of liaison officers following their deployment represents another critical issue. Logically, the continued use of acquired skills and established networks would benefit sending organisations. However, this study shows that in practice such reintegration rarely occurs systematically. In many cases, returning PLOs resume the same positions they held prior to deployment, with limited mechanisms in place to capitalise on their enhanced expertise and networks. This highlights a significant gap in organisational sustainability and knowledge transfer.

While sending organisations have developed effective mechanisms for deploying PLOs and facilitating cross-border information exchange, there remains substantial scope for improvement regarding long-term organisational learning and resource optimisation.

Established structures should therefore be critically reviewed to assess whether they continue to support sustainable international cooperation and the effective internal use of acquired expertise.

Future research should explore ways in which the professional standing of PLOs within their home organisations can be strengthened. Detailed role descriptions and empirical accounts of operational challenges may help counter misconceptions and provide a more accurate understanding of liaison work. Research could also examine the potential value of formal recognition or reward systems linked to exceptional performance in overseas liaison roles.

Further research should also focus on post-deployment utilisation and reintegration strategies, comparing the organisational impact of deploying returning PLOs in roles aligned with their newly acquired skills and networks versus returning them to their previous positions. Such work could inform organisational reforms aimed at maximising institutional learning and resilience.

Finally, additional research should examine the role of cultural competence in cross-border information exchange. Comparative studies could investigate the advantages and limitations of cultural training for PLOs, particularly in culturally diverse host countries. Such research may offer valuable insights into the extent to which cultural knowledge contributes to trust-building and the rapid establishment of effective cooperation abroad.

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