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FORENSIC SCIENCE COOPERATION IN THE EU: THE ROLE OF ENFSI IN STANDARDIZING INVESTIGATIVE PRACTICES

Forensic science plays a crucial role in criminal investigations, providing scientific evidence that is often decisive in court proceedings. However, the transnational nature of modern crime requires harmonized forensic practices and effective international cooperation among forensic laboratories. The European Network of Forensic Science Institutes (ENFSI) has emerged as the primary organization facilitating such cooperation and standardization across Europe, fundamentally transforming the landscape of forensic science delivery in the region.

ENFSI was founded in 1995 with the primary purpose of improving mutual exchange of information in the field of forensic science and enhancing the quality of forensic science delivery throughout Europe. What began as a meeting of representatives from eleven governmental forensic laboratories in Western Europe in 1993 has evolved into the monopoly organization in the field of forensic science, formally recognized by the European Commission. As of 2019, ENFSI has expanded its membership to include seventy-one laboratories from thirty-nine countries, demonstrating its significance as a platform for knowledge exchange within the global forensic community.

The organizational structure of ENFSI is designed to address the multifaceted nature of forensic science. The network operates through seventeen Expert Working Groups (EWGs) that actively collaborate on furthering their respective disciplines, including DNA analysis, digital imaging, document examination, firearms and gunshot

residue analysis, drugs, explosives, fingerprints, handwriting analysis, and information technologies. Each working group develops and implements annual collaborative exercises or proficiency tests to ensure quality assurance and competency assessment among member laboratories. For instance, the European DNA Profiling Group (EDNAP), established in 1988 and integrated into ENFSI, disseminates advances in DNA profiling techniques to each country, ensuring that cutting-edge methodologies are uniformly adopted across Europe.

A cornerstone of ENFSI's mission is the development and implementation of best practice manuals to standardize forensic methodologies across member states. These manuals provide detailed guidance for conducting complex forensic analyses in various disciplines. Notable examples include the Best Practice Manual for Facial Image Comparison published by the Digital Imaging Working Group in 2018, which addresses human-based facial image comparisons, and the Best Practice Manual for the Forensic Examination of Inorganic Gunshot Residue by SEM/EDS released by the Firearms/GSR Working Group in 2022. The European Document Experts Working Group is actively investigating the application of artificial intelligence in document examination, reflecting ENFSI's commitment to incorporating emerging technologies into forensic practice.

Quality assurance and accreditation constitute essential components of ENFSI's activities. The organization's official policy mandates that all member laboratories should achieve or work toward ISO/IEC 17025 compliant accreditation for their laboratory testing activities. This international standard specifies general requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories, ensuring that forensic results are reliable, reproducible, and admissible in court proceedings. ENFSI also urges all members to seek accreditation and provides guidance on policies, certification, and expert advice to ensure compliance with best practices and international standards.

The cooperation between ENFSI and European law enforcement agencies is formalized through several institutional arrangements. In 2015, ENFSI concluded a memorandum of understanding with Europol, the European Union's law enforcement agency, which permits the exchange of knowledge and expertise and underscores the need for enhanced cooperation in forensic science to combat crime. This partnership facilitates the integration of forensic expertise into operational law enforcement activities, ensuring that investigations benefit from the latest scientific developments. Additionally, in 2020, the European Commission awarded funding to the ENFSI Secretariat to support various ENFSI activities and initiatives, administered by the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs.

ENFSI's international reach extends beyond European borders through its Associate Membership program, which allows non-European laboratories to participate in specific Expert Working Groups. This inclusive approach enables global forensic institutions to contribute to and benefit from ENFSI's collaborative exercises, knowledge-sharing initiatives, and standardization efforts. The network also maintains connections with other international forensic organizations, including the Asian Forensic Sciences Network (AFSN) and various standardization bodies such as the

European Committee for Standardization (CEN) and the European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization (CENELEC).

Recent developments demonstrate ENFSI's commitment to addressing contemporary challenges in forensic science. The organization collaborates with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) through jointly organized online symposia on emerging forensic issues. In 2024, ENFSI held multiple working group meetings, including the Forensic IT Working Group Meeting in Athens in September 2024, and continues to address critical topics such as 3D-printed firearms through specialized seminars. The 2024 Annual Report highlights ENFSI's progress toward implementing the European Forensic Science Area 2.0 Action Plan, which aims to further professionalize the network and improve cooperation among member institutions.

The implementation of the European Forensic Science Area 2.0 represents a strategic priority for ENFSI, focusing on enhanced professionalization, improved cooperation within the network, and consolidation of forensic capabilities across member states. This initiative involves developing e-learning platforms, maintaining specialized databases, and ensuring that scientific and technical developments are effectively monitored and disseminated throughout the network. ENFSI's governance structure, consisting of a five-member Board and a Secretariat, along with standing committees for Quality and Competency and Research and Development, ensures effective coordination and strategic direction for these ambitious goals.

Thus, ENFSI has established itself as an indispensable organization in the landscape of European criminal justice, providing a framework for standardizing forensic practices, ensuring quality assurance, facilitating knowledge exchange, and promoting international cooperation. Through its Expert Working Groups, best practice manuals, accreditation initiatives, and institutional partnerships with Europol and the European Commission, ENFSI ensures that forensic science remains credible, reliable, and effective in supporting criminal investigations and prosecutions. The organization's evolution from eleven founding members to seventy-one laboratories across thirty-nine countries demonstrates the critical importance of collaborative approaches to forensic science in an era of increasingly transnational crime. The EU experience with ENFSI offers valuable lessons for other regions seeking to harmonize forensic standards and enhance the quality of criminal justice systems.

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THE INTERACTION BETWEEN THE GERMAN POLICE AND THE PUBLIC

European police legislation enshrines the concept of police service to the community, transforming it from a repressive body into a 24/7 service. Justifying its social role, the police must primarily focus on crime prevention. Consequently, the emphasis shifts to the local community level, which acts as both a service consumer and an evaluator of police effectiveness. Deepening the partnership between the police and the public is a powerful factor in building a rule of law state and affirming civil society.

The 1882 “Kreuzberg ruling” represented a fundamental shift in the relationship between the state, the individual, and the police in Europe. By limiting police powers, the ruling established the principle that the state's authority to restrict individual freedoms must be justified by law and serve a legitimate public interest. This concept, which evolved over time, laid the groundwork for the modern understanding of policing as a service that balances the needs of the community with the rights of individuals. Germany, being a federal state, has a corresponding structure of law enforcement agencies. The federal government of Germany shares responsibility for law and order with the governments of the Länder, which, according to the Constitution of 1949, have their own police forces.

The core principle of community policing is the recognition by the police of the need to involve the public in shaping and delivering police services. This involves working in partnership with communities to identify and address local problems, such as crime, fear of crime, and anti-social behavior. German police have a long history of community-oriented policing, with strategies such as “Bürgerorientierte Polizeiarbeit”, “Bürger Nähe Polizeiarbeit”, and “Gemeinwesenbezogene Polizeiarbeit”. However, the Community Policing model has gained increasing prominence as a means of promoting democracy, selfgovernance, and problem-solving at the local level.