

External Police Oversight Mechanisms

In Mexico, the concept of oversight mechanism began with the modality of Citizen Security Committees, considered in the Citizen Participation Law, promulgated in 2000. The Law provides the possibility of submitting citizen complaints, as well as the right to receive general and specific reports about functions from their local authorities, and thus evaluate their actions. To date, *Causa en Común* has conducted nine different projects (San Miguel de Allende, Aguascalientes, Ciudad de México, Consejo Nacional de Seguridad, Morelos, Michoacán, Oaxaca, Quintana Roo and Estado de México) at municipal, state and federal levels.

The mechanisms have had the objectives of strengthening police development processes, and improving the relationship between corporations and communities. The effectiveness of each external mechanism is variable and difficult to measure; the main obstacle being to "open" internal processes to the scrutiny of citizens and civil society.

With the experience accumulated by *Causa en Común*, the main challenges are:

- Moving from diagnosis to action.

In most of the External Police Oversight Mechanisms, the authorities allow diagnoses and documentary evidence of institutional conditions; limitations usually begin when decisions and omissions need to be evaluated. The transition from diagnosis towards a model of external evaluation with autonomy and institutional recognition, depends on the multiplication of this kind of efforts, mainly through political pressure.

- Institutionalize the mechanisms so that they can remain, and remain independent.

The majority of the Chiefs of Public Security, at the federal and local levels, mistakenly view the Mechanisms exclusively as instruments of intrusion, as obstacles, instead of considering them as instruments to support their development and their relationship with the community. But, even when there is a positive disposition, changes of administrations represent, in most cases, the termination of the Mechanisms. To avoid this, it is necessary that a legal framework, at the state and federal levels, provide support for this supervisory practice. Otherwise, the duration and scope of the Mechanism will depend on the political will of certain people at certain times.

- A new obstacle: the militarization of public security.

One of the consequences of the current tendency to militarize public security, is the opacity usually associated with the Mexican Armed Forces. Since the new National Guard is, essentially, a military corporation, the consolidation of a Supervisory Mechanism, currently coordinated by *Causa en Común*, will certainly be a challenge. At this stage, this Mechanism ("Observatory of the National Guard") has operated without official cooperation. Nevertheless,

its scope will be broadened to allow for the study of the accelerated rate of militarization promoted by the present government.

General consideration:

It is essential that External Police Oversight Mechanisms are strengthened by legal and political means. They must be understood, not only as a tool for accountability, but also as a means of strengthening their institutional processes and assuring a social legitimacy.

Certainly, in times of political contempt, and of accelerated militarization, these Mechanisms are more necessary than ever in the difficult history of Mexican police corporations.