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Service dogs and the regulation of their possible use by the police

Introduction

Many of you may have heard from the media about our service dogs, who assist the police in many areas. However, fewer people have more specific professional and legal information than this, and an untrained observer would not realise how serious a task and responsibility the keeping, training and use of service dogs are ¹. If only because the training and actual use of service dogs is a somewhat mystified 'blind spot' area of information for 'civil' society and often even for professional 'non-dog' colleagues ².

As a result, many people either think and expect too much of their skills or associate too little return with their use. In fact, many people really do get their information from the media or from a service dog show, i.e. there is a real mystique surrounding the field.

My efforts to dispel this mystery also reinforce my belief that the use of service dogs should be discussed and presented in more forums to demonstrate this special capability of the law enforcement sector. The regulatory environment of this field, which is less known to 'civilians' and lawyers, presents a very interesting picture.

¹ Horváth, O. (2015): Szolgálati kutyák a rendvédelemben: a múlt, a jelen és a jövő lehetőségei. [Service dogs in law enforcement: past, present and future possibilities.] Magyar Rendészet, Budapest. 2015/3., 69

² Frigyer, L. (2023): A szolgálati kutyák alkalmazásával okozott kár szabályozásának egyes aspektusai. [Some aspects of the regulation of damage caused by the use of service dogs]; In: Gaál, Gyula; Hautzinger, Zoltán (editor) (2023): A biztonság védelme a rendészetben : Jubileumi kötet Zámbó Péter ny. rendőr ezredes 70. születésnapjára [Protecting security in law enforcement: an anniversary volume for the 70th birthday of Péter Zámbó, retired police colone]; Pécs, Magyarország, Magyar Hadtudományi Társaság Határőr Szakosztály Pécsi szakcsoport, 406, 353-359, 7

The historical role of service dogs in relation to the police

The use of service dogs has been a long-standing part of police activity. The first dog kennel was established in 1930 in Csillaghegy, which provided trained dogs for the gendarmerie until the end of the Second World War. After the World War, dog training was resumed in 1945, but the breakthrough came only in 1948 with the Minister of the Interior's Decree No. 278542/1948/IV.1. /BM and then with BM Decree No. 16-1317/1963, which merged the BM Dog Training Schools in Dunakeszi and Kerepestársá with effect from 1 January 1964.³

This merger made it possible for the predecessor of the Department of Dog Leader Training and Animal Control of the Police Education and Training Centre (ROKK KKÁFO), based in Dunakeszi, to become the internationally renowned central dog handler training and dog training base of the Hungarian armed forces by the early 1970s.⁴

The importance of the area is perhaps best demonstrated by the number of service dogs. Currently, the ROKK KKÁFO, which is centrally responsible for this field, has hundreds of service dogs under its control. To be precise, in 2021, there were 649 service dogs. The number of dogs in each county varies, of course. It is adapted to the needs of each area and to the competence of the area in terms of its specialised tasks.

This shows you that there are still quite a lot of service dogs in the police system, performing various tasks, which involve constant contact with colleagues and the people involved in the actions and their environment. At the same time, there are many occasions when potential harm can occur.

³ Boglyasovszky et al. (2007): Szolgálati kutya alkalmazása. [Use of a service dog] IRM. Budapest. 7

⁴ Source: <https://rokk.hu/bemutakozas/szervezeti-felepites/gazdasagi-szervek/kutyavezeto-kepzo-es-allatfelugyeleti-foosztaly-dunakeszi/>
Accessed: 30.05.2025

It would therefore be reasonable to think that, given its importance, the field is well regulated in detail, both in general and in specific fields ⁵.

Basic rules on the use of service dogs

The rules on the use of service dogs are laid down at different levels of the legislative hierarchy, depending on the body applying them.

At the legislative level of the legislative hierarchy, the only normative provisions on the use of service dogs are generally those on the use of dogs as a means of coercion, which are best known to the civilian sector and to „non-dog” professional staff ^{6, 7}. An example of this is the regulation of Act XXXIV of 1994 on the Police (hereinafter referred to as the „Rtv.”), which also serves as a primary basis. The regulations are very similar for all bodies that may use service dogs as a means of coercion.

Rtv.: Use of service dogs

§ 50 (1) A police officer may use a muzzled service dog, whether on or off leash, as a means of coercion if the conditions for the use of physical coercion (§ 47) are met.

(2) A police officer may use an unleashed service dog on a leash if the unlawfully gathered crowd cannot be dispersed by a less coercive means (§§ 47-49) or if it is necessary to disperse a group of people seriously endangering public safety or to overcome active resistance to police action.

(3) A police officer may use a muzzled and unleashed service dog

(a) to prevent an attack threatening serious injury;

⁵ Frigyer, L. (2022): Gondolatok a rendőrségi szolgálati kutyák alkalmazásával kapcsolatos károkozás szakterületi szabályozásáról; [Reflections on the sectoral regulation of the use of police service dogs] In: Kovács István (editor) (2022): Multidiszciplinaritás: A rendészettudomány sokszínűsége Tanulmánykötet. Magyar Rendészettudományi Társaság Hallgatói Tagozat. [Multidiszciplinaritás: the diversity of police science, Collection of Studies, Hungarian Society of Police Science, Student Section], Budapest. 35-36

⁶ Kovács, I. (2021): Rendvédelmi ismeretek I. [Law enforcement knowledge I.], MRTT Hallgatói Tagozat Budapest. 86

⁷ Law 1

(b) to apprehend a person suspected of having committed a serious criminal offence;

(c) to prevent an attack on their person or conduct directly threatening their life or physical integrity.

As a source of law with more specific provisions than this law, we can refer to the Act on the National Tax and Customs Administration, which, in connection with the search of clothing, luggage and vehicles, regulates the search activity with the service dog to the level of a law, as a basic example of the field of application of service dogs ⁸.

Further detailed rules on enforcement and other areas of application are also found in a mix of legislation and other public law instruments ⁹.

It is important to emphasise that knowledge of these lower standards is essential, as it is these detailed rules that give substance to the activities carried out with specially trained service dogs, which have been used successfully by the police for a very long time.

The importance of the area is perhaps reflected in the number of dogs. In recent years, the police have had a relatively large number of service dogs (650), with 649 service dogs in 2021 to be precise. However, the number of animals per county varies according to the needs of the time and the competence of the area in terms of its specialised tasks. Unfortunately, this number is currently lower and the actual number of animals in active stock (after deduction of those withdrawn from service for scrapping and other reasons) is currently below 400. This actual number is made up of the number of patrol dogs assigned to service duties, explosive detection dogs, public protection special (assistance) dogs, tracking dogs, drug detection dogs, search dogs, personal search dogs, personnel tracking dogs, scent detection dogs and cadaver and body search dogs.

⁸ Law 2

⁹ Law 3

The basic detailed rules of the activity are set out in ORFK Instruction 36/2020 (XII. 23.) on the Police Dog Service Regulations (hereinafter: Dog Regulations).

However, the significant presence of service dogs is not only evident in the Police, as they are also used by several organisations across the law enforcement spectrum. A 'good-looking', trained service dog with a determined handler is a tool - with impressive power - that precedes its own deployment by its mere appearance ^{10,11}.

In addition to those already mentioned, several organisations employ or may employ - under a specific legal mandate - service dogs, for which this possibility is not well known. Examples include state nature conservation guards, mountain rangers, field guards, professional hunters, public land wardens, but also municipal assistant wardens and armed security guards. Moreover, it also includes fishery guards employed by the National Food Chain Safety Office (hereinafter referred to as NÉBIH) of the State Fishery Service. In this organisation, the General Inspection Directorate of the NÉBIH is responsible for the tasks related to the acquisition, registration, training and training of service dog handlers.

Trends for the future (ways to increase application and numbers)

Common language and activities

It is of particular importance that when keeping, training and using service animals, organisations and individuals use the same terms to describe and formulate the activity. In order to achieve a higher quality of work with

¹⁰ Frigyer, L. (2009.) A szolgálati kutyák és vezetőik képzésének, továbbképzésének szabályozása, a fejlesztés szükséges irányjai a büntetés-végrehajtásnál [Regulation of the training and further training of service dogs and their handlers, necessary directions of development in the penitentiary system] Börtönügyi Szemle 28. /1., 44

¹¹ Frigyer, L. (2020): Kriminálisztikai szösszenet avagy miért kellene a büntetés-végrehajtási szervezet személyi állománya részére kriminálisztikai ismereteket oktatni, [Criministics summary or why staff of the penitentiary organisation should be trained in criministics] In: Európai Jogi Közlemények I. évfolyam/1. szám (2020.) Budapest. 34

service animals, it is necessary to share experiences of selection, training and use between different organisations and individuals, but this is only possible if positive and negative experiences are regularly shared between professionals to improve work with service animals. In this context, joint training, competitions and enforcement activities are organised. All this should be done by relying on the same professional language for communication, which in turn should provide a common 'service' model for civilian animal keepers^{12,13}.

According to the Dog Regulations, the training institution, which provides basic, advanced and further training and supervision of dog handlers and their service dogs, is the Department of Dog Handler Training and Animal Supervision of the Police Education and Training Centre (hereinafter referred to as the „DTO”). The training institution is located in Dunakeszi. The long and illustrious history and present of the institution, both nationally and internationally, in the field of dogs is a guarantee for the provision of this activity.

According to the Dog Regulations, the CDF ensures, among other things, the uniform implementation of the Police's duties in relation to dog handlers and service dogs, and supervises the training, further training and certification of service dogs and dog handlers, the use, application and keeping of service dogs. It also monitors and gives opinions on the breeding and training of service dogs.

It performs the tasks of the preparatory department in relation to the internal standard-setting activity for the service dog population. It approves the equipment, clothing, housing, accommodation, transport vehicles and all technical documentation relating to the training, use, deployment and housing of service dogs and all other matters within its remit.

¹² Source: <https://www.police.hu/hu/hirek-es-informaciok/legfrissebb-hireink/szervezeti-hirek/veget-ert-a-nemzetkozi-szolgalati-kutyas>
Accessed: 20.05.2025

¹³ Boda, J. (2019): Rendészettudományi szaklexikon, [Law enforcement encyclopedia] Dialóg Campus, Budapest. 541

Joint officer and driver training

One of the foundations of the professional work of law enforcement agencies and organisations with service animals in this area is that the managers in charge of the activity are aware of the service animal skills - as well as responsible (service) animal husbandry - and the sensitisation of future (officer) managers in this area is one of the main missions of the Ludovika SE Law Enforcement Dog Section at the National University of Public Service. By organising activities and events, they aim to provide a professional background for the university teaching of the subject „The use of service dogs”, taught at the Faculty of Law Enforcement.^{14,15}

Synopsis

Overall, the existing legislation currently ensures the implementation of the tasks related to the use of service dogs. However, it would be more appropriate to set out the basic rules for the keeping of service animals in a higher level of legislation, even at the level of a government decree, rather than in a set of different levels of regulation and in order to clarify the regulatory practice that has emerged. On the one hand, to unify these specific activities and to implement them in a common police framework. On the other hand, to standardise the ability to act with service animals, thereby increasing their effectiveness. After all, public order protection or search dog (drugs, persons, etc.) activities and capabilities carried out with service dogs are strongest and most recognised when they are based on the same and uniform legal basis, which is equally accessible to all.

¹⁴ Source: <https://sportosegyetem.uni-nke.hu/ludovika-sportegyesulet/szakosztalyok/rendeszeti-kutyas-szakosztaly>

Accessed: 30.05.2025

¹⁵ Source: <https://opsz.hu/unnepelyes-keretek-kozott-elindult-a-rendor-polgaror-kutyas-jarorszolgalt/>

Accessed: 30.05.2025