



PRESS RELEASE

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Public thematic report

THE DIVISION OF AREAS OF JURISDICTION BETWEEN THE NATIONAL POLICE AND THE NATIONAL GENDARMERIE

In France, the national police and gendarmerie jointly carry out public safety and law enforcement duties. Since the gendarmerie became part of the Ministry of the Interior in 2009, they have been under the same political authority. The internal security forces employ 253,000 police officers and gendarmes and have benefited from an increased budget for several years. However, the regional distribution of the areas of competence of the national police and national gendarmerie has changed little over the last 80 years, despite the changes that have taken place in terms of both demographics and criminality. Due to cumbersome decision-making and competition between the two forces, the map of areas of competence has not changed at all for ten years. In view of this, the Court analysed the regional distribution of the security forces with a dual aim of responding as effectively as possible to the security needs of the general public and optimising the allocation of public resources. The current distribution of forces, which is outdated and inconsistent, is a source of dysfunction and inefficiency to the detriment of the service provided to the general public. The Ministry of the Interior must address this issue as a matter of urgency and make the necessary adjustments.

An inconsistent map, a source of difficulties and increasingly bypassed

Historically, the gendarmerie was responsible for security in rural areas, while policing in towns and cities was handled by municipal forces. In 1941, the Vichy regime brought policing in municipalities with over 10,000 inhabitants under State control by transferring certain mayoral powers to prefects under what became known as the 'State Police' system. This system was extended in 1996 to all departmental capitals, regardless of population size or crime levels. Apart from this change, there have been few modifications to the division of police and gendarmerie zones in France over the past 80 years, and none at all since 2014 — despite demographic and crime trends that would have warranted them. The Court of Accounts recommends revising the legal framework to allow better coordination between the police and the gendarmerie.

The national police force is organised into districts that must be able to carry out all their duties autonomously. This model, which requires a minimum number of staff, is suitable for densely populated urban areas. Conversely, the gendarmerie relies on multiple units operating according to a principle of subsidiarity, which allows it to develop its organisation over a larger area. However, more than one in ten police districts covers a population of less than 20,000, while two-thirds of the municipalities within metropolitan areas are under gendarmerie jurisdiction. The Court recommends transferring small police districts to the gendarmerie,

transferring all municipalities in rural and sparsely populated departments, including their administrative centres, to the national gendarmerie and, at the same time, entrusting the police with municipalities in metropolitan areas that present continuous crime-related challenges with the central city.

Furthermore, the current regulations provide for exceptions, sometimes unnecessarily complex, to the strict separation between areas under police and gendarmerie jurisdiction (new municipalities under mixed police-gendarmerie jurisdiction), but do not allow for the operational needs of certain regions (the *Camargue* and the *Larzac plateau*, for example) to be met. The Court recommends that the regulations be amended to remedy these situations.

A review of transfer management to overcome management inflexibility

In the absence of a precise operational objective and reliable indicators before 2016, it is difficult to draw up an operational report on previous transfers. It has been the subject of ad hoc reports, which have always concluded that they have had a positive effect without being able to support this with figures. These transfers may have led to additional costs linked to property operations and poorly managed redeployments, which resulted in overstaffing in areas with no significant crime-related challenges.

The territorial distribution of the police and the gendarmerie reflects, beyond operational needs, issues of human resources and attractiveness for each of the forces. These factors could be better aligned with the preferences of police officers and gendarmes. For example, the secondment system that has existed between the two forces since 2011 has not been sufficiently exploited during previous transfers, even though it offers a second career for officers while limiting staff movements. The Court recommends strengthening this bridge.

Overcoming inertia to address the public safety challenges in the regions

There are many obstacles to a major redrawing of the map. These mainly relate to the balance between the police and the gendarmerie, the sensitivity of this issue for trade unions and, in some cases, the reluctance of local elected representatives. The Ministry of the Interior, faced with numerous crises over the last decade or so, has prioritised the management of these crises over the necessary adjustments to the distribution of the police and the gendarmerie throughout the country, despite the forces having been under a single authority since 2009. Furthermore, certain recent internal reforms, such as the reorganisation of the national police and the gendarmerie's '200 brigades' plan, are further cementing the map in certain places. The Court of Accounts nevertheless recommends resuming the necessary adjustments to the police/gendarmerie map, favouring continuous fine-tuning over major waves of change, which are often difficult to plan, sometimes costly, and whose effects are hard to control. Finally, the question of how police and gendarmerie zones are allocated must be considered in light of the rise of municipal police forces — particularly in metropolitan areas — and the growing role they play in the local security continuum.

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PRESS CONTACTS:

Julie Poissier ■ Communications Director ■ T +33 (0)6 87 36 52 21 ■ julie.poissier@ccomptes.fr

Jean-Christian Gauze ■ jean-christian.gauze@ccomptes.fr



@Courdescomptes



ccomptes



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