MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE
FOR THE STUDY OF
CRIME, SECURITY AND LAW

Conference

Police Accountability

Adapting Liability and Control Mechanisms to Heterogeneous Societies and Transnational Policing

26 – 27 February 2026

Max Planck Institute for the Study of Crime, Security and Law, Freiburg i. Br.

INTRODUCTION

For several decades, “accountability” has been a topical term in research on policing. Its buzzword character obscures the numerous issues it encompasses, such as the liability of both institutional and individual actors, as well as the various mechanisms for controlling those entities. Uncovering these issues is crucial for adapting police oversight to the changing nature of police work, from transnational police cooperation to the policing of increasingly heterogeneous societies.

For example, it may not be immediately clear who can be held liable for actions in a transnational context, where police officers from one country act in another. Furthermore, controlling police work in pluralistic societies can be more challenging, as members of minority groups run the risk of being both overpoliced and underprotected.

This conference will analyze the different mechanisms of liability, control, and oversight for policing and police cooperation in increasingly heterogeneous societies and transnational environments. It will also examine the challenges arising from police work conducted outside of its traditional territorial jurisdiction. In doing so, it will identify potential pitfalls and evaluate proposals for future development.

The conference will examine three key aspects of accountability that play a role in this context: liability in transnational police cooperation (i.e., ‘who’ is liable), existing national and European institutional control mechanisms (i.e., ‘how’ control is carried out), and possibilities for democratic accountability in personnel matters (i.e., how to identify the ‘good’ officers and ensure that they maintain their qualities abroad and vis-à-vis foreign citizens or refugees). In addition to considering these three aspects, the conference promotes an interdisciplinary approach by providing a forum for researchers with sociological, psychological, and legal backgrounds.

PROGRAM

WEDNESDAY, 25 FEBRUARY 2026

From 19:00	**“Early Bird” meeting in a local restaurant (on a self-pay basis)**

THURSDAY, 26 FEBRUARY 2026

10:00 – 10:30	**Registration**
10:30 – 11:00	**Welcome address** Prof. Dr. Ralf Poscher (Director MPI-CSL) and Dr. Sabrina Ellebrecht & Johanna Fink (organizers of the conference)
11:00 – 12:30	**Opening lecture** **The Wicked Problem of Police Accountability** Prof. Dr. Michael Rowe (Northumbria University)
12:30 – 13:30	**Lunch**
13:30 – 17:00	**Panel 1: Shifting Liabilities in Transnational Police Cooperation? From Joint Operations to EU Agencies**
13:30 – 13:45	Introduction and chair: Prof. Dr. Florin Coman-Kund (Erasmus University Rotterdam)
13:45 – 14:10	**The Liabilities of Transnational Policing: Comparative Perspectives on Attributing Responsibility in Cross-Border Operations** Prof. Dr. Saskia Hufnagel (University of Sydney)
14:10 – 14:30	**Liability in Transnational Operational Police Cooperation in the EU. Comparative Insights from France and Germany** Johanna Fink, M.A., Mag. iur. (MPI-CSL/ Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne)
14:30 – 15:00	*Discussion*
15:00 – 15:30	**Coffee break**
15:30 – 15:55	**Delegated without Control? National Constitutional Safeguards and Legal Protection in Integrated EU Border Management** Christopher Paskowski (Bucerius Law School)

15:55 – 16:20	**Trust vs. Accountability in EU Police Cooperation: The Case of Europol** Eric Töpfer, Dipl.-Pol. (German Institute for Human Rights)
16:20 – 17:00	*Discussion*
17:00 – 17:30	Break
17:30 – 19:00	Evening lecture **Police Accountability Adrift? Proposals, Policies, and Politics in Light of Shifting Legitimacy Standards** Prof. Dr. Monica den Boer (Leiden University/Netherlands Defence Academy)
From 19:00	Conference dinner
21:00	Wrap-up first day

FRIDAY, 27 FEBRUARY 2026

09:00 – 10:00	Panel 2: Can Personnel Selection Criteria contribute to Police Accountability?
09:00 – 09:15	Introduction and chair: Dr. Isabel Thielmann (Independent Research Group Personality, Identity, and Crime, MPI-CSL)
09:15 – 09:35	**The State of Knowledge on Personnel Selection in the German Police, Taking into Account Transnational Police Work** Prof. Dr. Wim Nettelnstroth and Henriette Binder, Dipl.-Psych. (HWR Berlin)
09:35 – 10:00	*Discussion*
10:00 – 10:15	Coffee Break
10:15 – 13:30	Panel 3: Control – Policing the Police
10:15 – 10:30	Introduction and chair: Prof. Dr. Hartmut Aden (HWR/FÖPS Berlin)
10:30 – 10:55	**Between Institutional Challenge and Individual Responsibility: Dialogue as a Confidence-Building Measure between Police and Society** Dr. Silvia Staubli (University of St. Gallen)

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10:55 – 11:20	**Institutional Barriers to Police Accountability: Examining How Weak Oversight Mechanisms Hinder Police Accountability in the Global South** Dr. Oluwagbenga Michael Akinlabi (Northumbria University)
11:20 – 11:45	*Discussion*
11:45 – 12:05	Coffee break
12:05 – 12:15	Introduction and chair: Dr. Matthias Wienroth (Northumbria University)
12:15 – 12:40	**Polizeibeauftragte as Police Accountability Mechanisms: Building Trust and Perpetuating Legitimacy** Marie-Theres Piening, M.A. and Prof. Dr. Tobias Singelnstein (Goethe University of Frankfurt)
12:40 – 13:05	**Accountability as a Signifier for Functioning Statehood: Loose Ends at the Societal Micro and Macro Levels** Dr. Nadja Maurer (Research Centre for Strategic Police Research/University of Hamburg/Leuphana University of Lüneburg)
13:05 – 13:30	*Discussion*
13:30 – 14:30	Lunch
14:30 – 15:00	Wrap-up, discussion, and outlook Chaired by Dr. Sabrina Ellebrecht and Johanna Fink
15:00	End of the conference

ORGANIZATIONAL INFORMATION

Date:	26 – 27 February 2026
Location:	Max Planck Institute for the Study of Crime, Security and Law F113, Fürstenbergstraße 19, D-79102 Freiburg i. Br.
Contact:	Dr. Sabrina Ellebrecht (s.ellebrecht@csl.mpg.de) Johanna Fink (j.fink@csl.mpg.de)
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