



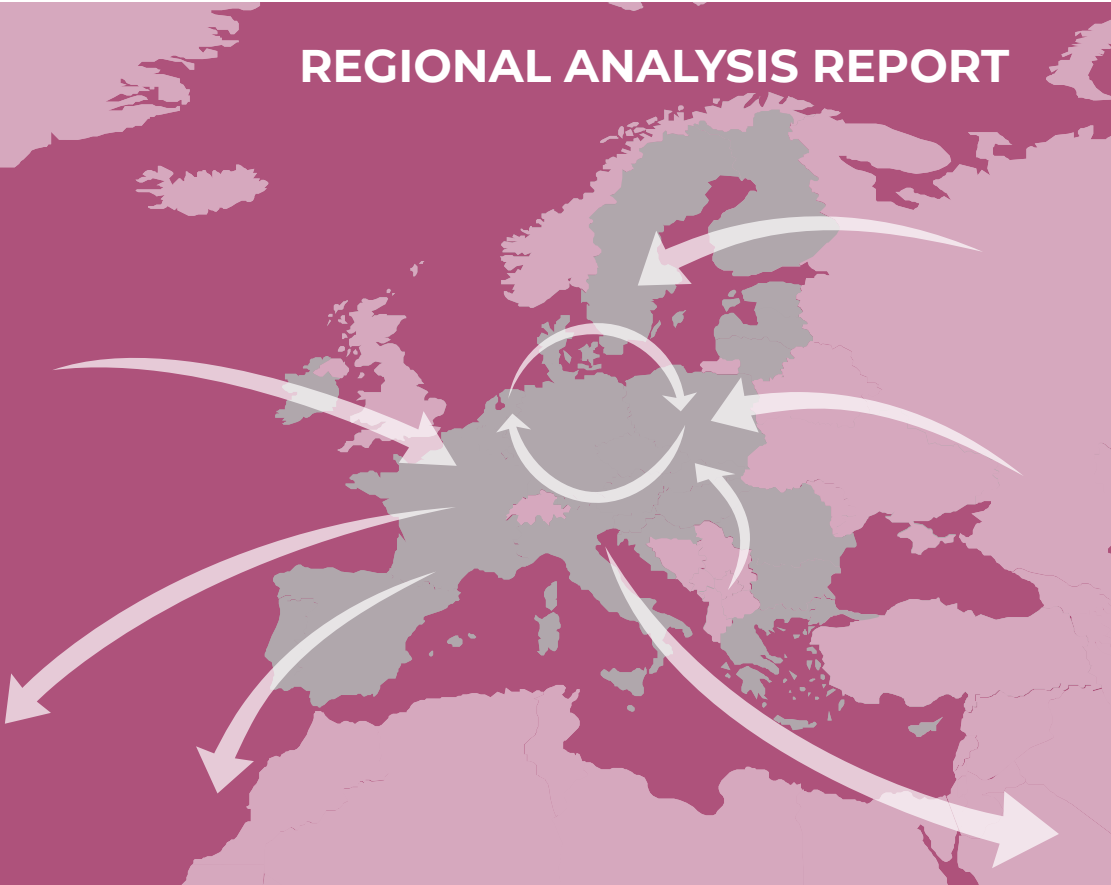
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United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



Illicit Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts, Components and Ammunition to, from and across the European Union

REGIONAL ANALYSIS REPORT



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME

Vienna

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their Parts, Components and
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UNITED NATIONS

Vienna, 2020

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

AEW	Acoustic expansion weapons
CEPOL	European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training
EMCDDA	European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction
Firearms Protocol	United Nations Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition
GFP	UNODC Global Firearms Programme
Global Firearms Data Project	European Union-funded project entitled “Supporting Global Data Collection and Analysis on Firearms Trafficking and Fostering Cooperation and Information Sharing, in particular Among Countries along Major Trafficking Routes to/from the European Union”, which was implemented by UNODC between 2017 and 2019
IAFQ	Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire
iARMS	Illicit Arms Records and Tracing Management System
INTERPOL	International Criminal Police Organization
MENA	Middle East and North Africa region
NABIS	United Kingdom National Ballistics Intelligence Service
NCA	United Kingdom National Crime Agency
RAB	UNODC Research and Trend Analysis Branch
Roadmap	Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons and their ammunition in the Western Balkans by 2024
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SOCTA	Europol Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment
TE-SAT	Europol Terrorism Situation and Trend Reports
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
WCO	World Customs Organization

Acknowledgements

This report was prepared by the UNODC Global Firearms Programme (GFP) under the overall coordination of Simonetta Grassi, Head of the Global Firearms Programme and the substantive guidance of Mareike Büttner, Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Officer working with the Programme. The paper was drafted by Nils Duquet (consultant), senior researcher at the Flemish Peace Institute.

The Programme would like to thank the Flemish Peace Institute for making data collected in previous and ongoing research projects of the institute available for this paper, which allowed to conduct an innovative exercise of combining quantitative and qualitative data on firearms trafficking and related forms of crime to enrich the evidence base on illicit firearms trafficking involving European Union Member States. A special thank is also owned to Antoine Vella of the UNODC Research and Trend Analysis Branch for providing advice on the data collected by UNODC and Mayara Petry da Silva, intern with the Global Firearms Programme, for verifying the footnotes contained in the report.

This publication was made possible through the financial support of the European Union.

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Executive Summary

1. This report constitutes the first of a series of analytical products complementing the *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020*, prepared by the UNODC Research and Trend Analysis Branch (RAB). The aim of the present report is to analyse illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime from a specific geographical angle, namely the European Union region, and to deepen the understanding of the illicit firearms trafficking situation in the region and its interconnection to the rest of the world. The report is based on the quantitative and qualitative data compiled by UNODC in the Illicit Arms Flows Dataset. To further enhance the evidence base on the phenomenon, this report complements the data from the Illicit Arms Flows Dataset with other qualitative and case-based data sources, in particular previously collected data by the Flemish Peace Institute, in addition to a review of exiting literature on illicit firearms trafficking in Europe and to the information exchanged among practitioners during a cross-regional expert meeting on this topic organized by UNODC in October 2019. By analysing these data sources in a joint manner, the report aims to significantly improve the understanding of the scope, characteristics and dynamics of illicit firearms trafficking into, from and across the European Union and contribute to the evidence base required to efficiently combat this phenomenon both within the region and globally.

Seizures of firearms, their parts and components, and ammunition in the European Union

2. As for the *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020*, the present report is predominantly based on firearms seizure data, which can be considered the best proxy for developing estimates of the scope and value of illicit firearms trafficking. However, the currently available data on firearms seizures in Europe needs to be interpreted carefully because of shortcomings with regard to the quality and comprehensiveness of the available data as a result of poor registration procedures, the lack of a uniform collection and registration approach or the lack of firearms expertise among local law enforcement officials seizing firearms.

3. More fundamentally, it is crucial to keep in mind that firearms can be seized in very diverse contexts and that seized firearms are not necessarily trafficked firearms or even illegally held at the time of seizure. In addition, national differences in seizure data are not necessarily a reflection of different illicit gun markets in these countries but can also be attributed to differences in national legislation and procedures and to the different levels of priority given to combat illicit firearms trafficking in these countries.

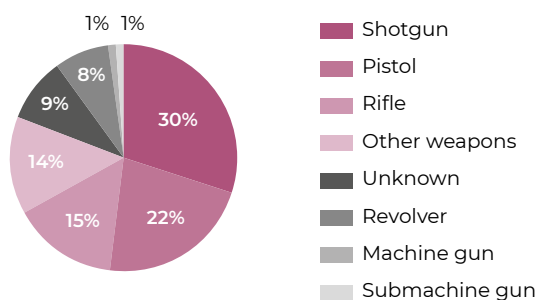
Close to 60 per cent of European Union Member States provided data on seized firearms to UNODC but with varying levels of details and completeness

4. In total 16 European Union Member States provided quantitative data on seized and trafficked firearms in 2016 - 2017 to UNODC via the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire (IAFQ), a new globally standardized tool developed by UNODC for enhancing the evidence base on illicit firearms trafficking and the global understanding of the firearms trafficking phenomenon. It also serves the purpose of supporting monitoring of target 16.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals. Through this target, Member States committed, among other objectives, to significantly reduce illicit arms flows by 2030. The completeness of data varies extensively among the reporting countries as many countries face challenges with providing data that goes beyond basic information on the amount and type of weapon seized. While 16 Member States submitted data on total number of firearms seizures disaggregated by type of weapon, data on tracing requests and outcomes was submitted by only six and eight Member States, respectively.

Shotguns, pistols and rifles emerge as most seized firearms within the European Union, making up almost 70 per cent of the reported seized firearms

5. The 16 European Union Member States that submitted seizure data via the IAFQ seized in total about 50,000 firearms in 2016 and 40,000 firearms in 2017, representing nine per cent and seven per cent of global reported seizure, respectively. Significant national differences in the number of seized firearms can be observed: while some Member States reported thousands of seized firearms annually, other Member States reported much lower seizures.

FIGURE 1: Distribution of seized firearms by type in 16 European Union Member States, 2016 - 17



Source: IAFQ

Note: Percentages are calculated on the basis of numeric data provided to UNODC in the corresponding question and do not reflect any unclassified amounts of seizures.

6. Shotguns (30 per cent) are the most widely seized firearms in these Member States, especially in Southern European countries. Also pistols (22 per cent) and rifles (15 per cent) are frequently seized. Revolvers (8 per cent) and military-grade firearms (2 per cent), such as machine guns and submachine guns, are seized much less frequently. In some countries, as for example in Sweden (9 per cent) and Croatia (7 per cent), the share of seized submachine guns and machine guns is however much higher and equals or surpasses the share of other types of firearms. Compared to other regions, the share of firearms seized in Europe also includes a significant proportion of pneumatic, blank-firing and gas weapons.

Illicit possession ranks as number one justification for the seizure of firearms

7. Firearms are seized in various contexts in the European Union. In line with the findings of the *UNODC Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020*, the most frequent legal justification for firearms seizures in the European Union in 2016-2017 is 'illicit possession' (34 per cent).

TABLE 1: Legal justification of firearms seizures in European Union Member States in 2017 (or most recent data) in percentage of seized firearms

Type of justification	DK	GR	HU	IT	LI	LU	NL	PT	RO	SL	ES	SW	UK
Illicit possession	70%	0.1%	100%	-	89%	59%	82%	71%	100%	100%	4%	-	95%
Illicit use	9%	-	-	-	7%	41%	10%	22%	-	-	3%	-	4%
Illicit trafficking	-	-	-	-	1%	-	1%	4%	-	-	1%	-	0.7%
Illicit manufacturing	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2%	-	-	-	4%	-
Altered markings	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.2%	-	-	-	96%	-
Unkown	-	99.9%	-	-	-	-	3%	-	-	-	89%	-	-
Other	-	-	-	100%	3%	-	8%	-	-	-	3%	-	-
Total number of seized firearms with relevant data	854	2492	193	2697	262	863	5202	3483	57	324	10602	140	947

Source: IAFQ

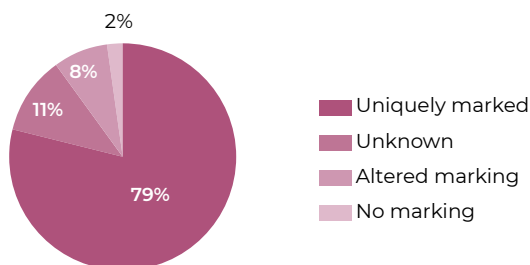
Note: Percentages are calculated on the basis of concrete data provided to UNODC and do not reflect any unclassified amounts of seizures.

8. The share of seizures with 'illicit trafficking' as legal justification fluctuated between zero - four per cent in the reporting Member States. This is believed to be an underestimate as the offence of illicit possession is generally an easier and quicker way for law enforcement and other relevant agencies to justify the prohibition of a transfer than the offence of illicit trafficking. The analysis of IAFQ data further demonstrates that most firearms seizures occur within the country's national territory. Some Member States also report a significant share of seizures at the land border or at airports. Firearms seizures on vessels or at harbours are rather exceptional in the European Union.

With 79 per cent of the seized firearms within the European Union for which related data was available uniquely marked, an important foundation for tracing and identifying the illicit origin of the seized weapon exists

9. Ten European Union Member States reported on the markings of seized firearms. 79 per cent of the seized firearms for which data on markings was available were uniquely marked.

FIGURE 2: Distribution of seized firearms by type of marking in 10 European Union Member States, 2016 - 17



Source: IAFQ

Note: Percentages are calculated on the basis of concrete data provided to UNODC and do not reflect any unclassified amounts of seizures.

10. This implies national authorities generally can trace seized firearms, attempt to identify their point of diversion, analyse illicit arms flows and subsequently take appropriate measures to mitigate diversion risks and combat trafficking. Six European Union Member States reported that during the most recent reporting year they had sent a total of 301 tracing requests on a total of 1,137 firearms to other countries or regional/international organizations. Most of these tracing requests were sent to other European countries.

The limited availability of data on seizures of ammunition impedes an informed analysis of related crimes

11. Nine European Union Member States submitted data on ammunition seizures from 2016 - 2017 to the IAFQ. In total these countries seized more than 800,000 rounds of ammunition in 2016 and about 350,000 rounds of ammunition in 2017. Strong differences between these countries can be observed in the annual number of ammunition seizures. However, the limited availability of data on seizures of ammunition hinders an in-depth analysis of crimes related to this commodity.

In the European Union, the seizures of firearms and parts and components are numerically closer to each other than in other parts of the world

12. Ten European Union Member States reported on seizures of firearm parts and components from 2016 - 2017 to the IAFQ. In total these countries seized almost 4,800 items in 2016 and almost 1,700 items in 2017. Strong differences can be observed between these countries in the annual number of seizures of parts and components. On a global scale the average number of seized firearms was about 20 times higher than the number of seized parts and components. This ratio was less than seven times in the reporting European Union Member States. While this relatively high share of seizures of parts and components may reflect increased attention from law enforcement authorities to the phenomenon of illicit trafficking in these items, it may also be linked to the high number of converted and reactivated firearms seized in the European Union, as access to parts and components constitutes an important prerequisite to illicit firearms manufacture.

Demand for illicit firearms in the European Union

The demand for illicit firearms trafficking within the European Union is largely driven by criminals

13. Illicit firearms trafficking in the European Union is mainly driven by criminal demand given that access to firearms enables and facilitates various criminal activities. Firearms are also acquired and possessed by criminals in Europe as tools for power or as 'trophies' to display reputation. Ten European Union Member States reported on the number of firearms seized in connection to other suspected offences to the IAFQ. An analysis of this data shows that firearms are often seized from criminals involved in violent crime and drug trafficking. Previous studies and other data have pointed to drugs criminals, mafia organizations, outlaw motorcycle gangs, armed robbers, terrorists and various other types of criminals such as street gangs, loan sharks, criminals involved in prostitution and criminal groups specialised in assassinations as customers on illicit gun markets in the European Union.

14. Most criminals tend to possess and use handguns, which are relatively cheap and easy to conceal. The possession and use of automatic firearms and other types of military-grade firearms by criminals is much less common in the European Union.

Firearms trafficking to, from and across the European Union is closely connected to other forms of crime, such as drug trafficking and terrorism. The connections appear in various modalities, such as involvement of the same organized criminal groups, use of the same modus operandi and trafficking routes, and even the exchange among the different commodities as form of payment

15. Within the European Union, firearms are mainly seized from criminals involved in violent crime and drug trafficking, with an average of 48 per cent of the seizures occurring in the context of violent crime and an average of 28 per cent of the seizures occurring in the context of drug trafficking. In individual European Union Member States, the percentage of seizures linked to drug trafficking is as high as 44 per cent, confirming important connections between drug trafficking and firearms-related criminality. Firearms seizures are also connected to the trafficking of other illicit commodities, other forms of organized crime and terrorism. Case-based information, for example, reveals visible connections between illicit firearms trafficking and this latter type of crime. Illicit firearms trafficking in European Union Member States increases the risk of firearms possession and use by terrorists. Firearms are attractive instruments for terrorists because they can be used as tools of violence in terrorist attacks, defensive tools against law enforcement operations and as a facilitator for attacks carried out with other types of weapons. In recent years various types, models and brands of firearms have been seized as part of counter-terrorist operations in the European Union. Terrorist demand for firearms is not a new phenomenon in Europe. Some ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorists have traditionally relied heavily on firearms to carry out their activities. Over the years these groups have developed their own organization-specific acquisition patterns. Although the imminent threat of separatist violence in the European Union seems to have diminished over the years, numerous acts classified as separatist-motivated gun violence are still taking place and some of legacy weapons have ended up in the local criminal underworld.

16. In recent years firearms have been used in various jihadist terrorist attacks in the European Union, mainly handguns and automatic rifles. These firearms are generally illegally acquired through (often pre-existing) criminal connections of the terrorists. They were frequently diverted during the armed conflicts in former Yugoslavia, but also reactivated and stolen firearms have been used. Little is known about the ways in which ammunition has ended up in the hands of these terrorists. In several

European Union Member States, firearms have been used in attacks by right wing terrorists and seized from right wing extremists. Cases of transnational illicit firearms trafficking between right-wing extremists and participation in military training camps have also been observed. Demand for firearms from left-wing terrorists within the European Union is currently quite low.

17. In various European Union Member States, the majority of illicitly held firearms are in the hands of private citizens who have no immediate professional criminal objectives, but who possess these weapons for self-protection, emotional reasons, collection purposes or other reasons. Sometimes this illicit possession is the direct result of a lack of compliance to changes in firearms legislation. Several security risks are connected to this type of illicit possession such as increased risks of homicides and the risks that some of these weapons will eventually end up on illicit gun markets where they can be sold to criminals and terrorists. Gun enthusiasts are sometimes involved in informal garage sales of unregistered weapons or illegal transactions on or in the vicinity of arms fairs.

Supply of illicit firearms in the European Union

18. Not all criminals in the European Union have the same access to trafficked firearms. Strong cross-national differences in the types of firearms seized and in reported prices for firearms strongly suggest significant differences in the availability of different types of firearms across the European Union. These differences can be attributed to various factors, including differences in criminal demand, geographical proximity to source countries and the capacities of law enforcement agencies to combat illicit firearms trafficking.

Prices for firearms vary significantly between types of arms and illegal markets. Converted blank-firing weapons are among the cheapest illicit firearms to acquire within the European Union. Strong price differences exist also between South Eastern Europe, Western Europe and Scandinavia

19. Within countries significant differences in access to trafficked firearms can also be observed. These differences are reflected in the price structure for different types of firearms on local illicit gun markets. Across the European Union (converted) blank-firing weapons are the cheapest to acquire, while handguns from reputed brands and military-grade firearms are generally the most expensive firearms to acquire on illicit gun markets in Europe. Strong price differences exist also between European countries: while

firearms are relatively cheap in South-Eastern Europe, prices are much higher in Western Europe and especially in Scandinavia.

The traditional closed character of the illicit firearms market in the European Union is eroding due to continuing cross-border smuggling of firearms from post-conflict countries, the increased availability of easily reactivated or converted weapons and increased access to firearms through online markets

20. The differences in access are strongly connected to the traditional ‘closed character’ of illicit gun markets in Europe with limited access to firearms – especially more sophisticated firearms – for persons who lack extensive criminal connections. In several European Union Member States, especially in Western Europe, this closed character has to a certain extent eroded because of continuing cross-border smuggling of firearms from post-conflict countries, the increased availability of (easy to reactivate) deactivated firearms and acoustic expansion weapons (AEW), the increased availability of cheap and reliable (easy to convert) blank firing weapons and increased online trafficking. Moreover, other phenomena such as criminal firearms pools, where criminals can rent firearms for certain periods, have also been observed in some European Union Member States. As a result, various types of firearms have become more easily available for lower-level criminals and terrorists with the right criminal connections.

The understanding of the role of local arms dealers on criminal markets within the European Union stands to be enhanced

21. In most European Union Member States there is no reliable and detailed intelligence picture on the role of local arms dealers on criminal markets. Previous studies suggest that dealers who distribute the firearms to local criminals tend to be pragmatic rather than ideological and that national differences seem to exist in Europe with regard to the types of dealers who locally supply firearms once they are trafficked into the country or diverted within the country. Arms dealers who exclusively supply firearms to terrorist networks have not been observed in the European Union. Because illicit arms trafficking is usually not a very lucrative activity in Europe, it is reported that criminal arms dealers are generally not willing to take the risk of knowingly supplying weapons to terrorists.

Demand for and diversion of firearms from the European Union in other regions

22. There is a global demand for European made firearms. Europe is home to some of the most important firearms manufacturing companies in the world and a major firearm exporting region. In 2018, European Union Member States granted almost 7000 export licenses for a total value of more than 2.6 billion euro. These legally exported firearms were mainly destined for recipients in North America, but also to recipients in the Middle East and other countries in Europe and Asia. An unknown share of these legally exported firearms from the European Union ends up in the wrong hands outside the region.

There is a high demand for firearms manufactured within the European Union across the globe, including by criminal actors. Europe is the main manufacturing region of firearms seized across the world. This highlights the risk of diversion from authorized transfers and possession and underlines the importance of a continuous dialogue between seizing and manufacturing countries

23. Europe appears as the main manufacturing region of firearms seized across the world. Seizure data reported to the IAFQ indicates that in several countries across the globe a significant share of the seized firearms was manufactured in the European Union. Several European Union Member States also reported that they receive tracing requests from countries in other regions, while reporting by some non-European countries to the IAFQ describe different ways in which legally exported firearms from the European Union have been diverted in other regions and ended up with criminals outside the European Union. Previous research demonstrates that exported firearms from the European Union have also ended up in the arsenals of various non-state armed groups across the globe. In the majority of known cases these firearms were exported to the intended and approved recipients in line with national legislation and only subsequently diverted in the destination countries or retransferred to another country without the formal approval of the exporting European Union Member States. In a few recorded instances, it was the entire supply chain that was illegal and made possible thanks to manipulated export documentation and concealment of the intended end users by employees of the European manufacturing companies. In addition, there are a few cases known of illicit firearms trafficking by professional criminals from the European Union to other regions. Although numerically low, these examples of triangulation reflect the existing risk that legally manufactured and exported firearms from the European Union end up in

the wrong hands, and opens the further reflection on whether the existing export control measures of the European Union can be further enhanced to address this risk.

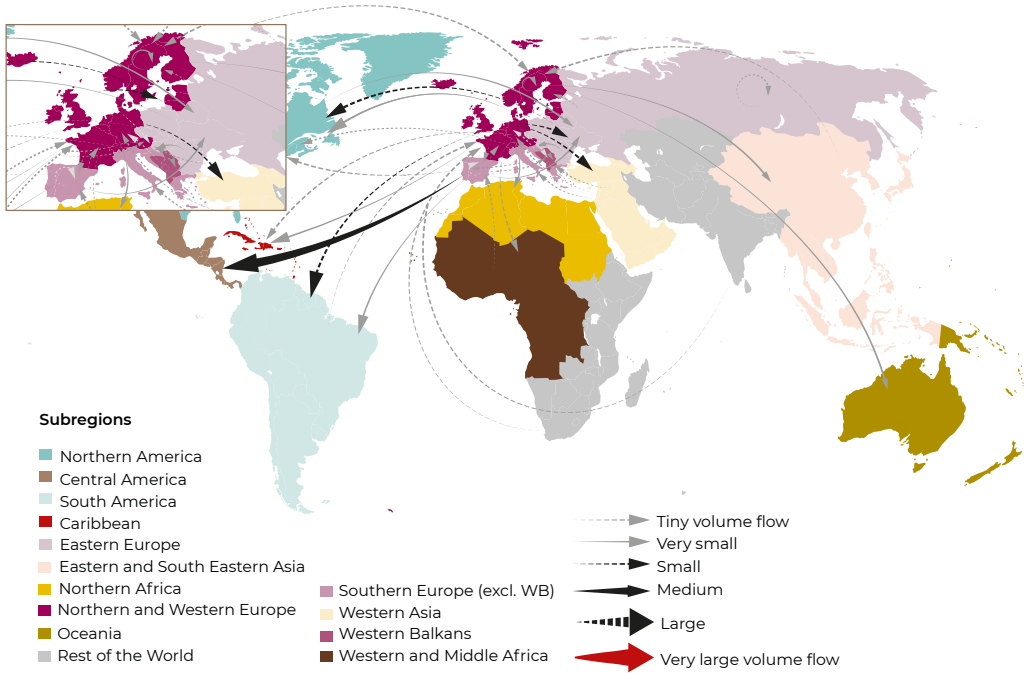
Illicit arms flows

Several European Union Member States are not only countries of destination for illicit firearms flows, but also countries of source and transit of such flows

24. The collected quantitative data reveal that the most pronounced illicit firearms flows occur at intra-regional level within the European Union. Most of the firearms seized in Europe were also manufactured in European countries and most of the tracing requests originating from the reporting European Union Member States were sent to other European countries. Qualitative data and previous studies also point towards intra-European firearms trafficking as the most important type of routing.

25. In addition, inbound and outbound illicit firearms flows connecting the European Union to multiple sub-regions across the globe were also recorded to varying degrees and levels of detail. Small and tiny volumes of illicit arms flows into the European Union were registered from Eastern Europe (including non-European Union Member States), Northern America, South America, Western Asia, Western and Middle Africa, and Western Balkans. Outbound illicit arms flows were registered in Central America (medium illicit flow), Eastern Europe (including non-European Union Member States), South America and Western Asia (all small illicit flows), Caribbean and Northern America, Eastern and South Eastern Asia, in North Africa and in Oceania (all very small illicit flows), and Western and Middle Africa and the Western Balkan (tiny illicit flows).

MAP 1: Transnational firearms trafficking flows affecting Europe (as defined by routes of seized firearms), 2016-17



The breakdown into subregional groupings is based on the standard UN classification (M49), adapted to take into account the availability of data and regions of special interest of the study. Please see Methodological Annex for details. Arrows represent flows between subregions (not specific countries).

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. A dispute exists between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning sovereignty over

Source: *UNODC Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020*, page 75.

26. Bearing in mind the incompleteness of the dataset, the data reveals that the European region, including European Union Member States, play a multifaceted role with regard to routes of illicit firearms flows including intra-regional, inbound and outbound routes.

27. Data available from seven European Union Member States on the most frequent firearms trafficking routes also underlines their role as destination countries. Only a few Member States reported that they were (also) a source country of illicitly trafficked firearms. This is likely connected to the observation that more data is available on inbound seizures than on outbound seizures.

Western Balkan routes of illicit arms flows to the European Union remain an important connection, but different data collection methodologies, such as quantitative and qualitative data collection seem to yield different results

28. The quantitative data does not support the widely acknowledged observation of a strong continued illicit arms flow from the Western Balkan region into the European Union. This conclusion seemingly differs from qualitative analysis of the phenomenon, which is linked to the illicit proliferation of firearms in the Western Balkans and nurtures the continued focus of several stakeholders on this route. This discrepancy may result from the incompleteness of the dataset or the fact that a lot of the data contained in the Illicit Arms Flows Dataset reflects only the transfer route used for the specific transfer during which the weapons were seized. As previous acts of trafficking of the same item may not be reflected in the data, some cases recorded in the Illicit Arms Flows dataset may indeed relate to cases where European Union Member States were the country of transit rather than the source country. On the other hand, the different observations may also reveal that different data collection methods may provide different components of an evidence-base, all of which are important to fully understand the phenomenon of illicit firearms trafficking and to develop appropriate responses.

29. However, Seizure data reported to the IAFQ by Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia confirms the continued illicit proliferation of firearms in the Western Balkan region, indicating that more than 4,400 firearms, especially pistols and rifles, were seized in these countries in 2016 - 2017. The data further reveals that countries from the Western Balkan are not only source countries, but often also transit countries. The illicit trafficking of legacy weapons from the conflict in former Yugoslavia not only fuels the local market and armed violence, but also poses significant security risks for the European Union: in recent years numerous of these legacy weapons have been used and seized from criminals and terrorists in the European Union. Europol hence expects this region will continue to be a source region of illicit firearms trafficking.

30. In 2018, the Western Balkan countries have adopted a joint Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons and their ammunition in the Western Balkans by 2024 (Roadmap). The achievement of the Roadmap's goals is measured through quantitative indicators collected both within and outside the Western Balkans. This includes also relevant data on firearms,

parts and components, ammunition and explosives coming from or through the Western Balkan region and seized at or within European Union borders (Key Performance Indicator 5). Data on this indicator is difficult to obtain. Enhancing the capacity of European Union Member States to collect, analyse and profile its seizure data is crucial to monitor the progress in this field.

Potential risks of future influx of illicit firearms from neighboring conflict zones, such as Ukraine, and several countries in the Middle East and Northern Africa into the European Union exist to various extent, and should not be underestimated

31. Current armed conflict zones in the European Union neighbourhood, especially Ukraine, and, according to Europol and national law enforcement authorities, also to some extent countries of the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA), such as Libya, could in the future emerge as major source countries for illicit firearms trafficking into the European Union. Although such illicit arms flows are currently rather exceptional, it is important to not underestimate the potential risk that the uncontrolled circulation of huge amounts of conflict arms at the borders of the European Union bear.

While varying among European Union Member States, the perceived amount of illicit firearms trafficking involving these countries remains stable. Over time, future iterations of the global firearms data collection exercise will allow to address this question from a statistical angle

32. Reporting by ten European Union Member States to the IAFQ on perceived amount of illicit firearms trafficking suggests there is no general trend of increasing or decreasing illicit firearms trafficking in the European Union.

TABLE 2: Amount of arms trafficking as reported by European Union Member States, 2016 - 2017

Country	Overall trend	Inbound	Outbound
Croatia	Small decrease	Small decrease	Small decrease
Denmark	Small increase	Small increase	stable
Hungary	Large increase	-	-
Lithuania	Stable	Not known	Not known
Portugal	Stable	Stable	Stable
Romania	Stable	Stable	Stable

Country	Overall trend	Inbound	Outbound
Slovakia	Small decrease	Not known	Stable
Slovenia	Small decrease	Small decrease	Small decrease
Spain	Stable	Stable	Stable
Sweden	Small increase	Small increase	Not known

Source: IAFQ

33. Over time, future iterations of the global firearms data collection exercise will allow to address this question from a statistical angle. Previous research concluded that illicit firearms trafficking involving European Union Member States is rather modest in terms of both the size and the number of criminal groups involved compared to other illicit markets such as trafficking in drugs or counterfeit goods.

Modus operandi and perpetrators of illicit firearms trafficking

Among the main modi operandi identified to illicitly traffic firearms, their parts and components and ammunition to, from and across the European Union are ant trafficking of illegally held items, exploitation of legal differences between source and destination countries, use of postal and fast parcel services, illicit manufacturing and trafficking of home-made firearms and ammunition as well as online trafficking

34. Previous research has demonstrated that the cross-border trafficking of small quantities of illicit held firearms ('ant trade') from post-conflict countries or other source countries is one of the main modi operandi of illicit firearms trafficking in Europe. These firearms are often intended for either personal use or to meet specific orders. This type of trafficking is mainly carried out over land by perpetrators who hide the firearms – sometimes with very ingenious techniques – in various compartments of different types of vehicles. Sometimes border officials and other security agency representatives are actively or passively involved in this type of trafficking. In some countries, firearms and ammunition are also trafficked by boat, especially smaller vessels such as speedboats. Firearms traffickers in Europe exploit consolidated smuggling routes and use skills used in other types of trafficking. In most countries the traffickers are multi-purpose groups who also carry out other types of trafficking. Firearms trafficking is thus often a supplementary source of income for these groups and firearms are therefore often trafficked together with other illicit commodities, especially drugs. Firearms traffickers usually have good connections in source countries, where locals collect previously diverted

firearms or divert the weapons themselves. In several European Union Member States, law enforcement agencies have observed that firearms traffickers often use contacts with their extended families in the source countries or within their ethnic communities.

Exploiting legal differences between the source and destination country leads to trafficking in several types of firearms and their parts and components, including live-firing firearms, reactivated or converted weapons and Flobert-caliber weapons

35. A significant modus operandi of illicit firearms trafficking in some European Union Member States involves the illegal import of live-firing firearms that were legally acquired in non-European Union countries with more permissive licensing systems or registration requirements such as the United States, thus exploiting legal differences between the source and destination country. Often this type of trafficking consists of ordering these firearms online or through straw purchasers in the source country and subsequently shipping them by using postal or fast parcel services to the destination country, but sometimes they are also smuggled into the country by the trafficker himself.

36. Compared to other regions, countries of the European Union seized a high share of modified, converted or reactivated firearms. Eleven European Union Member States reported data to the IAFQ on the technical condition of the seized firearms. In some of these countries very high levels of modified, converted and reactivated firearms were seized. In the United Kingdom, for example, 39 per cent of all seized firearms in 2017 were either modified, converted or reactivated. This type of trafficking is generally also connected to national differences in firearms legislation. Despite the adoption of the European Union Firearms Directive in 1991 and its amendments in 2008 and 2017, firearms traffickers have been able to exploit legal loopholes and differences in regulatory regimes between European Union Member States. In recent years especially easy-to-reactivate deactivated or AEW and easy-to-convert blank firing guns have been trafficked within the region. In general, these weapons are legally acquired from authorized arms dealers based in countries with less stringent firearms legislation and then illicitly trafficked into the destination (or transit) country. This type of illicit firearms trafficking is not limited to intra-European Union trafficking, but can also involve other countries. The internet has significantly facilitated this type of illicit arms trafficking.

37. From the early 2000s onwards converted blank firing weapons became a widespread security problem across Europe. Initially most

of these weapons were legally produced as blank firing weapons in other European countries, but also in other countries. Since 2010, especially converted Turkish-made blank-firing weapons are being seized in the European Union. These weapons are commonly used in gun crime across Europe. The seizing of blank firing weapons and converted blank firing weapons is often especially apparent in countries with more restrictive firearms legislation. Because of their low prices these weapons are currently especially attractive for lower-level criminals, but there is growing concern that organized crime groups and terrorist will increasingly acquire and use such weapons. Blank firing weapons are either bought physically in small quantities in neighbouring countries and subsequently illegally transported into the destination country or ordered online and shipped to the destination country by postal and fast parcel services. This activity is often carried out by private citizens without criminal objectives, but also organized crime groups have been observed in this type of trafficking. Since only basic tools and engineering skills are required to convert them, the conversion often takes place in the destination countries and is undertaken by the end user. Yet, also more professional firearms conversion workshops have been observed in various European Union Member States. When organized criminal groups are involved, the conversion of these weapons generally takes place on a larger scale. Sometimes certain models of blank firing weapons have also been converted into automatic handguns.

38. In various European Union Member States the reactivation of deactivated firearms from state stockpiles continues to pose an important security threat. As early as the 1970s reactivated firearms have been seized in Europe, but in recent years the trafficking of reactivated firearms has increased significantly. This type of trafficking has become one of the main sources of illicit firearms in Europe and these weapons have been used by organized criminal groups and terrorists in Europe. Many of these firearms were surplus weapons from the armed forces or police that were deactivated and modified into AEW, which are in general easier to reactivate than other deactivated firearms since the firing mechanism remains operational. The reactivation of deactivated firearms often occurs in the destination country and is often organized on a large scale. Most of the converted AEW that are currently being trafficked in Europe were surplus weapons, including automatic rifles and sub-machine guns, from the Czechoslovakian armed forces and were legally sold in Slovakia. This type of trafficking is carried out by private citizens without criminal objectives and by organized criminal groups. The persons reactivating the firearms are both people with very specific technical expertise as well as individuals without much technical expertise who use simple tools and online tutorials. While this type of trafficking is generally an intra-European Union phenomenon, reactivated firearms have also been trafficked from the European Union to countries outside the region.

39. After Slovakia changed its legislation regarding deactivated firearms a number of organized criminal groups who previously trafficked deactivated firearms, started exploiting another legal loophole by trafficking Flobert calibre firearms. These are real firearms that use rim-fire ammunition of a small calibre (generally 4-6 mm) and have limited firepower (up to 7.5 joule), but that can be modified easily to shoot larger calibre ammunition. Real firearms that were previously sold as AEW have been modified into Flobert-calibre firearms. In addition, companies that previously manufactured AEW shifted their production to Flobert calibre firearms and also alarm gun manufacturers started producing these firearms. The Flobert calibre firearms are generally acquired legally and cheap in Slovakia, then often smuggled to another country where they are modified before being smuggled in vehicles to West and Northern Europe where they are sold for much higher prices. Converted Flobert-calibre firearms are also trafficked online.

40. The trafficking of parts and components is an important type of trafficking in various European Union Member States. In Lithuania, for example, 91 per cent of the seized firearms in 2017 were assembled firearms. Especially the United States, where different parts and components can be legally acquired, is considered an important source country for parts and components being illicitly trafficked to the European Union. In general, the parts and components are shipped to European Union Members States by using postal packages with false customs declarations. Because American-based arms dealers are no longer authorized to send firearm components to international addresses, traffickers started using middlemen in the United States. The trafficking of parts and components also involves European Union Member States as source countries, especially Austria, because of differences in legislation on parts and components which can be ordered online. Firearms parts and components from European Union Member States have been trafficked to other countries within and outside the region.

41. Apart from the conversion and illicit reactivation of firearms, which may be considered as a form of illicit manufacture of firearms in line with article 3 (d) of the Firearms Protocol, the 3D printing of firearms is a specific type of illicit firearms manufacturing that has received a lot of media attention. New research on the emerging technologies related to 3D-printing concluded that these technologies are providing amateur gun smiths with new possibilities and lower costs.

The use of postal and fast parcel delivery services that transfer firearms and their parts and components ordered via the internet continues to be a widespread modus operandi that may have further increased during the global COVID-19 pandemic

42. In 2017, Europol stated that the use of postal and parcel services has become the most common way of firearms trafficking in the European Union. This observation is strongly connected to the increased use of the internet either to acquire firearms and ammunition illegally, for example through the darkweb, or to illegally import firearms or their parts and components after buying them legally in countries with less restrictions. Often postal and fast parcel deliveries are used to traffic firearms and parts and components into and within the European Union, but also from European Union Member States to other regions in the world. To mitigate detection risks, the people involved in this type of trafficking use different strategies such as deliberately mislabelling the parts and shipping them as different types of good, using delivery drop-off locations at a significant distance from their house or professional location, using middlemen to receive and transfer packages to them, or by involving employees of postal and fast parcel companies in their trafficking scheme. This type of trafficking is carried out by profit-oriented criminals, opportunistic individuals without criminal objectives and criminals with extremist political views.

43. The internet is an important enabler of illicit firearms trafficking in Europe and online firearms trafficking is expected to continue to increase over the coming years. The surface web is mainly used to exploit national differences in legislation with specific types of firearms and related items being sold on regular webpages, authorized online marketplaces and social media. On the darkweb firearms are sold on unauthorized online marketplaces in exchange for cryptocurrencies. Online trafficking has several important advantages such as the possibility to get in contact with potential sellers or buyers from across the globe and increased opportunities for persons without criminal connections to acquire firearms.

44. This trend is likely to be further accelerated in the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic, in which travel restrictions and strict border controls across the globe have heralded in a thriving period for online markets and postal deliveries. Detecting trafficked firearms, their parts and components shipped via postal services becomes even more difficult with the increased volume of parcels being shipped. This may provide criminals with additional opportunities for trafficking these items, thereby reinforcing the previously observed trends of illicit online trade and postal deliveries in many regions.

Introduction

45. In 2011, UNODC created the Global Firearms Programme (GFP) to assist United Nations Member States in preventing and combating illicit firearms trafficking¹ and related forms of crime through the ratification and implementation of the 2001 *United Nations Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition* (hereafter “Firearms Protocol”), supplementing the *United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime*.² One of the key areas of work of the GFP is monitoring illicit firearms flows and exploring their links to other forms of crime such as armed violence, drug and human trafficking as well as terrorism. Monitoring these flows can contribute to a better understanding of the scope, nature and dynamics of illicit firearms trafficking at global, regional and national levels. This in turn can be used by policymakers, law enforcement agencies and other relevant stakeholders to identify risks and threats related to illicit firearms trafficking and develop actions and measures to mitigate them.

46. Good data is a necessary precondition for monitoring illicit firearms flows. Many countries collect quantitative data on the numbers and types of seized firearms. In addition, some countries also collect important contextual information related to these seizures, such as the types of transport medium used, identified trafficking routes and the criminal context of the seizure. Yet, many countries currently do not have a system in place that allows for systematic data collection on seizures of firearms, their parts and components and ammunition, often due to a lack of technical skills and resources. In addition, capacities to aggregate and analyse the collected data on firearms seizures are often limited and overstretched, which restricts the possibilities for using the data as information basis for decision-making at policy and operational levels. The *UNODC 2015 Study on Firearms* noted that reliable analyses on the scope, patterns, routes and modus operandi of illicit firearms trafficking and its links to other forms of crime are scarce, and while efforts to improve the evidence base on firearms trafficking through research and analytical outputs have consistently increased over the past years, there

1 For the purpose of this paper, “illicit firearms trafficking” shall include the illicit trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition.

2 United Nations (2001), *Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*, United Nations General Assembly Resolution 55/255 of 31 May 2001.

is still a long way to go for the international community to develop an in-depth understanding on the topic.³

47. As part of its mission to monitor illicit firearms flows, UNODC has implemented the European Union-funded project “*Supporting Global Data Collection and Analysis on Firearms Trafficking and Fostering Cooperation and Information Sharing, in particular Among Countries along Major Trafficking Routes to/from the European Union*” (hereafter “Global Firearms Data Project”) within its Monitoring Illicit Arms Flows initiative.⁴ This project has led to the development of the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire (IAFQ), a standardized methodology for data collection on seized and trafficked firearms, their parts and components and ammunition. The questionnaire was developed with the dual purpose of improving data collection and analysis of illicit firearms trafficking and of supporting monitoring of indicator 16.4.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), for which UNODC was designated as co-custodian.⁵ With SDG target 16.4, Member States committed, among other things, to significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows by 2030.⁶ Another element of this Global Firearms Data Project is the establishment and analysis of a global dataset on seized and trafficked firearms, which constitutes the basis of several analytical products at global, regional and national levels.

3 UNODC (2015), *UNODC Study on Firearms 2015: A study on the transnational nature of and routes and modus operandi used in trafficking in firearms*, Vienna: UNODC, page XIII.

4 For more information and other outputs produced under the Monitoring Illicit Arms Flow initiative visit <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/firearms-protocol/monitoring-illicit-arms-flows-initiative.html>.

5 The SDG indicator 16.4.2 reads “proportion of seized, found or surrendered arms whose illicit origin or context has been traced or established by a competent authority in line with international instruments”, see A/Res/ 1/313 entitled “Work of the Statistical Commission pertaining to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

6 With SDG target 16.4, Member States committed to “by 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime”. It is one of the 12 targets of SDG Goal 16, which aims to “*promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels*”.

48. TEXT BOX 1: UNODC Illicit Arms Flows Dataset

The Illicit Arms Flows Dataset, on which large parts of this analysis build, is the result of a global firearms data collection effort carried out by UNODC in 2018 and 2019. It combines data received by UNODC from 80 responses to the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire (IAFQ), data contained in national reports on the implementation of the Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons⁷ and the International Tracing Instrument (collected and shared by the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs) and seizure data contained in the database of the Customs Enforcement Network (collected and shared by the World Customs Organization (WCO)). These sources, together with data from open source official national sources, yielded data for a total of 107 countries and territories for at least one of the years 2016 or 2017.

The IAFQ was developed in cooperation with national and international firearms and statistical experts, relevant international organizations, as well as non-governmental organizations and research institutes. It pursues the dual purpose of collecting data and information on seized and trafficked firearms in line with the mandate provided to UNODC, as well as to support the global monitoring of progress towards attainment of SDG target 16.4 and its indicator 16.4.2 by UNODC.

In particular, respondents were requested to provide the total number of seized arms in the reference year(s), and to disaggregate this number by type, condition, marking status and country of manufacture of the seized firearms, the legal justification and criminal context of the seizure and the tracing outcome, among other criteria.

Similar information and levels of disaggregation, albeit less detailed, were requested about found and surrendered arms and seized ammunition, parts and components.

The IAFQ further contains a metadata file, which collects information on the scope and nature of the data provided in the core file and is crucial for correctly understanding, interpreting and contextualizing the data provided by Member States.

⁷ See the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, A/CONF.192/15.

49. With a view to foster the use of data for strategic and operational purposes in the fight against illicit firearms trafficking, and to complement the *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020* with analytical outputs that focus on a specific country or region, UNODC is drafting regional reports, supporting the drafting of national reports, and convening targeted meetings among countries linked by specific trafficking routes, to discuss and identify responses to illicit arms flows. These efforts are undertaken with a view to bringing the data collected and analysed at global level back to its Member States.

50. This report constitutes the first regional report based on the data collected by UNODC and complemented with qualitative data and case-based examples from other sources. It focuses on illicit trafficking of firearms, their parts, components and ammunition to, from and across the European Union.

51. The report uses, as a starting point for the analysis, the definition of “illicit trafficking” as provided by the Firearms Protocol:
*the import, export, acquisition, sale, delivery, movement or transfer of firearms, their parts and components and ammunition from or across the territory of one State Party to that of another State Party if any one of the States Parties concerned does not authorize it in accordance with the terms of this Protocol or if the firearms are not marked in accordance with article 8 of this Protocol.*⁸

52. The analysis is based on several data sources of quantitative and qualitative nature. At the core is the Illicit Arms Flows Dataset (see text box 1), which comprises data of European Union Member States as well as other countries, collected by UNODC in the context of its Monitoring Illicit Arms Flows initiative. For the purpose of this analysis, this dataset is complemented with other qualitative and case-based data sources. First of all, quantitative and qualitative data and information collected by the Flemish Peace Institute in previous and ongoing research projects such as project

8 Article 3 (e) of the Firearms Protocol.

SAFTE⁹ and project DIVERT¹⁰. This includes data on cases of illicit firearms trafficking and information collected during in-depth interviews with law enforcement officials and other relevant actors involved in combatting illicit firearms trafficking in the European Union. Second, data and information exchanged during a cross-regional expert meeting on illicit firearms trafficking to, from and across the European Union organized by UNODC on 7 - 8 October 2019 in Vienna. Almost 60 representatives from national law enforcement agencies, prosecutorial authorities, customs agencies, and relevant ministries of 34 countries as well as representatives of relevant international and regional organizations and research institutes participated in this meeting. The experts discussed different types of transnational illicit arms flows and topics such as investigation and prosecution of illicit firearms trafficking and related crimes in their country, inter-institutional cooperation at national level as well as avenues for regional and cross-regional cooperation. Participants not only included representatives of European Union Member States, but also representatives of countries from other regions that presented some type of linkages to illicit firearms flows to and from the European Union such as the Western Balkans, West and Central Africa, the Middle East and North Africa region, North America as well as Latin America. Within the framework of this meeting, additional interviews were conducted with various participants. Third, this report is based on information collected during a review of existing literature on illicit firearms trafficking. And fourth, cases of illicit firearms trafficking and information identified through online research were embedded in this report to provide specific examples and complement the data. This last type of information was only used to illustrate and contextualize the modus operandi of different types of illicit firearms trafficking.

53. The combination of statistical and case-based data throughout this report was undertaken with a view to explore to which extent the different data sources can support certain observations and to make the analysis as practice-oriented as possible.

9 Project SAFTE is an international research project, co-funded by the European Commission, on illicit gun markets in Europe and terrorist access to these markets. The research was undertaken in 2017-2018 by an international network of firearms experts and coordinated by the Flemish Peace Institute. More information and the research reports of the project can be found at: <http://projectSAFTE.eu/>.

10 Project DIVERT is an international research project, co-funded by the European Commission, on the diversion of live-firing firearms from the legal into the illicit domain in the European Union through theft, fraud and non-regularization. The research project is currently ongoing and is undertaken in close collaboration with Europol, the Intelligence Centre Against Terrorism and Organized Crime of the Spanish Ministry of Interior Affairs and the Belgian Federal Judiciary Police. More information on the project can be found at: <https://vlaamsvredesinstituut.eu/en/divert/>.

54. The following chapters analyse the available national seizure data on firearms, their parts and components and ammunition. Chapter 1 examines the total number of seizures, the specific contexts in which they took place, the different types and technical conditions of the seized firearms and the marking and tracing of firearms. Chapter 2 of the report analyses the demand for illicit firearms in the European Union by criminals and other actors and the supply of these weapons on illicit gun markets in Europe. Chapter 3 examines the demand for European Union manufactured firearms by non-European criminals and non-state armed groups and the diversion of these weapons outside of the European Union. The focus of chapter 4 is on illicit arms flows with an analysis of the different trafficking routes involving European Union Member States and of seizures in third countries of firearms manufactured in or trafficked from the European Union. Chapter 5 explores the different modi operandi used and perpetrators involved in transnational firearms trafficking to, from and across the European Union. These different modi operandi include ant trafficking of illicitly held firearms and ammunition; exploitation of legal differences between source and destination countries; use of postal and fast parcel services; illicit manufacturing and trafficking of homemade firearms and ammunition and online trafficking. The report ends with a section on conclusions and implications for consideration by policymakers.

CHAPTER 1: Seizures of firearms, their parts and components and ammunition by European Union Member States¹¹

55. It is very difficult to estimate the scope and value of illicit firearms trafficking into, within and from the European Union. The *2015 UNODC Study on Firearms* noted that reliable scientific estimates of the overall size of illicit firearms trafficking worldwide are non-existent.¹² This can be explained due to a lack of systematic global data collection on this phenomenon. The *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020* also explains that it is not aiming at estimating the value of the illegal market because the available data is too sporadic to support such an estimation.¹³ This observation also applies to illicit firearms trafficking in Europe. A 2014 study on illicit firearms trafficking in the European Union - commissioned by the Directorate General Migration and Home Affairs - concluded that “the scale of the problem is ... impossible to quantify”.¹⁴ Using two different approaches¹⁵ that study estimated the number of unregistered firearms in the European Union between 81,000 and 67 million.¹⁶ Such a broad range in the estimated number of unregistered

11 The report is based on the European Union membership until 31 January 2020. For the purpose of this report, the United Kingdom is therefore still considered as a Member State of the European Union, thus data collected from the United Kingdom is referenced throughout the report and is treated as data involving the European Union.

12 UNODC (2015), *UNODC Study on Firearms 2015: A study on the transnational nature of and routes and modus operandi used in trafficking in firearms*, Vienna: UNODC, page 2.

13 UNODC (2020), *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020*, Vienna: UNODC, page 15.

14 Centre for Strategy and Evaluation Services (2014), *Study to Support an Impact Assessment on Options for Combatting Illicit Firearms Trafficking in the European Union: Final Report*, Brussels: European Commission, page 16.

15 The first approach involved calculating the average percentage of illicit seizures as a proportion of total firearms for seven European Union member states (which amounted to around one per cent) and then using this percentage as an indicator for calculating the total European Union figure based on the European Commission’s estimate of 81 million licit and illicit firearms circulating in the EU. The second approach consisted of deducting the number of officially registered firearms from the existing estimate of total firearms possession in European Union Member States made by the Gunpolicy website (and based on data from academic and government sources).

16 Centre for Strategy and Evaluation Services (2014), *Study to Support an Impact Assessment on Options for Combatting Illicit Firearms Trafficking in the European Union: Final Report*, Brussels: European Commission, pages 18 and 50.

firearms strongly underlines the problems with estimating the scope and value of illicit firearms trafficking in the European Union.

56. Several stakeholders consider seizure data the best starting point for developing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.¹⁷ Firearms seizures reflect the primary point of contact between an illicit phenomenon and the efforts of the government to counter it, and represent one of the best proxies for illicit firearms flows. Therefore, generating suitably disaggregated data on seizures is an important first step towards developing an understanding of firearms criminality, including their illicit trafficking. From a practical point of view, criminal justice authorities are more likely to collect and record data on firearms seizures than many other types of firearms-specific incidences, making this type of data more easily available in many countries and enhancing the comparability of the data among them.

57. However, the existing data on firearms seizures needs to be interpreted carefully for several reasons. First of all, because not all seized firearms are trafficked firearms. Firearms can be seized in very diverse contexts and are not necessarily illegally held at the time of seizure. Legally held firearms can, for example, also be seized for different types of crimes and misdemeanours, ranging from homicides to the failure to properly register a firearm. The Firearms Protocol requires State Parties to seize firearms, their parts and components and ammunition which are illicitly manufactured or trafficked and to criminalize such offences (article 6.2). National legal systems, however, generally provide for additional grounds to seize illicit firearms, not contemplated by international instruments such as the Firearms Protocol. Consequently firearms, their parts and components and ammunition are also seized for offences other than their illicit manufacture or trafficking, ranging from their use in other criminal activities to lower level offences such as the failure to comply safe storage conditions or to properly register a firearm, as well as offences linked to the illicit carrying, possession, display, use or discharge of such firearms in public spaces. Whether a particular situation or action constitutes a criminal or an administrative offence depends on national legislation. This implies that the criteria for seizing firearms can vary significantly among different countries. Important to stress is that firearms seizures are often the result of law enforcement investigations that are not primarily focused on arms offences, for example in investigations into drug trafficking cases or cases related to other types of organized crime. In addition, sometimes firearms are seized in the absence of a crime, but

¹⁷ See also the mandate provided to UNODC by the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (CTOC/COP/2016/15, resolution 8/3, paragraph 28) and the 2020 UNODC Study on Firearms Trafficking, page 20.

merely as a preventive measure, for example in cases of domestic disputes that might escalate into physical violence. Firearms seizures can thus be considered “a reflection of a complex reality and of different overlapping facets of the phenomenon of illicit trafficking of firearms”.¹⁸ The results of the *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020* further indicate that countries on average seized two-thirds of the firearms on the legal justification of “illicit possession”, while “illicit arms trafficking” was used as the legal justification of the seizure in only nine per cent of the cases.¹⁹ It is believed that the offence of illicit possession is generally an easier and quicker way for law enforcement and other relevant agencies to justify the prohibition of a transfer than the offence of illicit trafficking and that illicit trafficking will appear as the actual offence after further investigation. This is supported by the results of the global study: when the criminal context of the seizure is taken into account the share of arms trafficking doubles.²⁰ In addition, official government statistics on illicit firearms are – to a certain extent – a reflection of the priority given to tackling this security phenomenon. An increase in the number of seized firearms does not necessarily imply an increase in the illegal possession or trafficking in these weapons, but can also be the direct result of an increase in the number of law enforcement operations targeting such phenomena. Between 2010 and 2016 the number of firearms seized by the Croatian border police, for example, increased from 119 to 649 firearms.²¹ According to the findings of project SAFTE it is believed this spectacular increase is not a reflection of increased cross-border trafficking involving the country, but rather a reflection of strengthened border police capacity: after joining the European Union in 2013, Croatia started preparing accession to the Schengen zone and upgraded its border control by increasing the number of border police officers and procuring technical equipment for border control. This may subsequently have increased detection rates and the number of seizures.²²

58. Despite increased attention for good data collection on firearm seizures, several European Union Member States are still confronted with significant shortcomings with regard to the quality and the completeness of their national data as a result of poor registration procedures, the lack of a uniform collection and registration approach or the lack of firearms

18 UNODC (2020), *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020*, Vienna: UNODC, page 16.

19 Ibid, page 33.

20 Ibid, pages 35 and 36.

21 Dragović, F. et al (2018), ‘Availability of illegal weapons: connecting the dots. Case study of the Republic of Croatia’, in: Duquet, N. (ed.) *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 81-122.

22 Ibid.

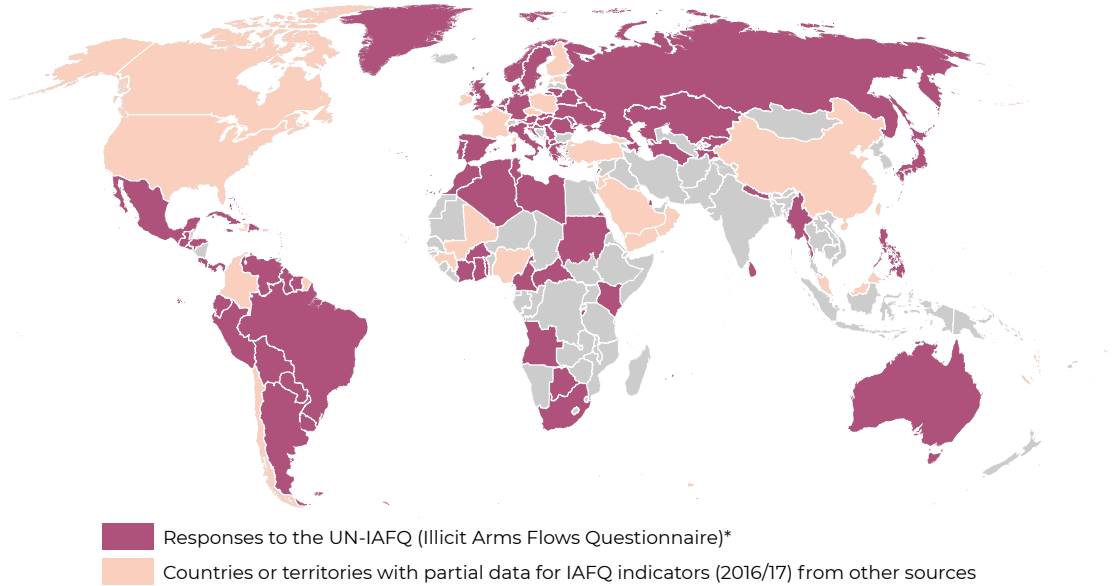
expertise among local law enforcement officials seizing firearms. In addition, investigating the illicit origin of the firearms seized is often not considered a priority in law enforcement actions that are focused on other criminal activities such as drug trafficking, homicides or armed robberies. Even when seized firearms are well-registered, several elements further hinder the development of a good intelligence picture on the size and circumstances conducive to illicit firearms trafficking. It is not only important to collect as much information as possible of the specific context of firearm seizures, but also to invest in analytical capacities that extend beyond the tactical and operational level. Yet, strategic analyses of the phenomenon of illicit firearms trafficking is not always a priority in European Union Member States. Despite the lack of reliable estimates, it is generally believed that the size of illicit firearms trafficking in Europe is lower than in many other parts of the world.²³ Europol has, however, observed that the illicit possession of firearms by members of organized criminal groups and lower-level street gangs has been increasing.²⁴

59. The described challenges are also reflected in the overall data availability within European Union Member States. The below map provides an overview of all countries for which data was available for the purpose of the *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020*.

23 Centre for Strategy and Evaluation Services (2014), *Study to Support an Impact Assessment on Options for Combatting Illicit Firearms Trafficking in the European Union: Final Report*, Brussels: European Commission, page 17.

24 Europol (2010), Oc-Scan Threat Notice: Integrated EU Approach Against Illegal Trafficking In Heavy Firearms. 6 January 2010.

MAP 2: Responses to the IAFQ (2018 data collection exercise on firearms) and other countries/ territories with partial or supplementary data from other sources



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Dashed lines represent undetermined boundaries. Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. The final boundary between the Sudan and South Sudan has not yet been determined. A dispute exists between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas).

*Includes responses from 6 countries limited to metadata and qualitative data only.

Source: *UNODC Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020*

60. While quantitative and/or qualitative data was available for 18 European Union Member States coloured in magenta via the IAFQ, for the countries coloured in light orange data was available from other sources.²⁵ The map shows that while data on seized firearms was retrievable for the large majority of European Union Member States, the participation rate in the global data collection exercise stands to be further increased. Moreover, the below table reveals that the completeness of data varies extensively among the reporting countries, including among European Union Member States.

25 The following is the list of European Union Member States that submitted qualitative and/ or quantitative data to UNODC via the IAFQ: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

TABLE 3: Availability of statistical data reported by European Union Member States through the IAFQ by number of responses to individual topics

Topic	Number of countries with data at global level	Number of countries with data at European Union level
Seizures, total and disaggregation by type	74	16
Seizures, disaggregation by secondary variables	65	14
Criminal context	53	13
Found and surrendered	51	12
Parts and components (seizures)	32	10
Ammunition (seizures)	47	9
Tracing outcome	33	8
Significant seizures	32	8
Tracing requests	18	6
Routing (various questions)	26	3

Source: Adapted from the methodological annex to the *UNODC Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020*

61. The table illustrates that 16 out of the 18 European Union Member States that submitted the IAFQ provided data on total numbers of firearms seizures disaggregated by type of weapon. With the exception of Spain, the response rate declines for all other European Union Member States, including to the 50 per cent margin for topics such as tracing outcomes, significant seizures, tracing requests and routing. These figures reveal that many countries, within the European Union and beyond, face challenges with providing data that goes beyond basic information about the number and types of seized firearms. This decreasing progression in response rates corroborates the experience by UNODC that investigative efforts and related data collection vary among the different steps of the criminal justice chain.

62. The following sections provide an overview of the total number of firearms seizures in European Union Member States in 2016 - 2017, the different contexts in which these seizures occurred and the types of firearms that were seized. Also, the (limited) available data on seizures of ammunition and firearms parts and components in European Union Member States is analysed.

1.1 Firearms

63. Sixteen European Union Member States provided seizure data for 2016 and 2017 via the IAFQ. These countries seized in total about 50,000 firearms in 2016 and 40,000 firearms in 2017, representing nine per cent and seven per cent of global reported seizure, respectively. Where available, the table below further contains seizure data from previous years, which was collected by UNODC in the context of the *2015 Study on Firearms* or reported by European Union Member States in the context of the Global Firearms Data Project. For the purpose of this analysis, the data of different reference years are combined into one dataset.

TABLE 4: Number of firearms seized by European Union Member States, 2016 - 2017 (or available years)

Country	Information on data coverage		Year							
	Full coverage	Incl admin. seizures	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Belgium	N.A.	N.A.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	3,745	3,614
Croatia	No	No	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	1,878	1,686
Denmark	Yes	Yes	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	778	854
Estonia	N.A.	N.A.	-	21	-	-	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Finland	N.A.	N.A.	2,783	3,023	2,127	3,149	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
France	N.A.	N.A.			536	825	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Germany	N.A.	N.A.				43,543	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Greece	Yes	Yes			133	-	n.a.	n.a.	9,145	2,492
Hungary	No	No	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	337	193
Italy	Yes	Yes	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	6,617	4,545
Latvia	N.A.	N.A.	23	120	27	16	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Lithuania	Yes	N.A.	183	170	115	198	n.a.	n.a.	309	262
Luxembourg	Yes	No	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	766	863
The Netherlands	N.A.	No	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	5,399	5,463
Poland	No	No	2,269	1,577	1,850	1,567	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Portugal	No	No	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	6,754	5,925
Romania	No	No	99	84	86	86	n.a.	n.a.	28	57
Slovakia	Yes	No	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	1,715	510
Slovenia	N.A.	No	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	304	324
Spain	Yes	No	5,723	6,013	9,378	7,515	6,897	6,161	9,003	10,602

Country	Information on data coverage		Year							
Sweden	N.A.	N.A.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	957	812
United Kingdom	No	No	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	946	947

Source: IAFQ and UNODC Study on Firearms 2015

64. Significant differences in the number of seized firearms can be observed. While countries such as Belgium, Croatia, Finland, Greece, Italy, Poland, the Netherlands and Spain reported that each year thousands of firearms were seized, other countries reported much lower numbers of firearms seizures. Caution is, however, needed when interpreting and comparing this data since a significant amount of Member States have not reported their seizure data. Secondly, not all European Union Member States reported the same type of seizure data. While UNODC specifically asked for data on seized firearms in connection to criminal offences, several European Union Member States noted that they were not able to differentiate their seizure between criminal and administrative offences. Moreover, countries indicated that the reported figures may not always represent all seizures that occurred in the jurisdiction in a given reporting year. Reasons for this may be related to various approaches to recording seizure data adopted by different structures within a country or to challenges in sharing collected data among different institutions. This means it is not possible to adequately compare the available national numbers on seized firearms across the European Union.

Context of the seizures: legal justification and location

65. Firearms are seized in various contexts. Thirteen European Union Member States reported on the legal justification of their firearms seizures. Data on the legal justification of seizures can provide, together with information on the criminal context in which they took place and data from the judiciary on prosecutions and adjudications related to firearms trafficking, an important insight into the different steps of the criminal justice response to firearms related criminality and may help authorities better understand investigative or prosecutorial challenges as regards illicit firearms trafficking.²⁶

66. Table 5 gives an overview of the main legal justifications based on the available data for 2017. More detailed figures on the legal justification of firearms seizures in European Union Member States can be found in the annex of this report.

²⁶ Note that data from the judiciary on prosecutions and adjudications related to firearms trafficking is collected by UNODC in the context of the 2019 firearms data collection cycle.

TABLE 5: Legal justification of firearms seizures in European Union Member States in 2017 (or most recent data) in percentage of seized firearms

Type of justification	DK	GR	HU	IT	LI	LU	NL	PT	RO	SL	ES	SW	UK
Illicit possession	70%	0.1%	100%	-	89%	59%	82%	71%	100%	100%	4%	-	95%
Illicit use	9%	-	-	-	7%	41%	10%	22%	-	-	3%	-	4%
Illicit trafficking	-	-	-	-	1%	-	1%	4%	-	-	1%	-	0.7%
Illicit manufacturing	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2%	-	-	-	4%	-
Altered markings	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.2%	-	-	-	96%	-
Unkown	-	99.9%	-	-	-	-	3%	-	-	-	89%	-	-
Other	-	-	-	100%	3%	-	8%	-	-	-	3%	-	-
Total number of seized firearms	854	2492	193	2697	262	863	5202	3483	57	324	10602	140	947

Source: IAFQ

Note: Percentages are calculated on the basis of numeric data provided to UNODC in the corresponding question and do not reflect any unclassified amounts of seizures.

67. The table indicates that, in line with the results of the UNODC *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020*, the most frequent legal justification for seizing a firearm in the European Union is illicit possession of firearms, equaling an average of 34 per cent of the seizures for which such data was available. In some countries, for example in Luxemburg and Portugal, the illicit use of a firearm is also an important justification for seizing the weapon. Illicit firearms trafficking is, however, not often used to justify the seizure of firearms. In most of the European Union Member States that reported on the legal justification of firearms seizures in 2016 - 2017 no cases of illicit firearms trafficking were reported, while in the few other countries the share of seizures on the ground of illicit firearms trafficking was between one and four per cent. The only exceptions are Greece and Hungary who reported a high share of seizures due to illicit firearms trafficking in recent years. Greece seized 6,435 firearms based on the suspicion of illicit firearms trafficking in 2016 (which accounted for 70 per cent of all reported seizures of firearms that year), while Hungary seized 127 firearms on the suspicion of illicit firearms trafficking in 2016 (which accounted for 38 per cent of all reported seizures of firearms connected to criminal offences that year). It is noteworthy that the exceptional high number of seized firearms justified by the suspicion of illicit firearms trafficking in Greece in 2016 is the result of the

seizure of one very large shipment of firearms in the territorial waters of the country (see paragraph 71).

68. As mentioned earlier, the observation that only a very small share of the seizures of firearms occurred on the ground of illicit firearms trafficking should be interpreted carefully. When law enforcement officials or border guards seize firearms in suspected trafficking cases, it is generally much easier to establish the illicit possession of the firearm by the suspects than the suspected trafficking, as the latter usually requires further investigation, including the tracing of the firearm and additional examination, which take more time and may involve other authorities. This implies that some of the seizures that have been reported as the result of illicit possession are in reality the result of foiled firearms trafficking activities.

69. Firearms are seized at various locations. Collecting data on the type of location at which seizures occur in a systematic manner can help authorities better understand the modi operandi used by traffickers, as seizures at borders - which may include land-borders, airports and harbours - may be particularly revealing about transnational illicit firearms flows. The results of the UNODC *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020* indicate that firearms seizures at borders account for less than 10 per cent of all seizures; most firearms are seized within national territories.²⁷ The table below illustrates the location in which seizures occurred in European Union Member States.

TABLE 6: Location of firearms seizures in European Union Member States in 2017 (or most recent data) in percentage of seized firearms

Type of location	DK	GR	HU	LU	NL	PT	RO	SL	ES	UK
Domestic / Within national territory	100%	99.5%	100%	81%	99.9%	98%	93%	90%	-	98.8%
Land borders	-	0.1%	-	-	-	-	7%	10%	.02%	-
Planes and airports	-	-	-	19%	-	1%	-	-	0.2%	0.1%
Vessels and harbours	-	0.4%	-	-	-	0.7%	-	-	0.1%	0.2%
Other	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	41%	0.8%
Unknown location	-	-	-	-	-	0.3%	-	-	59%	-
Total number of seized firearms	854	2,492	13	863	5,463	5,925	57	324	10,602	947

Source: IAFQ

Note: Percentages are calculated on the basis of numeric data provided to UNODC in the corresponding question and do not reflect any unclassified amounts of seizures.

27 UNODC (2020), *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking*, Vienna: UNODC, page 61.

70. Ten European Union Member States reported on the location of firearms seizures. Not surprisingly given the high share of firearms seizures due to their illicit possession or use, the overwhelming majority of seizures occurred within the country's national territory. There are however some Member States where a significant share of the seizures occurred at the border. In Luxembourg, for example, 19 to 26 per cent of the firearms were seized at the airport, while in Romania and Slovenia significant numbers of firearms were seized at the land border (respectively four to seven per cent and two to 10 per cent in 2017).

71. Seizures on vessels or in harbours also occur in the European Union, but are rather exceptional: only Greece, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain, Scotland and Northern Ireland (hereinafter referred to as United Kingdom) have reported on seizures on vessels or in harbours in 2016 or 2017. In these Member States such seizures accounted for maximum one per cent of all firearms seizures in that period. The only exception is the high share of firearms seized on vessels in Greece (70 per cent) in 2016, which is the direct result of one specific seizure of a very large quantity of firearms on a vessel coming from Turkey that was destined for the Democratic Republic of Congo.²⁸ Greece further reported to the IAFQ that in five separate seizures at Chania harbour 6,404 shotguns, 28 pistols, one revolver, one rifle and two machine guns were seized coming from Turkey.²⁹ Media articles also report of previous cases of seizures of large arms shipments on vessels transiting Greek territorial waters.³⁰

Type, technical condition and country of manufacture of seized firearms

72. Most of the countries that responded to the IAFQ also reported on the types of firearms that are seized. Notwithstanding the recorded problems with the interpretation of seizure data, the information on distribution of types of weapons can yield insights into the characteristics of illicit gun markets and the use of firearms by criminals in the different countries, especially if they can be combined with other available data such as homicide data or law enforcement data on other criminal offences. The results of the *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020* suggest that pistols are the world's most seized type of firearm, but

28 Reported by Greece via the IAFQ.

29 Ibid.

30 Greek coastguards seize huge shipment of arms and ammo 'bound for Libya', Independent, 6 September 2015; Greek coast guard seizes Libya-bound ship carrying weapons, Reuters, 2 September 2015.

also indicate significant regional differences in the distribution of different types of seized firearms.³¹

73. An analysis of the responses of European Union Member States indicates significant differences in the types of seized firearms across the European Union. The table below provides an overview of the predominant types of firearms seized in the 16 European Union Member States that reported quantitative data on the types of firearms they have seized in 2017 and four Member States that reported on the types of seized firearms in 2013. More detailed figures on the different types of firearms seized in European Union Member States can be found in the annex of this report.

TABLE 7: Predominant type of firearms seized in European Union Member States in 2017 (or most recent data)

Country	Pistol	Revolver	Rifle	Shot-gun	Submachine gun	Machine gun	Other	Unknown
Belgium	21%	11%	53%	-	0.3%	0.5%	-	-
Croatia	34%	4%	56%	-	2%	5%	-	0.1%
Denmark	33%	9%	12%	23%	5%	0.4%	18%	0.5%
Finland (2013)	13%	13%	21%	19%	-	4%	1%	29%
France (2013)	27%	7%	-	31%	1%	2%	13%	19%
Greece	15%	6%	7%	60%	2%	.08%	10%	.04%
Hungary	9%	-	48%	4%	-	-	33%	6%
Italy	23%	7%	.09%	61%	0.2%	-	-	9%
Latvia (2013)	13%	50%	13%	13%	-	-	13%	-
Lithuania	45%	33%	-	19%	-	2%	0.4%	-
Luxembourg	3%	3%	8%	2%	0.5%	-	87%	-
Netherlands	30%	10%	18%	-	0.4%	2%	39%	-
Poland (2013)	14%	14%	10%	10%	1%	10%	5%	34%
Portugal	3%	2%	1%	6%	0.1%	-	37%	51%
Romania	7%	4%	12%	-	-	-	77%	-
Slovakia	43%	12%	36%	8%	-	-	-	1%
Slovenia	36%	-	46%	-	-	-	18%	-
Spain	41%	11%	15%	31%	1%	.02%	-	-
Sweden	49%	9%	9%	13%	4%	5%	10%	-
United Kingdom	29%	21%	3%	26%	4%	-	17%	-

Source: IAFQ and UNODC 2015 Study on Firearms

Note: Percentages are calculated on the basis of numeric data provided to UNODC in the corresponding question and do not reflect any unclassified amounts of seizures.

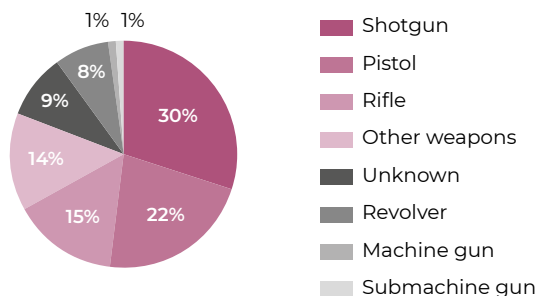
31 UNODC (2020), Global Study on Firearms Trafficking, Vienna: UNODC, pages 25 and 26.

74. The table shows that in several European Union Member States pistols are most frequently seized, but other countries also report frequent seizures of rifles and shotguns. In Belgium and Croatia for example, the majority of seized firearms are rifles, while also Finland, Luxembourg and Slovenia report high shares of seized rifles. Shotguns are the most commonly type seized in southern European countries such as Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain. Machine guns and submachine guns, commonly considered in the European Union area as military-grade firearms, are seized much less frequently, taking up only two per cent or less of all seized firearms. Several European Union Member States even reported that no machine guns or submachine guns were seized in 2016 - 2017. Yet, in some countries the share of military-grade firearms is significantly higher. In Hungary, for example, 83 submachine guns and 66 machine guns were seized in 2016 (out of a total of 337 seized firearms for criminal offences that year). In 2017, however, no military-grade firearms were seized in Hungary. In other European Union Member States the share of seized military-grade firearms is lower, but more stable. In Sweden and Croatia, for example, the share of machine guns was four to five per cent in recent years, while Denmark, Sweden and the United Kingdom reported that two to six per cent of the seized firearms were submachine guns. Interestingly, Poland, Latvia and Lithuania reported shares of seven to 10 per cent seized machine guns in the period 2010 - 2013. While in Latvia and Poland no recent data is available on the types of seized firearms, recent figure from Lithuania indicate a strong decrease in the numbers of seized machine guns.

75. An analysis of the data provided by 16 European Union Member States on the types of firearms seized specifically in 2016 - 2017 suggests that shotguns (30 per cent) are the most widely seized firearms in the European Union, followed by pistols (22 per cent) and rifles (15 per cent). Revolvers (8 per cent) and military-grade firearms (2 per cent), such as machine guns and submachine guns, are seized much less frequently (see figure 3). These figures deviate slightly from the distribution of types of firearms seized within Europe as a whole, where seizures are relatively evenly distributed between pistols (35 per cent), rifles (27 per cent) and shotguns (22 per cent).³²

32 UNODC (2020), *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking*, Vienna: UNODC, page 96.

FIGURE 3: Distribution of seized firearms by type in 16 European Union Member States, 2016 - 17



Source: IAFQ

Note: Percentages are calculated on the basis of numeric data provided to UNODC in the corresponding question and do not reflect any unclassified amounts of seizures.

76. The *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020* notes that, compared to other regions, the types of arms seized in Europe include a significant proportion of pneumatic, blank-firing and gas weapons. The figure 3 shows that 14 per cent of all seizures involve “other weapons”. In some European Union Member States this share is even higher, for example in Portugal (35 – 37 per cent), the Netherlands (39 - 43 per cent) and Romania (61 – 77 per cent). In Luxemburg the share of “other weapons” in seizures from 2016 and 2017 is even 71 - 87 per cent. The high share of “other weapons” suggests a high number of seizures of blank firing weapons in their original condition.

77. Eleven European Union Member States reported on the technical condition of the seized firearms. This data is presented in the table 8. Such information, collected and analysed in a strategic manner, can help authorities better understand the modi operandi used by criminals to acquire firearms and identify trends in firearms manufacturing processes.

TABLE 8: Technical condition of firearms seized in European Union Member States in 2017 (or most recent data) in percentage of seized firearms

Condition of firearm	DK	GR	HU	LI	LU	PT	RO	SK	ES	SW	UK
Industrially manufactured arms with no signs of alteration or deactivation	95%	0.1%	99%	-	100%	36%	100%	78%	99%	-	59%
Converted weapons	5%	-	1%	3%	-	2%	-	-	1%	7%	12%

Condition of firearm	DK	GR	HU	LI	LU	PT	RO	SK	ES	SW	UK
Assembled weapons	-	-	-	91%		-		7%	-	1%	0.1%
Reactivated weapons				-		-		-	.05%	-	4%
Modified weapons	-	-	-	6%		2%		15%	-	-	23%
Weapons otherwise illicitly manufactured, including illicit artisanal production	-	-		-		0.2%		-	-	-	3%
Unknown	-	99.9%		-		59%		-	-	93%	1%
Total number of seized firearms	854	2,492	337	262	116	5,925	57	510	10,602	812	947

Source: IAFQ

Note: Percentages are calculated on the basis of numeric data provided to UNODC in the corresponding question and do not reflect any unclassified amounts of seizures.

78. The table demonstrates that the overwhelming majority of seized firearms were industrially manufactured and did not have signs of alteration or deactivation. A few European Union Member States, however, also report significant shares of modified, converted, reactivated or assembled firearms. In Lithuania, for example, most of the firearms seized in 2017 were assembled weapons (91 per cent). In Slovakia assembled firearms were also seized in recent years (three to seven per cent in 2016 - 2017). Converted firearms were seized in the United Kingdom (12 per cent in 2016 - 2017), in Sweden (at least seven to eight per cent in 2016 - 2017), in Denmark (three to five per cent in 2016 - 2017) and in Spain (0.1 to one per cent in 2016 - 2017). Moreover, the United Kingdom (23 to 26 per cent in 2016 - 2017) and Slovakia (four to 15 per cent in 2016 - 2017) also reported significant shares of modified firearms.

79. The *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020* confirms that the vast majority of trafficked firearms originate as legally manufactured firearms, which are at some point in their life cycle diverted into the illegal domain.³³ Often there is little connection between the country of seizure and the country of manufacture of the firearms. According to the global study “vulnerability to firearms trafficking is mostly to be found in countries where firearms are diverted from legal holdings rather than where they are manufactured”.³⁴ Firearms are durable goods and their circulation before and after diversion often involves several transfers. This phenomenon is also corroborated for the European Union region by the findings of Project SAFTE,

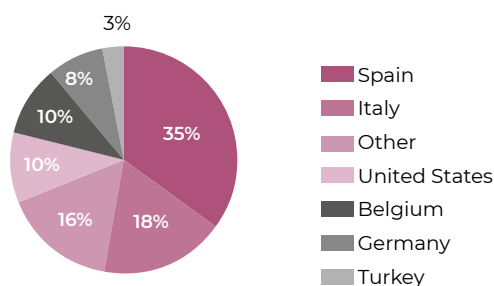
33 UNODC (2020), *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking*, Vienna: UNODC, page 27.

34 UNODC (2020), *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking*, Vienna: UNODC, page 22.

which suggest that almost all firearms seized in Europe were legally produced and then diverted to illegal gun markets.³⁵ This diversion can thus occur anywhere on the chain between the country of manufacture and the country of seizure. Yet, information on the country of manufacture of seized firearms may yield additional insights into their provenance and illicit arms flows. The *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020* demonstrates that Europe is the main manufacturing region of firearms seized across the world.³⁶

80. Nine European Union Member States reported on the country of manufacture of seized firearms in 2016 – 2017. The figure below gives an overview of the general distribution of the countries of manufacture (when known).

FIGURE 4: Distribution of seized firearms by country of manufacture in nine European Union Member States, 2016 – 17



Source: IAFQ

Note: Percentages are calculated on the basis of numeric data provided to UNODC in the corresponding question and do not reflect any unclassified amounts of seizures.

81. Not surprisingly, the most important countries of manufacture of seized firearms in Europe are European countries with a significant legal firearms production such as Belgium, Germany, Italy and Spain. Together these four countries account for the manufacturing of more than 70 per cent of seized firearms for which this type of data was available in the nine reporting European Union Member States. This provides an indication that most of the illicit firearms trafficking in the European Union may be intra-regional.

³⁵ Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 72.

³⁶ UNODC (2020), *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking*, Vienna: UNODC, page 53.

Marking and tracing of firearms

82. Tracing firearms is crucial in the quest to identify points of diversion. The Firearms Protocol defines “tracing” as the **systematic tracking of firearms and, where possible, their parts and components and ammunition from manufacturer to purchaser for the purpose of assisting the competent authorities of States Parties in detecting, investigating and analysing illicit manufacturing and illicit trafficking.**³⁷

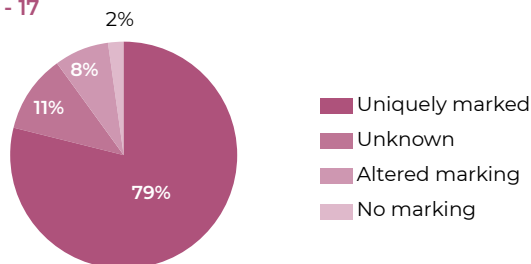
83. To trace firearms national authorities generally examine the legally required markings on the seized firearms and cross check these markings with national and international databases. The Firearms Protocol requires State Parties to mark each firearm at the time of manufacture in a unique and user-friendly manner and undertake appropriate simple marking on each imported firearm.³⁸ When national authorities seize a firearm, they can use this marking to attempt to trace its origin and track the movement of the firearm. In general, national authorities first check their domestic records when tracing a firearm. This way a domestic diversion can be identified. National authorities can also initiate an international tracing request, often starting with the country of manufacture of the seized firearm. This type of tracing requires international cooperation of at least two countries and can be facilitated by the Illicit Arms Records and Tracing Management System (iARMS) managed by the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), or by other means including the European Schengen system, the United States based e-trace or via direct bilateral contacts between the requesting and the requested country. Tracing of seized firearms is of great importance for a better understanding of illicit arms flows as it helps verifying the point of diversion and illicit origin of the weapon and triggering a wider investigation into a possible illicit trafficking offence.

84. Ten European Union Member States provided data on the markings on seized firearms from 2016 - 2017. The figure 5 provides an overview of the type of marking of seized firearms in these countries.

³⁷ Article 3 (f) of the Firearms Protocol.

³⁸ Article 8 of the Firearms Protocol

FIGURE 5: Distribution of seized firearms by type of marking in 10 European Union Member States, 2016 - 17



Source: IAFQ

Note: Percentages are calculated on the basis of numeric data provided to UNODC in the corresponding question and do not reflect any unclassified amounts of seizures.

85. Almost all European Union Member States that reported this information to UNODC noted that the vast majority of their seized firearms show a unique marking. Firearms without a marking are rarely seized in most of the European Union Member States that responded to the questionnaire. Only in Portugal a significant share of non-marked firearms was seized (18 per cent). Moreover, several Member States noted that a significant share of the seized firearms was characterized by altered markings, which can be an indication for criminal intent and constitutes a criminal offence under article 5 paragraph 1 c of the Firearms Protocol.³⁹ This share was particularly high in Portugal (37 to 39 per cent) and the United Kingdom (30 to 35 per cent), but also quite high in Sweden (16 to 17 per cent) and Spain (9 to 14 per cent). The relatively high share of ‘unknown’ in the total distribution for 2016 - 2017 is connected to the high share of ‘unknown’ markings in Greece (30 per cent in 2016 and even 100 per cent in 2017). In the other European Union Member States this share fluctuated between zero and one per cent.

86. As most seized firearms in the European Union are uniquely marked, national authorities have the opportunity to attempt to trace these firearms, identify their point of diversion and take the appropriate measures to address illicit supply chains. In some cases the firearm can be found in the national records of the seizing country or another country and the point of diversion can be identified. Yet, in other cases not enough information is available to identify the point of diversion. A comparison of the tracing activities between Lithuania and the United Kingdom illustrates significant

³⁹ According to article 5 paragraph 1 c of the Firearms Protocol, each State Party shall adopt such legislative and other measures as may be necessary to establish as criminal offences falsifying or illicitly obliterating, removing or altering the marking(s) on firearms required by article 8 of this Protocol.

differences that may exist between the (possibilities for) tracing across European Union Member States (see table 9).

TABLE 9: Outcome of tracing and other follow-up activities on seized firearms in Lithuania and the United Kingdom, 2016 and 2017

Possibility of identification	Tracing outcome	Lithuania		UK	
		Seized firearms	% of total	Seized firearms	% of total
Uniquely identifiable through marking	Weapon seized from its legitimate owner and weapon found in national registry	3	1%	0	0%
	Weapon seized from illegitimate owner and weapon found in national registry	3	1%	94	5%
	Point of diversion of the weapon (last legal record) identified through tracing and weapon found in foreign registry	-	-	145	8%
	Point of diversion otherwise established by a competent authority	-	-	18	1%
	Tracing attempted, but not enough information to identify point of diversion	332	58%	0	0%
	Tracing procedures still pending	-	-	114	6%
	No tracing procedure initiated	-	-	1370	72%
	Total		338	59%	1741
Not uniquely identifiable	Illicitly manufactured	-	-	41	2%
	Erased or altered marking	10	2%	111	6%
	No information available about the item	223	39%	0	0%
	Total	233	41%	152	8%
Unknown status with respect to marking	-	-	0	0%	
Total		571	100%	1893	100%

Source: IAFQ

Note: Percentages are calculated on the basis of numeric data provided to UNODC in the corresponding question and do not reflect any unclassified amounts of seizures.

87. In Lithuania 41 per cent of all seized firearms in 2016 - 2017 were not uniquely identifiable (mainly because no information was available on the item) compared to only eight per cent in the United Kingdom (mainly

because of erased or altered markings). The Lithuanian authorities attempted to trace the seized firearms that were uniquely identifiable through marking yielding limited success: only two per cent of all seized firearms in Lithuania have been traced back to the national register. In most of the cases the tracing was attempted, but not enough information was available to identify the point of diversion. In the United Kingdom no tracing procedures were initiated for most of the reported seized firearms, but when attempted these tracing requests were more successful and the point of diversion was identified: five per cent of all seized firearms were traced back to their own national registry while eight per cent of all seized firearms were traced to a foreign registry.

88. International tracing requests can yield important results to enhance knowledge in transnational trafficking routes. Six European Union Member States reported they had sent in total 301 tracing requests on a total of 1,137 firearms to other countries or regional/international organizations (during the most recent reporting year).

TABLE 10: Tracing requests sent by European Union Member States (most recent reporting year)

Country	Number of tracing requests sent	Total number of weapons in requests
Italy	44	44
Romania	15	15
Slovakia	3	3
Slovenia	2	2
Spain	87	923
United Kingdom	150	150
Total	301	1,137

Source: IAFQ

89. Most of these tracing requests were sent to other European countries and international organizations such as INTERPOL. Spain, for example, sent out 87 tracing requests for 923 firearms. These requests were mainly sent by the Spanish authorities to other European countries, to the United States of America and to INTERPOL (iARMS). In total, 81 of the 87 Spanish tracing requests were answered. The observation that European Union Member States mainly send tracing requests to other European countries reinforces the idea that seized firearms in Europe are mainly either manufactured or trafficked inside the region.

90. Yet, a different picture emerges when analysing the tracing requests received by European Union Member States. Seven European Union Member States reported receiving in total 1,807 tracing requests (see table below).

TABLE 11: Tracing requests received by European Union Member States (most recent reporting year)

Country	Number of tracing requests received	Non-European countries and international agencies requesting tracing
Belgium	769	Algeria, Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, Colombia, Netherlands Antilles, Jamaica, Japan, Morocco, Mozambique and INTERPOL
Italy	434	INTERPOL
Romania	16	Brazil, Trinidad and Tobago
Slovakia	381	INTERPOL
Slovenia	21	-
Spain	125	Brazil, Colombia, Lebanon, Mozambique and INTERPOL
United Kingdom	61	Algeria, Brazil, Colombia, Morocco, countries from North America and Northern Caribbean
Total	1,807	

Source: IAFQ

91. The table reveals that especially Belgium, Italy and Slovakia received many requests for tracing. While most of the tracing requests for European Union Member States came from other European Union Member States and other European countries, the national authorities of countries such as Belgium, Spain and the United Kingdom also received tracing requests from across the globe. This is a clear indication that European firearms have ended up in the wrong hands across the globe after being transferred legally or illegally to other regions.

1.2 Ammunition

92. International control measures on ammunition are often less restrictive than those applicable to firearms.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, it is

40 The Firearms Protocol defines “ammunition” as “the complete round or its components, including cartridge cases, primers, propellant powder, bullets or projectiles, that are used in a firearm, provided that those components are themselves subject to authorization in the respective State Party”, article 3 (c).

important to consider illicit ammunition flows when it comes to developing increased understanding of firearms issues given that access to ammunition is essential to all firearms-related criminality. Ammunition also tends to be more prone to trafficking since it needs to be replaced more frequently than firearms. The *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020* includes data on seizures of ammunition for 45 countries across the globe. In total these countries seized 3.0 million rounds of ammunition in 2016 and 7.9 million rounds of ammunition in 2017. On average 23 rounds of ammunition were seized for each seized firearm at global level.⁴¹

93. The nine European Union Member States that submitted data from 2016 - 2017 on seized ammunition to UNODC recorded in total more than 800,000 rounds of ammunition in 2016 and almost 300,000 rounds of ammunition in 2017. Yet, there are significant differences in the total amounts of ammunition seizures between these countries.

TABLE 12: Seized (rounds of) ammunition in European Union Member States, 2010 - 2013 and 2016 - 2017

Country	2010	2011	2012	2013	2016	2017
Croatia	-	-	-	-	636	695
Estonia	-	766	-	-	-	-
France	-	17,102	-	556,064	-	-
Germany	-	1,538,479	-	-	-	-
Greece	-	14,208	-	-	578,912	136,241
Hungary	-	-	-	-	19,047	3,106
Latvia	961	3,275	4,349	1,088	-	-
Lithuania	-	1	18	359	6,893	5,911
Poland	4,851	1,860	136,131	90,810	-	-
Portugal	-	-	-	-	55,365	86,631
Romania	-	6,438	292	-	81,861	79,810
Slovakia	-	-	-	-	-	9
Slovenia	-	-	-	-	48,214	25,151
Spain	-	-	-	-	8,813	10,191
Sweden	343	2,580	2,500	3,068	3,563	3,031

Source: IAFQ and UNODC Study on Firearms 2015

94. The largest ammunition seizure was reported by Greece with more than 135,000 rounds of ammunition seized in 2017 and even more

41 UNODC (2020), *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020*, Vienna: UNODC, page 29.

than 578,000 rounds of ammunition seized in 2016. Other Member States noted much smaller total quantities of ammunition seizures. In Slovakia, for example, nine rounds of ammunition were seized in 2017. The *UNODC Study on Firearms 2015* observed impressive fluctuations in ammunition seizures from year to year within countries.⁴² This observation is still valid today in the European Union but based on the existing data it is unclear what the cause is of these fluctuations.

95. The available data on country of manufacture of ammunition seized in European Union Member States is too limited to analyse. Only five European Union Member States reported on the countries of manufacture of the seized ammunition, with three of them noting “unknown” as only or most important country of manufacture and one stating “other” as most important country of manufacture.

TABLE 13: Most important countries of manufacture of ammunition seized in European Union Member States (2017)

Country	Most important manufacturing country
Greece	Unknown
Hungary	Unknown
Lithuania	Unknown, Czechia, Germany, Russian Federation
Spain	Other, United States, Spain, Italy
Sweden	Czechia, Brazil, Sweden

Source: IAFQ

1.3 Parts and components

96. Parts and components of firearms can not only be used to replace elements of firearms, but also to (illegally) modify weapons and to assemble them in their entirety.⁴³ Those items are therefore also subject to international control measures. National legislation on parts and components, however, differs strongly: while some parts and components are subject to restrictions in one country, these same restrictions do not necessarily apply in another country. The *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020* warns that “this leads to the potential for ‘grey trafficking’ whereby a legal purchase in one

42 UNODC (2015), *UNODC Study on firearms 2015: A study on the transnational nature of and routes and modus operandi used in trafficking in firearms*, Vienna: UNODC, page 26.

43 The Firearms Protocol defines “parts and components” as “any element or replacement element specifically designed for a firearm and essential to its operation, including a barrel, frame or receiver, slide or cylinder, bolt or breech block, and any device designed or adapted to diminish the sound caused by firing a firearm”, article 3 (b).

country can be used to illegally supply parts and components in another".⁴⁴ The global study further notes that parts and components may be easier to traffic and conceal than firearms because of their smaller size and that this type of trafficking is often linked to international online sales and the use of parcel deliveries.⁴⁵

97. European Union-wide challenges regarding the conversion of weapons, the illicit reactivation of firearms and the delivery of firearms using postal and courier services are closely linked to control regimes on parts and components. It is therefore important to develop increased insights into their illicit circulation. Ten European Union Member States provided quantitative data on seized firearm parts and components for the period 2016 - 2017 to UNODC. For a number of European Union Member States additional information on seizures of parts and components is available for the period 2010 - 2013 (see table below).

TABLE 14: Seized parts and components by European Union Member States, 2010 - 2013 and 2016 – 2017

Country	2010	2011	2012	2013	2016	2017
Croatia	-	-	-	-	163	104
France	-	27	-	-	-	-
Germany		490			-	-
Greece		873		-	1,823	862
Hungary	-	-	-	-	359	-
Latvia	0	107	9	0	-	-
Lithuania	-	-	-	7	67	54
Poland	606	485	1,001	367	-	-
Romania	-	-	-	-	0	0
Slovakia	-	-	-	-	12	-
Slovenia	-	-	-	-	58	515
Spain	-	-	-	-	2,270	118
Sweden	-	-	11	19	20	16
United Kingdom	-	-	-	-	5	14

Source: IAFQ and UNODC Study on Firearms 2015

98. The table reveals that the 10 countries reporting on seized parts and components seized in total 4,777 items in 2016 and 1,683 items in 2017. The table further indicates the existence of strong fluctuations between

44 UNODC (2020), *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020*, Vienna: UNODC, page 28.

45 Ibid.

European Union Member States in the total number of seized parts and components. While in some countries few parts and components are seized annually, other countries have reported much higher numbers (for example Spain and Greece in 2016 and Poland in 2012). In addition, the annual number of seized parts and components by individual European Union Member States can vary significantly. While Spain, for example, seized 2,270 parts and components in 2016, this number dropped to 118 in 2017.

99. The *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020* indicated that 33 countries that reported seizures of parts and components for firearms in 2016 - 2017 seized 19,000 items in 2016 and 15,000 items in 2017. Most of the reporting countries seized much lower quantities of parts and components than entire firearms. On average the number of seized firearms was 20 times higher than the number of seized parts and components.⁴⁶

100. Although the number of seized parts and components was lower than the number of seized firearms in all of the 10 European Union Member States that reported such information for 2016 - 2017, the European Union ratio between seized firearms and seized parts and components is much smaller than the global ratio. It may be important for authorities to analyse this observation together with the relative high numbers of seizures of converted and reactivated firearms in the same countries, as access to parts and components constitutes an important prerequisite to illicit firearms manufacture.

TABLE 15: Seized firearms and seized parts and components in 10 European Union Member States, 2016 - 2017

Country	Firearms	Parts and components
Croatia	3,564	267
Greece	11,637	2,685
Hungary	530	359
Lithuania	571	121
Romania	85	0
Slovakia	2,225	12
Slovenia	628	573
Spain	19,605	2,388
Sweden	1,769	36
United Kingdom	1,893	19
Total	42,507	6,460

Source: IAFQ

⁴⁶ Ibid, page 28.

CHAPTER 2: Demand and supply of illicit firearms in the European Union

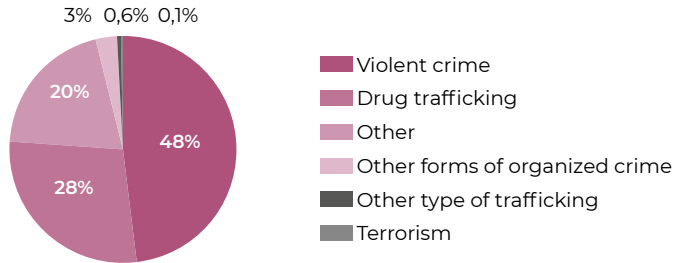
101. The *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020* concludes that demand for trafficked firearms is connected to a multitude of factors which revolve around three main elements: crime, conflict and speculation.⁴⁷ Yet, each country or region is characterized by (a combination of) specific factors that drive demand. Project SAFTE (see footnote 10) concludes that illicit firearms trafficking in the European Union is mainly driven by demand from local criminals and that a symbiotic relationship exists between criminal demand and firearms availability in European countries.⁴⁸ As a result, the characteristics and dynamics of illicit gun markets in Europe differ between countries with other criminal configurations.

102. To further enhance understanding on the link between firearms criminality and other forms of crime, countries were asked to report to UNODC on the criminal context in which the firearms seizures occurred. Eleven European Union Member States reported the number of seized firearms in connection with other suspected offences. Most often these countries reported seizures connected to illicit arms trafficking and other arms offences. Nevertheless, also significant numbers of seizures connected to other criminal offences were reported. The figure 6 provides an overview of the distribution of the different suspected offences which are not arms offences.

47 UNODC (2020), *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking*, Vienna: UNODC, page 36.

48 Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 79.

FIGURE 6: Distribution of seized firearms in connection to other suspected offences (not arms offences) in 10 European Union Member States, 2016 - 17



Source: IAFQ

Note: Percentages are calculated on the basis of numeric data provided to UNODC in the corresponding question and do not reflect any unclassified amounts of seizures.

103. This figure reveals that from the portion of firearms seized in a criminal or not further defined context, in the reporting countries, firearms are mainly seized from criminals involved in violent crime and drug trafficking. Firearms seizures connected to the trafficking of other illicit commodities, other forms of organized crime and terrorism seem to occur much less often. Yet, strong differences exist between European Union Member States.

104. This section analyses the demand for firearms from criminals, zoom into the terrorist demand for firearms and also discuss other sources of demand within European Union Members States. The below infographics summarizes the main actors with demand for illicit firearms within the European Union.

INFOGRAPHIC 1: Main actors with demand for illicit firearms within the European Union

Intent for criminal use	No immediate intent for criminal use
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Armed robbers • Drug criminals • Groups specialized in logistical preparation of assassinations • Mafia Organizations • Outlaw motorcycle gangs • Terrorists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collectors and other individuals with emotional reasons • Individuals with perceived need for self-protection

2.1 Criminal demand for firearms in European Union Member States

105. The results of project SAFTE corroborate the above finding and demonstrate that criminal demand for illicit firearms in the European Union comes from different types of criminals involved in various types of criminal activities such as drug trafficking, armed robberies, human trafficking, prostitution, street gang activities and terrorism.⁴⁹ This study also showed that different types of criminals acquire, possess and use different types of firearms.⁵⁰

106. According to project SAFTE, criminal demand for firearms within the European Union is primarily of instrumental nature: criminals often perceive a firearm as an important tool to carry out their criminal activities, as access to firearms enables and facilitates their criminal activities. Firearms are used by criminals as an offensive tool to obtain valuable commodities, for example during armed robberies, or to threaten rivals with violence. Firearms are also used as a defensive tool, for example to protect themselves from their rivals.⁵¹ According to the United Kingdom National Crime Agency (NCA), for example, the majority of shootings in the United Kingdom are committed by street gangs involved in various types of criminality, including armed robberies and drug trafficking, and victims of gun crime are generally known to the police.⁵² In addition to instrumental reasons, firearms are also acquired and possessed by criminals as “trophy” and for reasons of reputation: the possession of top-branded firearms, such as Glock pistols, or military grade firearms, such as automatic assault rifles, tends to increase the status of the possessor in the criminal underworld.⁵³

49 Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 79.

50 Ibid.

51 Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 79.

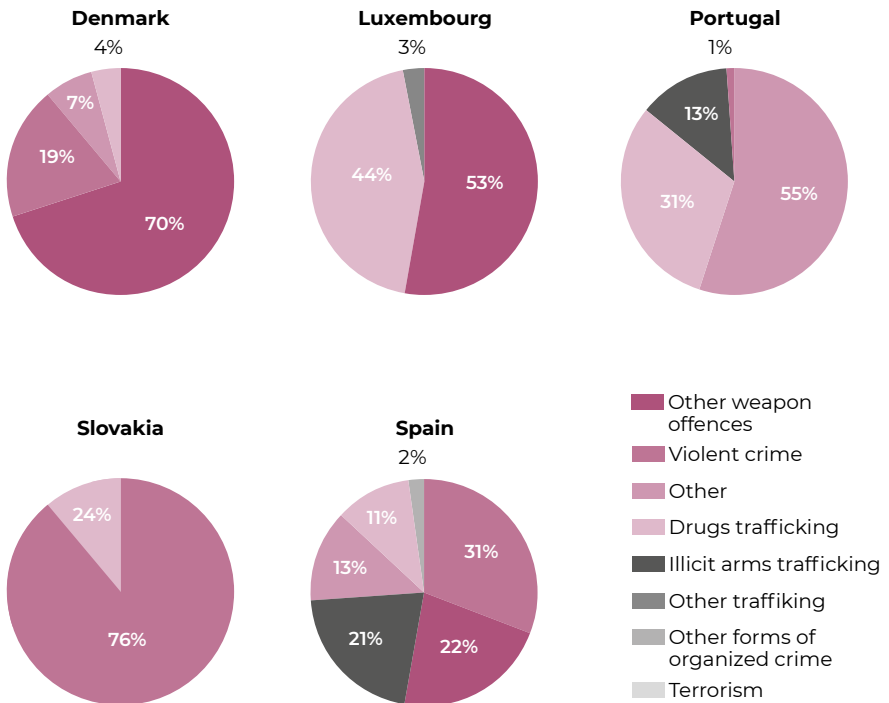
52 See description on illegal firearms in the webpage of the National Crime Agency, available at <https://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/what-we-do/crime-threats/firearms?highlight=WyJibGFuaylmaXJpbmciLCJibGFuaylmaXJlcnMiXQ=%20https://www.policeprofessional.com/news/nca-takes-action-against-terror-loophole-guns/>.

53 Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 79.

Drug criminals

107. Drug criminals are generally considered prime customers on illicit gun markets across Europe and therefore key drivers of illicit firearms trafficking into and within the region. As mentioned earlier, European Union Member States reported on seizures of firearms in connection to drug trafficking via the IAFQ. Data reported by Luxemburg, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain and Denmark is illustrated in the figure below.

FIGURE 7: Distribution of seized firearms in connection to other suspected offences in Denmark, Luxemburg, Portugal, Slovakia and Spain, 2016 - 17



Source: IAFQ

Note: Percentages are calculated on the basis of numeric data provided to UNODC in the corresponding question and do not reflect any unclassified amounts of seizures.

108. Luxemburg, for example, reported that 44 per cent of firearms were seized in connection to drug trafficking in 2016 - 2017; while Portugal reported that 31 per cent of the seized firearms in 2016 - 2017 in

connection to offences other than direct weapons offences were related to drug trafficking. The connection between illicit firearms and drug trafficking within the European Union is also discussed in other analytical products. A recent report by Europol and the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) notes for example that firearms, including automatic weapons, are increasingly being used by organized criminal groups involved in drug markets.⁵⁴ Also violent crime was an important context in which several European Union Member States reported on seizures of firearms via the IAFQ, for example in Slovakia, Spain and Denmark.⁵⁵

109. Illicit firearms possession by drug criminals is very obvious in countries such as the Netherlands and Belgium, which are key entry points for the trafficking of certain types of drugs into Europe and the most important production and manufacturing sites of cannabis, amphetamines and ecstasy within the region. Previous research by the Flemish Peace Institute confirms that intimidation and gun violence are common aspects of the drugs-related criminal underworld in these countries.⁵⁶ According to research from the Netherlands, drug criminals perpetrated about 40 per cent of gun crime in the country in the early 2000s.⁵⁷ Data from Belgian police indicates that the firearms seized from drug-related criminals in the period 2009 - 2015 include handguns, rifles and (converted) blank firing guns.⁵⁸ More recent seizures seem to confirm the availability of various types of firearms, including military-grade firearms, among criminals involved in different types of drug trafficking across the European Union (see text box for examples). Interestingly, the firearms possessed by drug trafficking organized criminal groups in the European Union are not only acquired for self-defence purposes or to carry out their criminal activities, but also to attack rival groups.

54 European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction and Europol (2019), *EU Drug Markets Report 2019*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, page 25.

55 Responses of Slovakia, Spain and Denmark to the IAFQ.

56 Bruinsma, M. and Spapens, T. (2018), 'Terrorist access to firearms in the Netherlands', in: Duquet, N. (Ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute page 257; Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2018), The illicit gun market in Belgium: A lethal cocktail of criminal supply and terrorist demand, in: Duquet, N. (red.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 21-79

57 Spapens, A.C. and Bruinsma, M.Y. (2002), *Vuurwapens gezocht. Vuurwapengebruik, -bezit en handel in Nederland, 1998-2000*, Tilburg: IVA

58 Belgian Federal Police, in: Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 36.

TEXT BOX 2: Examples of recent firearms seizures from drug criminals across the European Union

According to media reports, Dutch and Belgian law enforcement agencies raided several locations in both countries in April 2016 as part of joint operation 'Trefpunt'. Six major production facilities for synthetic drugs were discovered and 55 persons arrested. In addition to a large quantity of drugs also 20 firearms were seized. This included handguns, a Kalashnikov-type automatic assault rifle and an Uzi submachine gun.⁵⁹ In a follow up operation in November 2016, several firearms were seized by the Dutch police among individuals suspected of organized drug trafficking.⁶⁰

The Health Research Board, an agency for health research in Ireland, provides updates on operation 'Hybrid', which was set up in 2016 by the Garda Síochána, Irish police, after the killing of a high-level gang member in Dublin with the aim of investigating drug-related gang crime in the country. As of 13 January 2019, the operation has resulted in 17,000 lines of enquiry, 86 arrests and the seizure of 37 firearms.⁶¹ Media articles provide details about a specific case of the operation: As part of this operation the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau and the Emergency Response Unit raided a warehouse of a transport business in Rathcool, a suburban village south west of Dublin, in January 2017 and seized 17 firearms, more than 4,000 rounds of ammunition and silencers. The seized firearms included pistols, revolvers, a sub-machine gun and a Kalashnikov-type assault rifle. Four revolvers were laid out on a piece of cardboard, loaded and ready for use. According to the article, this was the largest organized crime arms cache ever uncovered by Irish police officers. Police reported that while most Irish organized criminal groups sourced firearms as they are needed on a one-off basis and maintained at most a handful of firearms at any one time, this group wanted to be self-sufficient and therefore stored a large quantity of weapons that could be used at a moment's notice. Several persons were arrested as part of the house search and in July 2019 one of them, described as the "quartermaster general" for one of the main organized criminal groups in Ireland, was sentenced to 11,5 years of imprisonment for his role in the criminal operation. According to the article, the Garda Síochána believes the man, who had no major previous convictions and appeared as a legitimate businessman, ran the warehouse as a

59 Nederlands drugsnetwerk reikt to diep in Vlaanderen, *De Standaard*, 5 April 2016; Een tik voor de pillendraaiers, *Brabants Dagblad*, 5 April 2016.

60 Weer actie tegen drugscriminelen, *Brabants Dagblad*, 15 November 2016.

61 Health Research Board (2018), *Irish National Focal Point to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, Focal Point Ireland: national report for 2017 – drug markets and crime*, Dublin: Health Research Board; Innocent family members targeted in Hutch/Kinahan feud as gardaí step up armed patrols, *The Journal*, 5 February 2019.

centralized arms supply depot for the criminal group. According to the report, hitmen recruited to assassinate rivals were delivered “murder kits” which comprised a gun and ammunition. These kits were assembled in the warehouse and supplied to the hired assassins.⁶²

110. The *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020* noted that firearms can also be exchanged for commodities from other illicit markets such as drugs.⁶³ This has also been observed in Europe with trafficked firearms sometimes being traded for other illicit commodities in the country of destination, particularly drugs. Europol and the EMCDDA have noted an overlap between organized criminal groups involved in illicit firearms trafficking and of drugs via the Western Balkans, with firearms sometimes being exchanged for drugs.⁶⁴ For example, several cases exist where members of Croatian organized criminal groups acquired firearms in the Western Balkans and smuggled them to the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries, where they were traded for cocaine, ecstasy and amphetamines. The traded drugs were then smuggled back into Croatia by the groups and sold on the local market.⁶⁵ According to a media article, a similar exchange of firearms for drugs has been observed in France. It is reported that in 2014 several members of the motorcycle gang Hells Angels were arrested in a follow-up investigation of the seizure of a “weapon of war” in a vehicle during an ordinary traffic control activity. In subsequent house searches the police seized several handguns, shotguns and ammunition. The police discovered that firearms were exchanged for drugs.⁶⁶ Also government officials from Denmark reported to the IAFQ that firearms are sometimes trafficked in return for narcotics.⁶⁷

111. The recent report by the EMCDDA and Europol also notes the risk that illicit firearms trafficking from Europe might be linked to drug trafficking from South America to the European Union. It is believed that organized criminal groups originating from the Western Balkans region that are heavily involved in drug trafficking and have established key locations in

62 International police forces examining Kinahan armoury raid, *The Irish Times*, 16 July 2019; Gangland weapons arsenal lay behind unassuming haulage firm, *The Irish Times*, 16 July 2019.

63 UNODC (2020), *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking*, Vienna: UNODC, page 36.

64 European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction and Europol (2019), *EU Drug Markets Report 2019*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, page 41.

65 Duquet, N. (ed.) *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 474.

66 Reims: Des Hells Angels au cœur d'un trafic d'armes et de drogue, *France 3*, 9 Octobre 2014.

67 Response from Denmark to IAFQ.

South America are trafficking firearms from Europe to South America. This type of trafficking can be highly profitable because the prices of firearms are much higher in South America than in the Western Balkans.⁶⁸ In a response to such suspicions, international law enforcement operations have been developed in recent years, for example ‘Operation Tayrona’, a transnational operation co-led by Europol and the Colombian authorities, targeting the trafficking of cocaine and firearms between America and the European Union. As part of this operation, 75 investigations were conducted and 36 vessels checked, mainly between March and June 2019. This resulted in the seizure of more than 19,500 kgs of cocaine, 133 firearms, more than 14,000 cartridges of ammunition, parts and components of weapons, several rocket launchers and hand grenades. Additionally, more than 3 000 firearms were traced.⁶⁹ There is, however, no evidence these firearms were trafficked from Europe to South America.

Mafia organizations

112. Italian mafia organizations are also considered as important purchasers of firearms on illicit markets. Law enforcement investigations indicated that each group has members who, because of their expertise and contacts, are responsible for procuring firearms.⁷⁰ According to experts, some of these firearms are obtained from the legal market through the use of ‘straw purchasers’ – relatives, friends or ordinary citizens with a firearms license – who purchase the firearms on behalf of an organized criminal group, transfer them (with erased serial numbers) to the group and then report them to the police as stolen or lost.

113. Many of the firearms possessed by Italian organized criminal groups, however, were purchased abroad and smuggled into the country. Experts at the afore-mentioned cross-regional meeting on illicit firearms trafficking to, from and across the European Union reported on a case that was also published by Eurojust and discussed in the media:

68 European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction and Europol (2019), *EU Drug Markets Report 2019*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, page 41.

69 Europol (2019), *Colombian authorities seize over 19 tons of cocaine in Operation Tayrona*, 17 June.

70 UNODC Cross-Regional Meeting on Illicit Arms Trafficking, Vienna, 7-8 October 2019.

TEXT BOX 3: Case illustrating illicit firearms trafficking between Austria and Italy

In 2019, Italian and Austrian authorities dismantled an international trafficking ring that supplied firearms to the Neapolitan Camorra and Calabrian Ndrangheta.⁷¹ In total, 22 individuals were arrested and 139 firearms as well as 1,600 rounds of ammunition were seized. Two Austrian citizens, who were operators of a hunting and fishing shop in Völkermarkt (Austria), illegally supplied Italian organized criminal groups, from time to time, with firearms. The Austrian citizens confessed selling 500 - 600 handguns with erased serial numbers, 50 Kalashnikov type rifles with ammunition and five Škorpion submachineguns with ammunition to the organized criminal group between 2016 and 2018. The authorities believe they sold in total more than 800 handguns and around 60 automatic rifles to these organized criminal groups. In total, 16 different Italian purchasers were identified. Members of the Camorra would travel to Austria to meet the Austrian suppliers to obtain information on the types of weapons available at that time. They then collected orders, together with cash advances, from various Italian buyers and used code language to order these weapons from the Austrian suppliers. The ordered weapons were picked up by couriers sent to Austria by the Camorra and then smuggled into Italy.

114. An Italian prosecutor of the National Anti-mafia and Counterterrorism Directorate further reported during the cross-regional meeting, that each mafia family tends to rely on its own firearms arsenal. This arsenal is considered the collective property of the group. Most arsenals were located in rural areas, close to old houses, inside farm stalls or in bunkers. The weapons were hidden behind double walls or in underground caches or wooden boxes. The firearms were sometimes individually wrapped in cellophane to avoid the effects of humidity, or they may be placed in sacks and then wrapped in large plastic bags. According to the expert, these arsenals are guarded and maintained by custodians expressly devoted to this task in exchange for a monthly payment. These custodians usually do not have a criminal record or known offences, so that they do not attract law enforcement attention. In general, two persons are in charge of the mafia arsenals, so that the weapons can immediately be moved elsewhere in case one of them gets arrested. Firearms from these arsenals are distributed to mafia members based on the circumstances or specific requests. Mafia organizations tend to employ two types of violence in which firearms play a key role. On the one hand, instrumental violence aimed at achieving concrete goals, such as a certain position in the marketplace or the elimination of rivals.

71 UNODC Cross-Regional Meeting on Illicit Arms Trafficking, Vienna, 7-8 October 2019; Eurojust, *Massive arms trafficking ring dismantled by Italian and Austrian action, coordinated by Eurojust*, 26 March 2019.

On the other hand, symbolic violence aimed at enhancing the reputation of the clans and securing a certain level of impunity. These two types of violence are not always distinct and often overlap.

Outlaw motorcycle gangs

115. A similar observation has been made about outlaw motorcycle gangs, which are also considered important customers on illicit firearms markets in Europe. The findings of project SAFTE explain that outlaw motorcycle gangs are known for their propensity for extreme forms of violence, which also includes the use of firearms and explosive devices such as grenades. In general, the use of intimidation and violence serves to exert control over group members and rivals. In addition, these groups exploit their reputation of being extremely violent to strengthen their position within local criminal markets. According to the findings, most of the violence is part of territorial disputes between different outlaw motorcycle gangs or part of the rivalries with local organized criminal groups and street gangs.⁷² In 2018, for example, media reported that six members and supporters of the Hells Angels, were injured with gunshot wounds after a shooting at a club party in Mölnlycke in the West of Sweden. According to media, police suspects the perpetrators were members of a local street gang.⁷³ Danish Police observed that 54 recorded public shootings in 2016 were connected to biker and street gang conflicts.⁷⁴ According to the interviewed officer, almost all shootings were carried out with pistols, which are more easily available, and are easy to carry and conceal. Some of the violence caused by outlaw motorcycle gangs in Europe is, however, also directed at persons who are not involved in these groups or in criminal activities, for example as part of extortion schemes. According to Europol, outlaw motorcycle gangs specifically target members of prison gangs, right wing extremist groups, the hooligan scene and members of the armed forces, in an attempt to recruit new members with specialist knowledge and skills.⁷⁵ The organization states that because of

72 Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 79 and 80.

73 11 held after suspected biker gang shootout wounds eight in Sweden, *The Local*, 5 November 2018; Risk för nya våldsdåd efter attacken på Hells Angels, *Expressen*, 11 November 2018.

74 Interview with firearms analyst at the Danish Police's National Centre of Investigation, in: Grip, L. (2018), 'Illegal weapons, gangs and violent extremism in Denmark', in Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 123 - 168.

75 Europol, *Fear of turf war between Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs in Europe*, Europol, press release, 31 December 2012.

their involvement in numerous criminal activities, outlaw motorcycle gangs are considered a national threat and a national policing priority in 17 European Union Member States.⁷⁶ Moreover, Europol believes that the number of outlaw motorcycle gangs in Europe has more than doubled between 2005 - 2017.⁷⁷

116. The results of a recent study on the profile of members of outlaw motorcycle gangs in the Netherlands indicate that about 30 per cent of the members of these groups and support clubs have previously been convicted for infractions on the Dutch Weapons Act.⁷⁸ In Sweden an older analysis showed that 16 per cent of the studied 80 members of the Hells Angels and 20 members of the Bandidos had violated the Swedish Weapons Act⁷⁹, while a recent study from Denmark indicates that almost two thirds of members of Danish outlaw motorcycle gangs have been convicted for illegal arms possession.⁸⁰ Not surprisingly, national law enforcement agencies in European countries have seized a wide variety of firearms from local outlaw motorcycle gangs in recent years. The below text box provides some examples from media reports.

TEXT BOX 4: Types of firearms seized from outlaw motorcycle gangs in Belgium

Media reports state that in Belgium for example, several members of an organized criminal group were convicted in 2018 for illegally importing 384 firearms, most of which were destined for an outlaw motorcycle gang.⁸¹ Other media reports explain that in March 2017, Belgian police also seized 35 firearms in a coordinated operation against another outlaw motorcycle gang.⁸² According to the article, the seized firearms included four 6.35mm pistols with silencer, a P34 revolver, a Skorpion submachine gun with a silencer, several rifles including automatic rifles and hunting rifles, a grenade, ammunition of different calibers and a bullet-proof vest. As part of this operation also four house searches were conducted in France, which resulted in the seizure of four long firearms, including a rifle with a silencer.

76 See description of threat of outlaw motorcycle gangs on the webpage of Europol, available at <https://www.europol.europa.eu/crime-areas-and-trends/crime-areas/outlaw-motorcycle-gangs>.

77 Ibid.

78 Blokland, A. et al (2017), *Profielen van Nederlandse outlawbikers en Nederlandse outlawbikerclubs*, Apeldoorn: Politie and Wetenschap / Leiden: Universiteit Leiden.

79 BRÅ (1999) *MC-brott*, Stockholm: Brottförebyggande rådet.

80 Klement, C. (2016), 'The prevalence and frequency of crime among Danish outlaw bikers', *Scandinavian Journal of Criminology*, 17 (2), pages 131 - 149.

81 Charleroi: ils importaient des armes pour les Hell's Angels, *La Gazette*, 5 November 2018.

82 34 mensen opgepakt en zware wapens aangetroffen bij huiszoekingen No Surrender, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 7 March 2017.

117. The observation of a wide variety of firearms, including automatic weapons, in the hands of outlaw motorcycle gang suggests that these groups tend to have broad access to firearms and can acquire various types of firearms on illicit gun markets in Europe. These groups are, however, not only the users of trafficked firearms, but often also involved in illicit firearms trafficking themselves (see for example paragraph 160 below).

Armed robbers

118. Another group of criminals with demand for illicit firearms and ammunition in European Union Member States are armed robbers. Statistics from the Belgian Federal Police for the period 2009 - 2015 indicate that when a firearm is used in armed robberies in the country this mostly involves a handgun.⁸³ Belgian law enforcement agencies also note that armed robbers use blank firing guns or replica firearms more often than drug traffickers. A live-firing firearm is generally less necessary for robberies since the perpetrators usually do not intend to shoot, but only use their weapon to intimidate their victims. Armed robbers – who are often young, less experienced criminals – often also do not have the necessary criminal contacts to acquire live-firing firearms.⁸⁴ This is in line with previous research results by the United Kingdom Home Office that suggest that the ready availability of realistic imitation firearms enables robberies to be committed by individuals who lack the criminal contacts necessary to obtain live-firing firearms.⁸⁵ While armed robbers in the European Union generally use handguns, blank-firing weapons or even replica guns, in some cases also military-grade firearms have been seized in connection to armed robberies. This is particularly the case when the target of these robberies is highly secured. For example, according to a media article, in the Milan region in Italy law enforcement officials in 2017 raided the headquarters of an organized criminal group specialized in robbing very well secured high-value transports and seized, in addition to a couple of handguns and a shotgun, also four Kalashnikov style rifles.⁸⁶ All firearms were reportedly loaded and ready for use.

83 Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2017), *De Belgische illegale vuurwapenmarkt in beeld*, Brussel: Flemish Peace Institute, page 45.

84 Interview with the Arms Unit of the Belgian Federal Police (DJSOC/Wapens), 5 April 2017.

85 Hales, G., Lewis C. and Silverstone D. (2006) *Gun crime: The market in and use of illegal firearms*, London: Home Office, Home Office Research Study, page 81.

86 Rapine a portavalori, nel Milanese il quartier generale dei banditi: armi da guerra rubate kit d'assalto, *La Repubblica*, 3 March 2017.

Terrorists

119. While firearms seizures related to terrorist acts do not occur more frequently than seizures in other criminal contexts, the often-high number of casualties caused by terrorist attacks and increasing radicalization among various groups has led the international community to focus on the crime-terror nexus more deeply. In light of these developments, the Flemish Peace Institute undertook an in-depth analysis of the access to firearms by terrorists within the European Union – project SAFTE.⁸⁷ This report zooms into the terrorist demand in European Union Member States, drawing from the findings of project SAFTE.

120. The international community adopted a predominantly treaty-based approach to counter-terrorism efforts, providing for certain crimes to be considered as terrorist related offences in the 19 international counter terrorism instruments.⁸⁸ Among these crimes are acts of aircraft hijacking, acts against the safety of maritime navigation, acts of unlawful taking and possessing of nuclear material, acts of hostage-taking and acts of terrorist bombings, inter alia. However, these instruments do not provide a definition on what constitutes terrorism. Although the term is not subject to a universally agreed definition, terrorism can be broadly understood as a method of coercion that utilizes or threatens to utilize violence in order to spread fear and thereby attain political or ideological goals.⁸⁹ For the international community to recognize a group as a terrorist organization, it requires to be designated as such by the United Nations Security Council. Up to date there are two primary non-State groups, namely the Taliban and Al-Qaida, which have been designated “terrorist” organizations by the Security Council. Moreover, in periodic reports to the Secretary-General, the Security Council has reported on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities to international peace and security.⁹⁰ At

⁸⁷ Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute; Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute,.

⁸⁸ See the instruments listed under international terrorism in the UNODC treaty database within the platform Sharing Electronic Resources and Laws on Crime (SHERLOC). Together with a number of Security Council resolutions relating to terrorism, these instruments make up what UNODC refers to as refers to as the universal legal regime against terrorism.

⁸⁹ See Module 1 of the UNODC Education for Justice module series on counter-terrorism for this definition and module four of this series for more information on how the term is dealt with in customary law, General Assembly resolution 49/60 and the United Nations Security Council resolution 1566 (2004).

⁹⁰ See United Nations Security Council resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015).

regional and national level, countries may adopt additional frameworks with specific definitions on terrorism or additional offences, such as the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism of 2005, the European Union Directive 2017/541 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2017 on combating terrorism, and others. These instruments may lead to varying language, designations and criminal justice responses to criminal behaviour associated with terrorism in different countries and regions. In line with the geographical focus of this paper, the below analysis is based on the classifications and designations used by European Union institutions, notably Europol.

121. In recent years, Europol repeatedly warned that the proliferation and increased availability of illegal firearms in European Union Member States increases the risk of their use by terrorists within these countries.⁹¹ While the quantitative data from the Illicit Arms Flows Dataset suggests that the number of firearms seizures connected to terrorist offences is rather small in European Union Member States compared to seizures connected to other criminal offences, the data confirms that there is a demand for firearms in terrorist contexts. Moreover, other datasets and research from the Flemish Peace Institute and Small Arms Survey⁹² based on qualitative data suggest a strong demand for firearms and their ammunition from terrorist actors and networks across Europe. In the last decade various high-profile terrorist attacks with firearms have been carried out across Europe, such as the 2011 Utøya attack in Norway, the attack on Charlie Hebdo in January 2015 in Paris, the attack on the Cultural Centre and Synagogue in Copenhagen in February 2015, and the attack on the Bataclan and the terraces in Paris in November 2015.

122. Firearms continue to be seized from suspected terrorists and used in attacks. The seizures as part of counter-terrorist operations include various models and brands of firearms, such as handguns and various types of military-grade firearms including assault rifles (especially Kalashnikov-type patterns and CZ vz.58 rifles) but also sub-machine guns. The results of project SAFTE further suggest that most contemporary terrorists

91 Europol (2017), *2017 European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment: Crime in the Age of Technology*, The Hague: Europol, page 54; Europol (2013), *TE-SAT 2013: EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report*, The Hague: Europol, page 7.

92 Florquin, N. and King, B. (2018), *From Legal to Lethal: Converted Firearms in Europe*, Geneva, Small Arms Survey, page 9.

seem to prefer military-grade firearms to carry out attacks.⁹³ The seizures of less-suitable firearms for terrorist attacks, such as hunting rifles or antique handguns, from terrorist networks therefore implies that not all of them have access to a wide range of firearms. Exceptionally, firearms legally acquired by the perpetrator are used, as was the case for example in the 2011 right-wing Utøya attack, but in the vast majority of cases, terrorists possess and use illicitly trafficked or domestically diverted firearms.

TEXT BOX 5: Case-based illustration on the use of illicit firearms in terrorist attack

In the 2012 Toulouse-Montauban attacks targeting French military personnel and a Jewish school, for example, the perpetrator used a pistol and a sub-machine gun.⁹⁴ According to a study by the Flemish Peace Institute, police investigations later discovered that the perpetrator of the attack acquired the submachine gun, ammunition and a bullet-proof vest from a Toulouse-based drug dealer who he had known since his childhood.⁹⁵ The drugs and arms dealer strongly denied being aware of the terrorist intentions of the perpetrator but was sentenced to 14 years of imprisonment for criminal terrorist conspiracy for his role in the attack. The French authorities were also able to trace the point of diversion of the pistol he used: it was stolen a year earlier from a professional sports shooter from the Toulouse area. Some of the other firearms stolen at the same time were later seized from Toulouse-based drug dealers. Later, French police found additional firearms in a search of the apartment and vehicles rented by the perpetrator, including several pistols, a revolver, sub-machine guns and a shotgun. One of the pistols was assembled by using components from various other firearms, while another pistol was reactivated. The perpetrator of the attack told police that he financed the acquisition of these weapons and ammunition with the earnings from years of criminal activities such as robberies and burglaries. According to some reports, the perpetrator was previously also linked to an organized criminal group smuggling cocaine between Spain and France.

93 Duquet, N. (red.) (2018), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 64; Duquet, N. et al (2019), *Armed to Kill: A comprehensive analysis of the guns used in public mass shootings in Europe between 2009 and 2018*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 58 and 59.

94 Duquet, N. et al (2019), *Armed to Kill: A comprehensive analysis of the guns used in public mass shootings in Europe between 2009 and 2018*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 24 and 25.

95 Ibid.

123. This is a clear illustration of what is often labelled the *new crime-terror nexus* in Europe, which entails the convergence of the social networks and environments of criminals and terrorists (instead of their convergence as organizations).⁹⁶ A significant share of the perpetrators of recent terrorist attacks in Europe had a criminal past, for example in armed robberies or drug dealing. The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR) argues that the various criminal skills of these terrorists have facilitated the successful planning and execution of attacks.⁹⁷ One of these criminal skills is the relatively easy access to illicitly trafficked firearms.

124. According to the findings of project SAFTE, terrorist demand for firearms within the European Union is mainly motivated by their desire to use these weapons as tools of violence in a terrorist attack or as defensive tools against law enforcement operations, but firearms have also been used as facilitator for attacks involving other types of weaponry.⁹⁸ The 2016 Berlin Christmas market attack, for example, was carried out with a truck, but the perpetrator of this attack first used a pistol to obtain the truck and shoot the truck driver.⁹⁹ These attacks that involve the use of firearms not only indicate the existence of a terrorist demand for firearms, but also the ability of terrorist actors to acquire such weapons and to use them in acts of violence.

125. In its Terrorism Situation and Trend Reports (TE-SAT), Europol distinguishes between jihadist terrorism, ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorism, left-wing and anarchist terrorism, right-wing terrorism and single issue-terrorism.¹⁰⁰ The findings of Project SAFTE suggest different demand and acquisition patterns between these different types of terrorist actors in Europe.¹⁰¹ The following sections provide a summary of the main

96 Basra, R., Neumann, P.R. and Brunner, C. (2016), *Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadist and the New Crime-Terror Nexus*, London: The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, page 11.

97 Ibid, pages 4, 26, 35 - 39.

98 Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 130.

99 Italy says same gun used in hijack of Berlin market truck, Milan shootout, *Euractiv*, 4 January 2017.

100 Europol (2019), *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2019*, The Hague: Europol.

101 Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 130-131.

characteristics of the demand and access to firearms and ammunition by these different types of terrorists in Europe.

Demand from jihadist terrorists

126. According to a study by the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), armed assaults have in recent years become the most common type of jihadist terrorist attacks in Europe and firearms have become the preferred weapon of choice for the perpetrators of such attacks, thereby becoming more common than bombs. Yet, this does not mean that the modus operandi of jihadi terrorist has shifted from bomb attacks plotted by groups of perpetrators to gun and knife attacks by individual perpetrators. Rather, these newer plots have come in addition to them, making the jihadi terrorist threat in Europe more heterogenous and unpredictable.¹⁰² Europol reiterated that the completed and failed jihadist attacks in Europe in 2018 predominantly targeted civilians and were mostly carried out with knives and firearms.¹⁰³

127. Between 2012 and 2018 five public mass shootings with jihadist motives (with at least four lethal victims not including the perpetrator) were carried out in Europe causing in total approximately 160 fatalities as the result of gunshot wounds. An analysis of the firearms used in these shootings demonstrates a strong demand for automatic rifles and other military-grade firearms: in four of the five identified mass shootings these types of firearms were used, often in combination with one or more handguns.

TABLE 16: Overview of the firearms used in public mass shootings with jihadist motives in Europe, 2012 - 2018

Shooting incident	Types of firearms used	Firearms acquisition
Toulouse (2012)	Colt .45 pistol	Illegally acquired on the criminal market (<i>previously stolen from a sport shooter</i>)
	Uzi sub-machine gun	Illegally acquired from a childhood acquaintance with a criminal background
Brussels (2014)	Reactivated Llama revolver (.38 Special)	Illegally acquired through a criminal connection (<i>legally sold as a deactivated gun</i>)

102 Nesser, P., Stenersen, A. and E. Oftedal (2016), 'Jihadi Terrorism in Europe: The IS-Effect, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 10 (6), page 19.

103 Europol (2019), *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2019*, The Hague: Europol, page 8.

Shooting incident	Types of firearms used	Firearms acquisition
	Automatic Zastava M70 AB rifle (7.62)	Illegally acquired through a criminal connection
Paris (Jan.2015)	Two automatic Zastava M70 AB2 rifles (7.62)	Illegally acquired (<i>diverted during Yugoslav wars</i>)
	Two Zastava M57 pistols (7.62)	Illegally acquired (<i>diverted during Yugoslav wars</i>)
	Two reactivated Tokarev TT33 pistols (7.62)	Illegally acquired through a criminal connection (<i>legally sold as deactivated guns</i>)
	Two reactivated automatic Vz.58 rifles (7.62)	Illegally acquired through a criminal connection (<i>legally sold as deactivated guns</i>)
Paris (Nov. 2015)	Three automatic Zastava M70 AB2 rifles (7.62)	Illegally acquired through a criminal connection (<i>diverted during Yugoslav wars</i>)
	Automatic Zastava M70 rifle (7.62)	Illegally acquired through a criminal connection (<i>diverted during Yugoslav wars</i>)
	Automatic AKS47 rifle (7.62)	Illegally acquired through a criminal connection (<i>diverted during Yugoslav wars</i>)
	Automatic Norinco 56-1 rifle (7.62)	Illegally acquired through a criminal connection (<i>diverted during Yugoslav wars</i>)
Strasbourg (2018)	Lebel 1892 revolver (8 mm)	Illegally acquired through a criminal connection

Source: Duquet et al (2019)¹⁰⁴

128. While it was impossible to identify the specific points of diversion, the analysis further demonstrates that the used firearms were generally illegally acquired through criminal connections of the terrorists and were often diverted during the armed conflicts in former Yugoslavia.¹⁰⁵

129. The findings of project SAFTE indicate that jihadist terrorists tend to acquire their firearms and ammunition on local illicit gun markets, often by using pre-existing criminal connections.¹⁰⁶ Not surprisingly, terrorist attacks were perpetrated by individuals who had specific criminal antecedents that involved various acts of gun crime and illicit arms possession. The perpetrator of the 2015 Copenhagen attacks, for example, was a young

104 Duquet, N. et al (2019), *Armed to Kill: A comprehensive analysis of the guns used in public mass shootings in Europe between 2009 and 2018*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 58.

105 Ibid.

106 Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 20.

man who was a member of a local youth gang when he was a teenager and was previously sentenced for the possession of an illegal weapon.¹⁰⁷ In some cases these specific criminal antecedents facilitated the acquisition of firearms for carrying out terrorist attacks. The Office of the Prosecutor General in Belgium strongly suspects, for example, that two of the perpetrators of the 2016 Brussels attacks, who used to be part of a network of violent criminals with access to firearms, played a crucial role in supplying automatic assault rifles to perpetrators of the Paris attacks in November 2015.¹⁰⁸ The two brothers used to be part of a network of violent criminals that used firearms to carry out armed robberies and carjackings in the Brussels area around 2010. While the members of this network initially used pistols, they later also used automatic assault rifles. Both brothers were convicted for acts of violent gun crime in 2010 - 2011 and radicalised in prison. The Belgian Office of the Prosecutor General believes that, after they were released from prison, the brothers used their previous criminal networks to obtain the firearms for attacks in Paris and possibly also for the failed attack on the Thalys train between Brussels and Paris in August 2015.¹⁰⁹

130. Most of the perpetrators of recent jihadist terrorist attacks in Europe with criminal connections were involved in low-level criminality rather than organized crime. This suggests that access to firearms is no longer restricted to high-level criminals but that in some European Union Member States these weapons have also become more easily available for lower-level criminals and terrorists with more limited criminal connections.¹¹⁰ This finding is, among other things, connected to the increased availability of reactivated firearms on illicit gun markets in various European Union Member States, which has contributed to the partial eroding of the traditional 'closed character' of illicit gun markets in various European Union Member States (see section 3.4). The text box below provides examples of seizures of reactivated firearms from jihadist terrorists in Europe.

107 Grip, L. (2018), 'Illegal weapons, gangs and violent extremism in Denmark', in Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 123-168.

108 Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2018), The illicit gun market in Belgium: A lethal cocktail of criminal supply and terrorist demand, in: Duquet, N. (red.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 21-79.

109 Ibid, pages 57-58.

110 Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 119.

111 Brussels Jewish museum terror attack: French citizen convicted, *The Guardian*, 7 March 2019.

TEXT BOX 6: Examples of seizures of reactivated firearms from jihadist terrorists in Europe

The 2014 attack on the Jewish Museum in Brussels is considered the first terrorist attack perpetrated by a foreign fighter who returned from Syria and Iraq.¹¹² During this attack the perpetrator used an assault rifle produced in former Yugoslavia and delivered to a customer in the Republic of Croatia in 1998 and a revolver manufactured in Spain that was legally acquired as a deactivated firearm and then illegally reactivated. Interestingly, the perpetrator did not use firearms that he trafficked to Europe from the conflict zone, but acquired the firearms shortly before the attack from a criminal contact from the south of France who he had met in prison before his departure for Syria and Iraq.¹¹² In November 2019 the supplier of these firearms was convicted to 15 years in prison for complicity to the attack, but he repeatedly stated he was not aware of the terrorist motivations of the buyer.¹¹³

Project SAFTE described that the perpetrator of the hostage-taking at a Jewish supermarket in January 2015 was armed with two reactivated Vz.58 assault rifles and two pistols.¹¹⁴ After the hostage-taking French police seized four additional reactivated pistols and a revolver in the apartment of the perpetrator. All of these reactivated firearms were legally sold by the same Slovakian arms shop. The assault rifles were produced in the early 1960s and the pistols between 1942 and 1952. These firearms were part of the arsenal of the armed forces and in 2013 - 2014 deactivated by a Slovakian company. This company then sold them to the arms shop. Two different clients from Belgium legally acquired the weapons from the Slovakian arms store. Both are suspected of reactivating these firearms and selling them on the illicit gun market. In recent years several suspected intermediaries have also been arrested for their potential role in supplying firearms to the perpetrator of the terrorist attack in Paris.

Experts at a meeting of the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL) discussed a case of March 2016, one week before the terrorist bombings in Brussels, in which jihadist terrorists used at least one reactivated assault rifle in a shootout with police forces in Brussels.¹¹⁵ Police investigations have further

112 Duquet, N. et al (2019), *Armed to Kill: A comprehensive analysis of the guns used in public mass shootings in Europe between 2009 and 2018*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 32-34.

113 Trois ans de prison en plus pour Nacer Bendrer, complice de l'attentat du musée juif de Bruxelles, *Belga*, 4 November 2019.

114 Duquet, N. et al (2019), *Armed to Kill: A comprehensive analysis of the guns used in public mass shootings in Europe between 2009 and 2018*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 36-39.

115 CEPOL Meeting 14/2019 'Firearms linked to organised crime and terrorism: implementation of the EU Firearms Directive, Lisbon, 23-27 September 2019.

revealed that the perpetrators of the Brussels bombings were in the possession of several firearms, including Czech-made Vz.58 assault rifles that have often been reactivated and sold as deactivated or AEW in Slovakia, in the safe house where they prepared their explosives. The police believe the perpetrators moved these firearms to a garage box a few days before the bombings. After these bombings Belgian police searched for these weapons in more than two hundred garage boxes, but were not able to find them.¹¹⁶

131. In addition to firearms in their original condition and reactivated firearms, seizures among terrorists in Europe have also included, to a lesser degree, converted blank firing weapons. In 2014, for example, the British police foiled a terrorist plot to carry out a drive-by shooting soon after the potential perpetrators acquired a converted Baikal pistol with a silencer and a magazine containing six rounds of ammunition from a low-level street gang member.¹¹⁷

132. Little is known about the various ways ammunition has ended up in the hands of the jihadists in Europe. An analysis of the markings on the 7.62 x 39mm cartridge cases that were retrieved at the scene of the Bataclan and Thalys attacks in 2015 indicates that mainly old ammunition was used and that this ammunition was manufactured in various East and South East European countries such as former Yugoslavia (between 1974 and 1991), Bulgaria (in 1967 and 1988) and Czechoslovakia (in 1991), as well as ammunition manufactured in non-European countries such as Iran (in 1992 - 1993) and China (in 1963 - 1964).¹¹⁸ Moreover, in Belgium some of the firearm magazines were supplied to jihadists after they were legally acquired in a gun store.¹¹⁹

116 Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2018), 'The illicit gun market in Belgium: A lethal cocktail of criminal supply and terrorist demand', in: Duquet, N. (red.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 55.

117 Holtom, P., James, P. and Patmore, C. (2018), 'From the IRA to ISIS: Exploring terrorist access to the UK's illicit firearms market', in: Duquet, N. (red.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 414 and 415.

118 Florquin, N. and Desmarais, A. (2018), 'Lethal legacies: Illicit firearms and terrorism in France', in Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 213.

119 Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2018), 'The illicit gun market in Belgium: A lethal cocktail of criminal supply and terrorist demand', in: Duquet, N. (red.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 61.

Demand from ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorists

133. Demand for firearms for terrorist purposes is not a new phenomenon in Europe. Separatist movements that are classified as terrorist organizations by certain countries, such as 'Euskadi Ta Askatasuna' (ETA) and the 'Provisional Irish Republican Army' (IRA), have traditionally relied heavily on firearms to carry out their activities. Over the years these types of terrorist organizations have developed their own organization-specific acquisition patterns. Although the imminent threat of separatist violence in the European Union has diminished over the years, numerous acts classified as terrorist-related gun violence are still taking place, especially in Northern Ireland and Ireland. Despite large-scale disarmament initiatives, it is believed that many Republican organizations and splinter groups still possess significant amounts of firearms. So-called 'legacy weapons' from the Troubles have been circulating in the region for decades and are now being used in the criminal underworld. While Kalashnikov-type assault rifles and sub-machine guns are rarely seized in other parts of the United Kingdom, the Police Service of Northern Ireland frequently seize these types of firearms in Northern Ireland.¹²⁰ Europol noted that dissident groups in Northern Ireland continue to have access to a range of firearms and still use them in their attacks.¹²¹

Demand from right-wing terrorists

134. In its most recent Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) of June 2019, Europol notes that the violent right-wing extremist scene is very heterogeneous across European Union Member States. Although the number of arrests linked to right-wing terrorism remained relatively low in 2018 and was limited to a small number of European Union Member States, Europol did notice a strong increase in arrests for the third year in a row.¹²² Among some of these right-wing extremist networks a clear demand for firearms seems to exist. In 2019, for example, Europol warned that the right-wing extremist scene in Germany is characterized by a high affinity for weapons.¹²³ In 2017 - 2018 German law enforcement agencies seized in total 1,767 weapons during operations targeting right-wing extremists in the

120 Holtom, P., James, P. and Patmore, C. (2018), From the IRA to ISIS: Exploring terrorist access to the UK's illicit firearms market, in: Duquet, N. (red.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 412.

121 Europol (2019), *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2019*, The Hague: Europol, page 19.

122 Ibid, page 61.

123 Ibid, page 60.

county. According to a media article, the Federal Ministry of Interior Affairs stated that these weapons include various handguns, long guns and military-grade firearms.¹²⁴

135. In recent years several right-wing terrorist attacks were carried out with firearms in Germany: in July 2016, a gunman killed nine people with a pistol he had acquired on the Darknet¹²⁵, in June 2019 a German politician was assassinated at home in Hesse by a person linked to the German branch of the neo-Nazi group 'Combat 18'¹²⁶, in October 2019 two persons were killed and two other injured during a mass shooting near a synagogue and kebab shop in Halle¹²⁷, and in February 2020 nine people were killed in two shootings at shisha bars in Hanau¹²⁸.

136. Right-wing terrorist violence with firearms is, however, not limited to Germany. Also in other countries firearms have been seized from and used in acts of violence by right-wing extremists. In Italy, for example, a gunman shot six African migrants in Macerata in February 2018¹²⁹, while in Belgium four members of the right-wing extremist group 'Bloed, Bodem, Eer en Trouw' (BBET) were convicted in 2014 for planning a terrorist attack in Belgium, that included killing politicians with firearms.¹³⁰ In total, the Belgian police seized about 400 weapons - including assault rifles, pistols, pump-action guns, ammunition and silencers - from members of this group and the police suspect some of the members were even illicitly trafficking firearms to fund their terrorist activities.¹³¹ In 2016 the leader of the neo-Nazi paramilitary organization 'Magyar Nemzeti Arcvonal' killed a police officer in a gun fight.¹³²

124 Ermittler stellen fast 1.100 Waffen in rechter Szene sicher, *Die Zeit*, 28 September 2019.

125 Duquet, N. et al (2019), *Armed to Kill: A comprehensive analysis of the guns used in public mass shootings in Europe between 2009 and 2018*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 48.

126 Walter Lübcke murder raises specter of neo-Nazi terrorism, *DW*, 17 June 2019; Walter Lübcke killing: Suspect with far-right links confesses, *BBC News*, 26 June 2019, Suspect in killing of German politician was jailed for attempted bombing, *The Guardian*, 17 June 2019.

127 German Halle gunman admits far-right synagogue attack, *BBC News*, 11 October 2019.

128 Germany shooting: What we know about the Hanau attack, *BBC News*, 20 February 2020.

129 Far-right gunman charged as race attack fear grips election in Italy, *The Times*, 5 February 2018.

130 Vier BBET-leden krijgen celstraffen, *De Standaard*, 7 Februari 2014.

131 Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2018), The illicit gun market in Belgium: A lethal cocktail of criminal supply and terrorist demand, in: Duquet, N. (red.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 21-79.

132 Nationalist Paramilitary Group Founder Sentenced to Life in Prison for Murdering Police Officer, *Hungary Today*, 11 December 2019.

In the months following this act of violence, the Hungarian authorities seized more than 100 weapons from members of this organization, including handguns, shotguns, military-grade rifles, machine guns, more than 18,000 rounds of ammunition, hand grenades and rocket launchers.¹³³

137. Members of right-wing extremists groups have been convicted for transnational illicit firearms trafficking. In 2014, for example, the leader of the Belgian group BBET was convicted for illicit firearms trafficking in the Netherlands for supplying firearms to the Dutch right-wing extremist group 'Ulfhednar'.¹³⁴ Additionally, some right-wing extremists have also received firearms training in other countries. In 2015, for example, Poland reported to Europol that Polish nationalists learned military tactics and received firearms training in a camp near Moscow, while instructors of combat training schools in Russia posted online they came to Poland to set up and run military camps there.¹³⁵ Also members of the 'National Front of Denmark' are reported to have received weapons training in Russia.¹³⁶ It is believed similar training camps have also been organized in some European Union Member States. In Germany, for example, 'numerous guns' were seized from a member of the Reichsbürger movement, who was a legal gun owner, during a law enforcement operation that targeted a criminal organization suspected of setting up paramilitary training camps in forests in Thuringia.¹³⁷

Demand from left-wing terrorists

138. Although left-wing terrorist organizations from the 1970s and 1980s, such as the Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF), have possessed and used firearms in several European Union Member States in the past, demand for firearms seems to be much lower among left-wing extremist groups today. Europol notes that nowadays left-wing terrorist attacks are limited to a few European Union Member States, notably Greece, Italy and Spain. Some of these left-wing groups have access to firearms and are willing to use them. Europol, for example, noted that Greek left-wing extremist groups possess

133 Több mint száz fegyvert találtak a rendőrök a Magyar Nemzeti Arcvonal tagjainál, 444, 8 December 2018.

134 BBET-veroordeelde Tomas Boutens terug politiek actief, *Apache*, 8 July 2019.

135 Europol (2016), *TE-SAT 2016: EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report*, The Hague: Europol, page 42.

136 Grip, L. (2018), *Illegal weapons, gangs and violent extremism in Denmark*, in: Duquet, N. (red.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 155.

137 German anti-terror police uncover hidden paramilitary training camps for far-right extremists, *The Independent*, 23 June 2017.

firearms.¹³⁸ In recent years, for example, several shootings have been carried out by left-wing groups in Greece. In 2013 the ‘Militant Peoples Revolutionary Forces’ carried out a drive-by shooting of two members of the Golden Dawn, a far-right political party, with a nine mm Tokarev-type semi-automatic pistol.¹³⁹ In 2014 and 2016 another group, ‘Revolutionary Self-Defence’, used a Kalashnikov-type rifle to shoot at the party offices of the socialist party PASOK and at the Mexican Embassy in Athens. In 2017 the same Kalashnikov type rifle was used during another shooting at the PASOK party offices.¹⁴⁰ Interestingly, in March 2020 Greek counter-terrorist agencies also seized firearms and other weapons from militants of the Turkish left-wing group ‘Revolutionary People’s Liberation Front’ (DHKP-C) in Sepolia, a suburban area of Athens. In a tunnel underneath the house they found a Kalashnikov type rifle, several handguns, cartridges, various firearms parts and components, and several anti-tank rocket launchers.¹⁴¹

Other criminal activities

139. Several other types of criminals have also been observed as customers on illicit gun markets in Europe. In Denmark, for example, street gangs are considered important customers on illicit gun markets.¹⁴² Firearms have also been seized from heavily armed criminal groups specialised in the logistical preparation of assassinations. In the Netherlands, for example, (attempted) liquidations are generally the result of criminal rivalries related to drug trafficking. They often take place in broad daylight and sometimes involve automatic rifles. In 2015, Dutch police seized 92 firearms, including military-grade firearms, 16 silencers, nine hand grenades,

138 Europol (2016), European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2016, Den Haag: Europol, page 37.

139 Two Golden Dawn supporters shot dead in drive-by in Greece, *The Independent*, 2 November 2013; Two members of Greece’s Golden Dawn shot dead, *BBC*, 1 November 2013; Golden Dawn shooting gun identified, *Belfast Telegraph*, 2 November 2013; Greeks fear more violence after Golden Dawn members shot dead, *Reuters*, 2 November 2013; Οι ‘Μαχόμενες Λαϊκές Επαναστατικές Δυνάμεις’ ανέλαβαν την ευθύνη για τη δολοφονία των δύο μελών της Χρυσής Αυγής στο Νέο Ηράκλειο, *News 24/7*, 16 November 2013; Leftist militants claim Golden Dawn killings as rally honours 1973 uprising, *The Guardian*, 17 November 2013; Golden Dawn killings ‘could be act of revenge by far left group’, *The Telegraph*, 2 November 2013.

140 Gun from Greek PASOK shooting used in past guerrilla attacks – police, *Reuters*, 7 November 2017; Tests confirm Revolutionary Self-Defense behind police hit at PASOK offices, *Ekathimerini*, 11 January 2017.

141 Greek police (2020), *Επιχείρηση της Αντιπρομοκρατικής Υπηρεσίας σε Εξάρχεια και Σεπόλια με έντεκα συλλήψεις αλλοδαπών Μεγέθυνση κειμένου*, 20 March 2020.

142 Grip, L. (2018), ‘Illegal weapons, gangs and violent extremism in Denmark’, in Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 123-168.

33 magazines and 4,600 rounds of ammunition stored in two storage rooms in Nieuwegein. These weapons belonged to '26Koper', an organized criminal group specialised in the logistical preparations for liquidations such as the supply of firearms, vehicles and even assassins. In 2019, five members of this group were convicted to prison sentences between 13 and 14.5 years.¹⁴³

2.2 Other demand in European Union Member States

140. Preliminary findings of project DIVERT suggest that in various European Union Member States the bulk of illicitly possessed firearms are in the hands of private citizens who have no immediate criminal objectives, but whose demand is motivated by other factors such as self-protection, emotional reasons or collection purposes.¹⁴⁴ According to these preliminary findings, this type of illicit firearm possession is generally the result of a past armed conflict in the country or because the firearms legislation in the country changed and persons who were previously legal gun owners but did not ask for the necessary permits after this changes of legislation. There are several security risks connected to this type of illicit firearms possession, such as an increased risk of homicides (especially in a domestic or family setting) but also the risk that some of these weapons end up on illicit gun markets and from there in the hands of criminals or terrorists.

141. A country such as Croatia, for example, is still struggling with the legacy of the armed conflicts on its territory in the 1990s. Project SAFTE describes that despite an international arms embargo on the country, Croatia was able to acquire weapons during its war of independence (1991 - 1995), for example by capturing weapons from the former Yugoslav People's Army but also through illegal import.¹⁴⁵ The report explains that many Croatian citizens who lived in war-affected areas armed themselves for personal protection and for participating in the armed conflict. A significant part of these weapons is still in illicit possession and sometimes end up on the illicit gun market in the country. As a result, semi-automatic and automatic

143 Openbaar Ministerie, *OM acht in hoger beroep voorbereiding voor liquidatie bewezen en eist straffen tot zeventien jaar*, 17 January 2019; Forse straffen voor wapenleveranciers liquidatiebende Koper26, *De Telegraaf*, 11 March 2019; Een uitzendbureau voor moord op bestelling, *NRC Handelsblad*, 21 September 2016.

144 Flemish Peace Institute, Project DIVERT, ongoing research.

145 Dragović, F. et al (2018), 'Availability of illegal weapons: connecting the dots. Case study of the Republic of Croatia', in Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 81-122.

firearms, including various versions of Kalashnikov-type rifles, are currently available on the illegal market. Yet, many of these illicit firearms possessors have not sold their weapons on the illicit market because they prefer to keep them themselves because they are emotionally attached to them and because they bought the weapons during the war for much higher prices than the current prices on the illicit market.

142. Although several surrender programmes have been implemented and resulted in tens of thousands of surrendered weapons, Croatian law enforcement agencies continue to seize firearms and other weapons that were diverted during the armed conflict.¹⁴⁶ According to a media article, in August 2016, for example, the Croatian police seized 10,365 rounds of various types of ammunition, eight rifles (including one automatic rifle), four pistols, 13 complete silencers and several silencer parts, 12 different magazines, 11 detonators caps, 11 metres of detonating cord, four hand grenades, one explosive bullet and various weapons parts during a house search.¹⁴⁷ The police investigation discovered that the suspect acquired these immediately after the war of independence and were subsequently stored illegally for two decades in his home.¹⁴⁸

143. The illicit trafficking of 'legacy weapons' from the conflict in former Yugoslavia does not only fuel the local market and violence within the affected countries, but also continues to pose significant security risks for the European Union. In recent years various firearms that fell off the radar during the armed conflicts in former Yugoslavia have been observed in the hands of criminals and used in terrorist attacks in the European Union. The perpetrators of the Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris in January 2015, for example, used two Zastava M57 pistols which carried former Yugoslav army symbols and two Zastava M70 AB2 assault rifles that were produced in the 1980s for the Yugoslav armed forces. Tracing of one of the assault rifles that was used in the terrorist attack on the Bataclan in Paris November 2015 also resulted in the conclusion that in 1981 this weapon was delivered to the 'Republički štab teritorijalne odbrane' (the Bosnian self-defence forces), which during the war in Yugoslavia in the 1990s became the regular Bosnian army.¹⁴⁹ It is, however, unclear at what point this assault rifle was trafficked into the European Union.

146 Ibid.

147 'Ja samo volim oružje': Policija mu banula u kuću, ostali u šoku što je sve skrivao, *Net.hr*, 20 April 2016.

148 Ibid.

149 Duquet, N. et al (2019), *Armed to Kill: A comprehensive analysis of the guns used in public mass shootings in Europe between 2009 and 2018*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 46.

144. Law enforcement agencies from various European Union Member States also seize firearms which originated from older armed conflicts such as the Second World War. In Latvia, for example, government officials have stated that about half of the firearms seized in 2015 were the result of so-called ‘black digging’ whereby gun enthusiasts excavate weapons from old battle fields.¹⁵⁰ Preliminary findings of project DIVERT suggest that some of these firearms have ended up on the illicit gun market in Latvia, but others have also been trafficked to neighbouring Lithuania.¹⁵¹ Similar cases of seizures of firearms from the Second World War have been detected in European Union Member States across the continent.¹⁵²

145. In other European countries the illicit possession by private citizens who have no immediate criminal or terrorist objectives is the direct result of the lack of compliance to changes in firearms legislation. In Belgium, for example, the Ministry of Justice in 2016 announced that 117,000 firearms legally possessed at the time just before the adoption of a new more stringent firearms legislation in 2006 were ‘missing’ in the Central Arms Register and stated that this was due to gun owners who did not apply for the necessary gun licences to keep their guns in their legal possession or who illegally exported their firearms.¹⁵³

146. In various European Union Member States there are gun enthusiasts who, for a wide variety of reasons, prefer not to register or obtain the required license to possess firearms. In France, for example, there are frequent firearms seizures from illegal, and sometimes excessive, arsenals accumulated by so-called ‘compulsive collectors’. These arsenals are considered an attractive target for gun thieves.¹⁵⁴ Sometimes such firearms are also being illegally sold. In Denmark, for example, some gun enthusiasts are known to organize informal garage sales of unregistered weapons. These weapons are generally sold to other gun enthusiasts without criminal intent.¹⁵⁵ Yet, sometimes such weapons end up in the hands of criminals or

150 Černeckis, K. (2016) *Aizsardzības, iekšlietu un korupcijas noversšanas komisijas sedes protokols*, Nr.109, 20.aprīl 2016.

151 Flemish Peace Institute, Project DIVERT, ongoing research.

152 Ibid.

153 Zeker 117.000 wapens nog steeds “verdwenen” in België, *Belga*, 7 maart 2016.

154 Florquin, N. and Desmarais, A. (2018), ‘Lethal legacies: Illicit firearms and terrorism in France’, in Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 169-235.

155 Interview with firearms analyst at the Danish Police’s National Centre of Investigation, Glostrup, 2 May 2017, in: Grip, L. (2018), ‘Illegal weapons, gangs and violent extremism in Denmark’, in Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 123-168.

even terrorists. The 2015 terrorist attack on the Krystalgade Synagogue in Copenhagen was carried out with a Polish-made pistol produced before the Second World War and a German-made Walther 7.65 mm pistol that had also been produced in the first half of the 20th century.¹⁵⁶ The Danish Police believe these firearms were unregistered weapons that were stolen from a private home or storage system and were never reported as stolen to the police.¹⁵⁷

147. Gun enthusiasts sometimes also illegally acquire their firearms on so-called 'arms fairs'. Various national law enforcement agencies consider these fairs as a particular security risk for illicit firearms trafficking. In France, for example, the Gendarmerie noted that some sellers have been caught displaying prohibited weapons on the more than 300 arms fairs that are organized annually.¹⁵⁸ Arms fairs also have a bad reputation in Belgium among law enforcement units specialised in arms trafficking.¹⁵⁹ They are considered meeting places for gun enthusiasts interested in illegally obtaining firearms. While the actual transfer of firearms generally takes place at a later moment and a different place, these arms fairs are sometimes used to make the necessary contacts and agreements. To curb this type of trafficking law enforcement agencies in Belgium have significantly increased controls at arms fairs.¹⁶⁰ An important finding is that illicit firearms trafficking on arms fairs is not only perpetrated by gun enthusiasts, but also by organized criminal groups. In 2015 the Italian Carabinieri, for example, dismantled a firearms trafficking ring run by an Italian organized criminal group based in Udine. This group acquired the firearms from a military depot in Croatia and transferred them to Slovenia where they were sold at an arms fair for militaria collectors close to Nova Gorica.¹⁶¹

156 Grip, L. (2018), 'Illegal weapons, gangs and violent extremism in Denmark', in Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 123-168.

157 Interview with firearms analyst at the Danish Police's National Centre of Investigation, Glostrup, 2 May 2017.

158 Florquin, N. and Desmarais, A. (2018), 'Lethal legacies: Illicit firearms and terrorism in France', in Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, 2000, page 200.

159 Interview with the Arms Unit of the Belgian Federal Police, 5 April 2017.

160 Duquet, N. and Van Alstein? M. (2011), *Vuurwapens: Handel, bezit en gebruik*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute.

161 Strazzari, F. and Zampagni, F. (2018), Between organised crime and terrorism: Illicit firearms actors and market dynamics in Italy, in: *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 237-283.

148. To counter the illicit possession of firearms by private citizens who have no immediate criminal or terrorist objectives and the risk of these weapons ending up on illicit gun markets, some European countries have implemented different types of surrender programmes and have together collected tens of thousands of firearms in recent years. Eleven European Union Member States reported the number of surrendered firearms in 2016 - 2017 via the IAFQ (see table below). It should be noted that these figures do not necessarily refer to weapons surrendered as part of a voluntary surrender programme, but also include weapons handed to the police outside such a campaign, for instance when it was no longer required by the owner or inherited with no further use by the new owner.

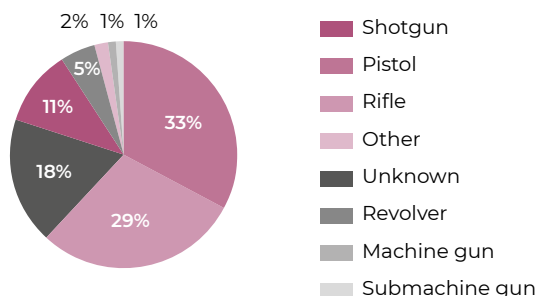
TABLE 17: Number of surrendered firearms in 11 European Union Member States in 2016 - 2017 by type

Country	Year	Revolver	Pistol	Rifle	Shotgun	Machine gun	Sub-machine gun	Other	Unknown	Total
Croatia	2016	203	2,436	2,181	0	88	55	0	0	4,963
Croatia	2017	186	2,102	2,097	0	70	29	0	0	4,484
Greece	2016	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Greece	2017	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Lithuania	2016	12	16	1	11	0	0	0	0	40
Lithuania	2017	7	10	0	4	0	0	0	0	21
Luxembourg	2016	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Luxembourg	2017	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Netherlands	2016	51	105	154	0	3	0	164	0	477
Netherlands	2017	57	78	166	0	0	3	129	6	439
Portugal	2016	115	204	84	841	2	0	33	44	1,323
Portugal	2017	148	302	97	829	5	0	43	32	1,456
Romania	2016	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Romania	2017	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Slovakia	2017	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	2,857
Slovenia	2016	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Slovenia	2017	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Spain	2016	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Spain	2017	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
United Kingdom	2016	14	84	5	16	0	1	4	0	124
United Kingdom	2017	12	99	4	15	1	11	4	0	146
Total both years		807	5,436	4,789	1,716	169	99	377	82	16,332

Source: IAFQ

149. The table shows that significant differences in the numbers of surrendered firearms exist. While in Croatia almost 9,500 firearms, in Slovakia almost 2,900 and in Portugal almost 2,800 firearms were surrendered, other European Union Member States reported no or very little surrendered firearms. The data provided by these countries suggests that mainly pistols (33 per cent) and rifles (29 per cent) are surrendered, followed by shotguns (11 per cent) and revolvers (five per cent). Machine guns and submachine guns are surrendered much less often (less than two per cent of all surrendered firearms).

FIGURE 8: Distribution of surrendered firearms in 11 European Union Member States in 2016 - 17 by type



Source: IAFQ

Note: Percentages are calculated on the basis of numeric data provided to UNODC in the corresponding question and do not reflect any unclassified amounts of seizures.

150. Very strong differences in the types of surrendered firearms can be observed across these countries. In Portugal, for example, the majority of surrendered firearms are shotguns (60 per cent), while Croatia accounts 90 per cent of all surrendered machine guns and submachine guns in those 11 European Union Member States. These figures clearly suggest significant differences in the availability of different types of illicit firearms across the European Union.

2.3 Supply on illicit gun markets in the European Union

151. Criminals and others looking for firearms across the European Union do not have the same access to illicit firearms. First of all, significant national differences have been observed in the availability of different types of illicit firearms across the region. Previous research by the Flemish Peace Institute has shown that there is not a single unified illicit firearms market in the European Union, but that significant differences can be observed between and even within Member States, for example with regard to the availability of different types of firearms, the importance of different trafficking methods and the involvement of different actors in illicit firearms trafficking.¹⁶² The data collected under the Global Firearms Data Project supports this observation of significant differences between European Union Members States regarding their illicit gun markets. The data above, for example, demonstrates significant cross-national differences in the types of seized firearms. Also significant differences in prices of different types of firearms have been observed across Europe (see paragraph 158).

152. Cross-national differences in illicit firearms markets across Europe can be attributed to various local elements such as for example the nature of the local criminal underworld, the countries' legal framework on firearms, the dynamics of legal firearms possession and transfers, the recent history of these countries (especially in post-conflict countries), geographical context, the priorities and capacities of law enforcement agencies to combat illicit firearm trafficking, etcetera.¹⁶³ The findings of project SAFTE also describe that in Italy, for example, a wide range of firearms – including military-grade firearms – are easily available for most organized criminal groups, partially because of the relatively short distance over water to source countries in the Western Balkans. Despite this relatively easy access, the illicit gun market in Italy is not considered huge and serves mainly as an organizational method for structuring and strengthening organized criminal groups, who in general have tight controls over the distribution of firearms to others.¹⁶⁴ According

162 Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 11.

163 Ibid, page 71.

164 Strazzari, F. and Zampagni, F. (2018), *Between organised crime and terrorism: Illicit firearms actors and market dynamics in Italy*, in: *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 237-283.

to the NCA, in the United Kingdom, however, the market is supply-driven and access to firearms is usually limited.¹⁶⁵ A 2006 Home Office study in the course of which 80 convicted firearm offenders were interviewed indicated that choice of firearms was generally limited; only a small amount of well-connected criminals have access to a range of firearms.¹⁶⁶ Often criminals need to rely on firearms from an unknown provenance that may have been used in previous gun crimes¹⁶⁷ or firearms that are considered of lower quality such as converted blank firing guns or 'antique' weapons.¹⁶⁸

153. The following sections analyse the availability of different types of firearms, the prices of firearms on illicit gun markets across Europe and the profile of the criminal arms dealers on these markets.

Access to different types of firearms

154. In most European countries the majority of legal gun owners possess long firearms such as shotguns and rifles. The possession of handguns is much less widespread: only in a handful of European countries handguns constitute the majority of legally owned guns.¹⁶⁹ This picture seems to be quite different for the illegal possession of firearms in Europe. The responses of European Union Member States to the IAFQ demonstrate that in many of these countries especially handguns are seized (see table above), for example in Denmark (42 per cent of all seized firearms are handguns), Latvia (63 per cent), Lithuania (78 per cent), Slovakia (55 per cent), Spain (52 per cent) and Sweden (58 per cent). Project SAFTE noted that most criminals seem to prefer handguns to carry out their criminal activities since they are relatively cheap and easy to conceal. The possession of long guns, and especially military-grade firearms, among criminals occurs less frequently in Europe.¹⁷⁰ Some criminals, however, also possess and use for example (sawn-

165 See description on illegal firearms in the webpage of the National Crime Agency.

166 Hales, G., Lewis C. and Silverstone D. (2006) *Gun crime: The market in and use of illegal firearms*, London: Home Office, Home Office Research Study 298, page 3.

167 Hales, G., Lewis C. and Silverstone D. (2006) *Gun crime: The market in and use of illegal firearms*, London: Home Office, Home Office Research Study 298, page 5.

168 Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 79.

169 Duquet, N. and Van Alstein, M. (2015), *Firearms and violent deaths in Europe: An Exploratory Analysis of the Linkages Between Gun Ownership, Firearms Legislation and Violent Death*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 10.

170 Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 134.

off) shotguns. It seems that the sources and supply lines of these weapons sometimes differ from those of handguns. The Danish authorities reported to the IAFQ that criminals occasionally use sawn-off shotguns. Danish law enforcement agencies also observed that these shotguns are generally not internationally trafficked but stolen within the country. The Danish authorities further reported to the IAFQ that even though there has been an escalation in gang shootings during recent years, automatic firearms are rarely used in such shootings.¹⁷¹ Interestingly, antique guns are also used in some European countries. In the United Kingdom, for example, an emerging trend in the criminal use of antique firearms has been observed by law enforcement agencies a few years ago. Such an antique firearm has also been used in the terrorist attack on a British Arm soldier in Woolwich in May 2013.¹⁷²

155. Differences in access to certain types of firearms have not only been observed between European countries, but also within these countries. These differences can mainly be attributed to the ‘closed character’ of illicit gun markets in Europe, with limited access to firearms – especially more sophisticated firearms – for persons without the necessary criminal connections and reputation. Due to their extensive network and reputation, higher-ranking criminals therefore tend to have better access to good-quality firearms than lower-ranking, often younger, criminals who often only have access to (converted) blank-firing weapons, antique firearms or replica guns.¹⁷³ Such differences in firearms access related to the potential buyer’s position have been observed by various law enforcement agencies across the European Union. In Belgium, for example, criminals involved in the whole-sale production or large-scale trafficking of drugs are often armed with firearms and sometimes even military-grade assault rifles and sub-machine guns. Smaller street drug dealers, however, often have no access to firearms or only

171 Response from Denmark to IAFQ.

172 Williamson, H. (2015), Criminal Armourers and Illegal Firearm Supply in England and Wales, *Papers from the British Criminology Conference*, 15, pages 93-115; ‘Antique guns’ adapted by criminals facing weapons shortage, *BBC News*, 22 October 2013.

173 Maalsté, N., Nijmeijer, P. and Scholtes, M. (2002), *De vuurwapengedetineerde aan het woord. Daderonderzoek naar achtergronden en motieven van vuurwapenbezit, vuurwapengebruik en vuurwapenhandel*, The Hague: ES and E; Duquet, N. and Van Alstein, M. (2014), “Vuurwapen te koop. Het profiel van de legale en illegale markt voor vuurwapens in België”, in: *Baum, T., Depauw, S. and Duquet, N. (Ed.), Belgische wapenhandel: Een politiek, economisch en ethisch hangijzer*, Leuven: Acco; Holtom, P., James, P. and Patmore, C. (2018), “From the IRA to ISIS: Exploring terrorist access to the UK’s illicit firearms market”, in: Duquet, N. (Ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute.

access to (converted) blank firing guns.¹⁷⁴

156. The closed character of illicit gun markets in Europe has to a certain extent eroded in several European Union Member States in recent years. This has been linked to the increased availability of certain types of firearms on illicit gun markets across Europe.¹⁷⁵ Europol, for example, noted the increased possession of firearms and the increased use of military-grade firearms by European criminals.¹⁷⁶ According to project SAFTE “the underlying factors of this erosion are the emergence of the Internet, the cross border smuggling of military grade assault rifles into the European Union, the conversion of blank firing guns and the reactivation of deactivated firearms and AEW. The increased availability of firearms has contributed to arms races between criminal groups across the European Union. This has facilitated the gradual trickling down of the possession and use of firearms to lower segments of the criminal hierarchy in several European Union member states, especially in Western Europe”.¹⁷⁷ The Dutch National Police for example also observed that criminals looking for firearms are increasingly using multiple lines of supply. Previously, each criminal group relied on its own arms supplier but nowadays groups frequently acquire their weapons from multiple distributors.¹⁷⁸

157. Another development is the existence of criminal firearms pools, where criminals can rent firearms for certain periods, in some European countries. Already in 2010, Europol warned about the existence of such pools in some larger Western-European countries and that this development could significantly increase the local availability of firearms by lowering the costs of firearms possession and limiting the risks of detection.¹⁷⁹ The renting of firearms has also been observed by national law enforcement agencies. The Danish authorities reported to the IAFQ that law enforcement agencies in Denmark have observed how organized criminal groups have

174 Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2018), The illicit gun market in Belgium: A lethal cocktail of criminal supply and terrorist demand, in: Duquet, N. (red.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 21-79.

175 Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 17.

176 Europol (2010), *Integrated EU approach against the illegal trafficking in heavy firearms*, OC-Scan Policy Brief for Threat Notice 004-2010.

177 Project SAFTE (2017), *Executive Summary*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute.

178 Boerman, F., Grapendaal, M., Nieuwenhuis, F. and Stoffers, E. (2017), *2017 National Threat Assessment Organised Crime*, Zoetermeer: National Police of the Netherlands, page 98.

179 Gebruik oorlogswapens verdubbeld in België, *De Morgen*, 15 July 2010.

recently started “pooling” firearms and ammunition by storing them in neutral locations known only to key gang members. According to the authorities, after their use, these firearms are returned to storage for future use. Danish law enforcement agencies noted that they have had several examples of the same firearm being used up to five times in different shootings, while previously firearms were gotten rid of after their use in a shooting.¹⁸⁰ The concept of leasing firearms was also noted in the Dutch National Threat Assessment of 2017, especially among street gangs.¹⁸¹

Prices for firearms on illicit gun markets in the European Union

158. The table 18 gives an overview of prices for different types of firearms as recorded by national law enforcement agencies in their country. The different prices for various types of firearms on national illicit gun markets and their fluctuation over certain periods are important indicators of their availability on these markets. Yet, information on such prices needs to be interpreted very carefully since these price estimates are often based on a small number of cases recorded at different times and since price levels are determined by elements such as the buyer’s contacts in the criminal underworld, the urgency of the acquisition, whether or not the firearm was previously used or the opening up of a new supply chain.¹⁸² Local dynamics strongly influence local prices. While automatic Kalashnikov-type rifles are generally being sold for €2,000 - 2,500 on the French illicit gun market, some sources state that these rifles can be acquired for as little as €300 in Marseille.¹⁸³ Prices can also fluctuate over time. The Federal Judiciary Police of Brussels, for example, observed a decrease in firearms trafficking cases in Brussels in the immediate aftermath of terrorist attacks in Paris and Belgium in 2015 - 2016.¹⁸⁴ The police thinks this was probably related to increased law enforcement attention to terrorist-related activities such as firearms trafficking in this specific period. One hypothesis is that firearms traffickers have become aware of the perceived increased risk of getting caught and the heavier penalties if there is a link with terrorist networks. This may have resulted in some of them

180 Response of Denmark to the IAFQ.

181 Boerman, F., Grapendaal, M., Nieuwenhuis, F. and Stoffers, E. (2017), *2017 National Threat Assessment Organised Crime*, Zoetermeer: National Police of the Netherlands, page 100.

182 Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 126.

183 Florquin, N. and Desmarais, A. (2018), ‘Lethal legacies: Illicit firearms and terrorism in France’, in Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 169-235.

184 Interview with Firearms division of the Federal Judiciary Police of Brussels, 10 May 2017.

displacing their trafficking activities to other Belgian cities. This is believed to have impacted both the availability of firearms in Brussels and prices for these weapons. The price for Kalashnikov-type assault rifles went up from €1,200 to more than €2,000 - 3,000, while the price of Glock pistols increased from €1,000 a few years ago to approximately €3,000.

TABLE 18: Prices for different types of firearms on illicit gun markets across Europe in reference years 2016 – 2017

Country	Model	Price	Source
PISTOLS			
Croatia	Unspecified model	€300	IAFQ
Belgium	Unspecified model	€500-1000	Belgian federal police ¹⁸⁷
The Netherlands	Unspecified pistol	€1000-2000	Dutch police ¹⁸⁸
Lithuania	Unspecified model	€2500	IAFQ
Denmark	Used 9 mm pistol	€800 (DKR 6000)	IAFQ
Belgium	Glock (unspecified)	€1000-2000	Belgian federal police
Spain	Glock (unspecified)	€1500	IAFQ
Slovakia	Glock 17	€1300	IAFQ
Denmark	Glock 17	€1,350 (DKR 10,000)	IAFQ
Sweden	Glock 17	€1,400 (SEK 15000)	IAFQ
France	Glock (unspecified)	€1500	Government official ¹⁸⁹
Denmark	Glock 26	€2,300 (DKR 17,000)	IAFQ
BLANK-FIRING			
Spain	Ekol	€250	IAFQ
North Macedonia	Flare	€300	IAFQ
Belgium	Converted blank firing weapon	Max €400	Belgian federal police
Sweden	Start/Gas, Zoraki 917	€1,000 (SEK 11250)	IAFQ
RIFLES			
Croatia	Unspecified model	€500	IAFQ
North Macedonia	Kalashnikov 7.62×39mm	€450	IAFQ
Slovenia	Crvena Zastava M70	€450	IAFQ
The Netherlands	Kalashnikov-type (incl. 100 rounds of ammunition).	€1,500-4,500	Dutch police ¹⁹⁰

Country	Model	Price	Source
France	M70 AB2	€2,000-2,500	Government official ¹⁹¹
Belgium	Kalashnikov-type	€2,000-3,000	Belgian federal police
Denmark	Kalashnikov-type	€3,350 (DKR 25,000)	IAFQ
Slovakia	Vz. 58	€750	IAFQ
France (2015)	Vz.58 (reactivated)	€1,500	Government official ¹⁹²
Slovenia	Zastava M59/66	€1,000	IAFQ
Sweden	AR 15	€2,000 (SEK 22,500)	IAFQ
<i>SUBMACHINE GUNS</i>			
Denmark	Uzi	€1,000 (DKR 7,500)	IAFQ
Spain	vz.61	€350	IAFQ
Slovenia	vz.61	€750	IAFQ
France (2015)	vz.61	€1,500	Government official ¹⁹³
Sweden	vz.61	€1,850 (SEK 20,000)	IAFQ

Source: IAFQ and Project SAFTE

159. The table demonstrates that strong price differences for firearms exist. Blank-firing guns (whether or not converted) are the cheapest types of firearms, followed by handguns. The highest prices are paid for military-grade firearms and handguns from reputed brands such as Glock or Beretta. Strong price differences also exist between European countries: while firearms are relatively cheap in South-Eastern Europe, prices are much higher in Western Europe and especially in Scandinavia. These observations confirm the existence of different illicit gun markets in Europe, which are characterized by differences in supply and demand.

185 Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2018), The illicit gun market in Belgium: A lethal cocktail of criminal supply and terrorist demand, in: Duquet, N. (red.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 21-79.

186 Police data for National Threat Assessment 2017.

187 Florquin, N. and Desmarais, A. (2018), 'Lethal legacies: Illicit firearms and terrorism in France', in Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 169-235.

188 Police data for National Threat Assessment 2017.

189 Florquin, N. and Desmarais, A. (2018), 'Lethal legacies: Illicit firearms and terrorism in France', in Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 169-235.

190 Ibid.

191 Ibid.

Profile of criminal firearms dealers

160. The findings of project SAFTE conclude that distributing firearms on local criminal markets is generally considered not to be very lucrative compared to other criminal activities in Europe.¹⁹² In most European Union Member States there is, however, no reliable and detailed knowledge on the role of local arms dealers on criminal markets. Transcrime concluded that while previous studies have pointed to the involvement of different types of actors in the retail of firearms such as professional criminals and (former) members of law enforcement agencies or the armed forces, information on how these dealers conduct their business remains largely anecdotal.¹⁹³ The results of Project SAFTE suggest that national differences seem to exist with regard to the types of arms dealers who distribute the firearms to local criminals once they are trafficked into the country or diverted within the country. In Italy, for example, organized criminal groups are considered in control over the distribution of firearms, while in Belgium the police noted the existence of a difference between the profiles of individuals for whom selling a firearm or a small amount of firearms on the illicit market is a once-off activity and individuals who are more actively involved in firearms trafficking.¹⁹⁴ An additional observation is that the dealers on criminal gun market seem to be pragmatic rather than ideological. In Denmark, for example, members of an outlaw motorcycle gang with right-wing extremist tendencies have sold firearms to ethnic street gangs.¹⁹⁵ According to the NCA, firearms in the United Kingdom are supplied through criminal networks and arms dealers, often exploiting cultural, ethnic and familial links to source regions.¹⁹⁶

161. In the Netherlands, in-depth research has been undertaken on the profile of local arms dealers. These dealers are almost always men. Most of them were born in the Netherlands and have Dutch nationality.

192 Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 19.

193 Savona, E.U. and Mancuso, M. (eds.) (2017), *Fighting illicit firearms trafficking routes and actors at European level: Final report of Project FIRE*, Milan: Transcrime – Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, page 36.

194 Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 160 - 184.

195 Grip, L. (2018), 'Illegal weapons, gangs and violent extremism in Denmark', in Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 142 and 143.

196 See description on illegal firearms in the webpage of the National Crime Agency.

They usually have a criminal record, which include several firearms offences.¹⁹⁷ The 2017 National Threat Assessment Organised Crime of the Dutch National Police notes that criminal investigations were able to link the distributive firearms trade in the Netherlands to the ‘travelling community’, members of outlaw motorcycle gangs and criminal groups of an Antillean or former Yugoslavian background. Also criminal youth gangs “that have gone big” are reported to have been active in the distributive trade in firearms, especially modified gas pistols and alarm pistols.¹⁹⁸

162. The findings of in-depth research into terrorist access to illicit gun markets in Europe demonstrate that criminal arms dealers who exclusively supply firearms to terrorist networks have not been observed in the European Union.¹⁹⁹ Instead, interviewed law enforcement officials believe that the arms dealers who have supplied firearms to terrorists were frequently not aware of the terrorist intentions of the buyers.²⁰⁰ Because illicit arms trafficking is usually not a very lucrative activity in Europe, it is reported that criminal arms dealers believe that the risks involved in supplying weapons to terrorists are considered too high. Aware of this problem some terrorist networks have deliberately advised potential terrorists to hide their real motives when attempting to procure firearms. The July 2015 issue of *Dar al-Islam*, a French-language ISIS magazine, for example advised would-be terrorists to conceal all external displays of religiosity and instead to deliberately dress like someone planning to carry out an armed robbery.²⁰¹

197 Bruinsma, M. and Spapens, T. (2018), ‘Terrorist access to firearms in the Netherlands’, in: Duquet, N. (Ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 304.

198 Boerman, F., Grapendaal, M., Nieuwenhuis, F. and Stoffers, E. (2017), *2017 National Threat Assessment Organised Crime*, Zoetermeer: National Police of the Netherlands, page 98.

199 Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 143-144.

200 Ibid.

201 Basra, R., Neumann, P.R. and Brunner, C. (2016), *Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadist and the New Crime-Terror Nexus*, London: The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, page 36.

CHAPTER 3: Demand for and diversion of firearms from European Union Member States in other regions in the world

163. Several companies based in European Union Member States are important producers and global exporters of firearms and ammunition. The results of the *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020* indicate that Europe is the main manufacturing region of firearms seized across the world.²⁰² This implies a clear demand for European made firearms also outside of the European Union and highlights the risk of diversion from authorized transfers and possession.

164. The Firearms Protocol stipulates that State Parties need to take appropriate measures to require the security of firearms, their parts and components and ammunition at the time of manufacture, import, export and transit through its territory and to increase the effectiveness of import, export and transit controls.²⁰³ The Arms Trade Treaty also underlines the need to prevent the diversion of conventional weapons, such as firearms, to the illicit market and stipulates that State Parties to the treaty need to assess the risk of diversion as part of their national arms export procedures, to cooperate and exchange information with other State Parties, and to take measures through investigation and law enforcement to address diversion.²⁰⁴ While the European Union itself is Party to the Firearms Protocol and the majority of European Union Member States are party to both the Firearms Protocol and the Arms Trade Treaty, European Union Member States are also required to comply to the European Union Common Position 2008/944/CFSP on arms exports and Directive 258/2012 on the export of civilian firearms. The Common Position stipulates that in their assessment of applications for export, brokering and transit licenses, Member States need to take into account on a case-by-case basis the risk that these firearms and ammunition will be diverted to an

202 UNODC (2020), *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020*, Vienna: UNODC, page 53.

203 United Nations, Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, article 11.

204 United Nations, The Arms Trade Treaty, article 11.

undesirable end-user or for an undesirable end use within the buyer country or re-exported under undesirable conditions.²⁰⁵

165. The Annual Report on the implementation of Common Position 2008/944/CFSP indicates that in 2018 European Union Member States granted almost 7,000 export licenses for a certain category of firearms (ML1 weapons) with a total value of more than 2.6 billion euro to countries across the globe.²⁰⁶

TABLE 19: Value of licenses exports of firearms (ML1) from European Union Member States per region of destination, 2018

Region of destination	Value of licensed exports (in million euro)
Europe	315.8
North America	1,614.5
Central America and Carribean	14.4
South America	27.4
North Africa	7.8
Sub-Saharan Africa	33.5
Middle East	363.4
South Asia	39.0
South-East Asia	137.4
North-East Asia	13.3
Central Asia	6.1
Oceania	53.8
Worldwide	2,626.4

Source: European Council²⁰⁷

Note: The regions referred to in this table stem from the classification in the European Union's annual report on the implementation of Council Common Position 2008/944/CFSP and may not necessarily reflect the classification adopted by the United Nations Statistics Division.

205 The Council of the European Union (2008), *Council Common Position 2008/944/CFSP of 8 December 2008 defining common rules governing control of exports of military technology and equipment*, article 2, criterion 7.

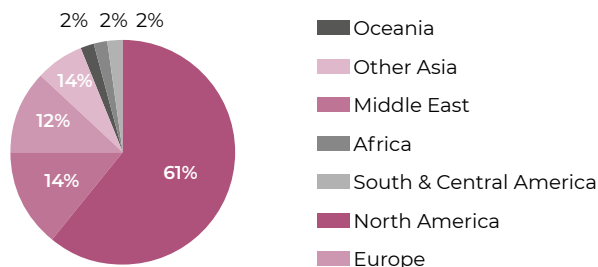
206 This category includes "smooth-bore weapons with a calibre of less than 20 mm, other arms and automatic weapons with a calibre of 12,7 mm (calibre 0,50 inches) or less and accessories ... and specially designed components therefor".

207 European Council (2019), *Twenty-First Annual Report according to article 8(2) of Council Common Position 2008/944/CFSP defining common rules governing the control of exports of military technology and equipment*, Brussels: European Union, page 437.

166. According to this report all European Union Member States granted firearms export licenses in 2018, but the most important exporting countries in terms of value were Austria (885 million euro), Belgium (327 million euro), Bulgaria (110 million euro), Croatia (336 million euro), France (138 million euro), Germany (182 million) Poland (102 million euro) and the United Kingdom (325 million euro). In addition, seven European Union Member States (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Hungary, Italy, Sweden and the United Kingdom) also granted brokering licenses, for example from Kazakhstan to Algeria or from Czechia, Italy and Switzerland to Jordan.²⁰⁸

167. The figure below illustrates that the majority of licensed firearms exports from the European Union is destined for recipients in North America (61 per cent) and in particular for the United States. Other important destination regions of these firearms flows are countries from the Middle East (14 per cent), other European countries (12 per cent) and other Asian countries (7 per cent).

FIGURE 9: Share of the value of licensed exports of firearms (MLI) from European Union Member States to regions of destination, 2018



Source: European Council (2019)²⁰⁹

168. While the overwhelming majority of European Union manufactured firearms are in first instance legally transferred to the intended recipients, an unknown amount of these firearms have been diverted from the legal domain, and ended up on illicit gun markets and in unwanted

208 Ibid.

209 European Council (2019), *Twenty-First Annual Report according to article 8(2) of Council Common Position 2008/944/CFSP defining common rules governing the control of exports of military technology and equipment*, Brussels: European Union, pages 524-531.

hands within Europe and across the globe. Quantitative reporting to the IAFQ demonstrates that firearms manufactured in the European Union have been seized in various countries across the globe.

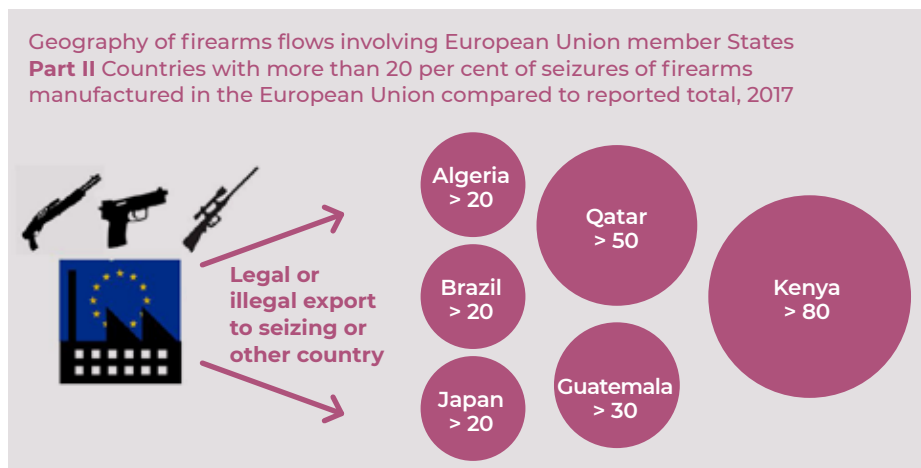
TABLE 20: European Union countries of manufacture of firearms seized in a selection of non-European Union Member States, 2017

Manufacturing country	Algeria	Argentina	Australia	Brazil	Guatemala	Japan	Kenya	Mexico	Qatar	Tunisia
Austria				332				16		
Belgium				48		46	227	16	3	2
Bulgaria					58					
Croatia		328								
Czechia		36	162	69	287		270	6	7	
France	124									33
Germany	35	199	327			20	370	15	7	
Hungary										3
Italy		177	134	64	278	6	45	54	1	4
Romania								6		
Spain			187			6		40	9	2
United Kingdom		1,040	270				7,599			
Total of seizures - EU manufacture	159	1,780	1,080	513	623	78	8,511	153	27	44
Total of seizures	772	19,657	27,819	2,284	1,921	361	9,728	7,241	51	635

Source: IAFQ

169. The table reveals that in some non-European Union countries a significant share of seized firearms was manufactured in the European Union. In Guatemala, for example, one third of the reported seized firearms were manufactured in the European Union (mainly in Czechia and Italy). In Algeria, Brazil and Japan more than 20 per cent of the reported firearms seized in 2017 were manufactured in the European Union (mainly French firearms in Algeria, Austrian firearms in Brazil and Belgian firearms in Japan). In Kenya the share of firearms manufactured within the European Union (mainly in the United Kingdom) was even 87 per cent in 2017, while more than half of the (limited number of) firearms seized in Qatar in 2017 were manufactured in the European Union. The below infographic captures this information again in an illustrative way.

INFOGRAPHIC 2: Countries with more than 20 per cent of seizures of firearms manufactured in the European Union compared to reported total, 2017



170. Qualitative reporting to the IAFQ sheds more light into the ways these firearms have ended up in unintended hands:

TEXT BOX 7: Example of legally exported firearms being subsequently trafficked to Brazil

Brazilian authorities reported to the IAFQ that pistols from Austria and Czechia and assault rifles from Romania, Hungary and other Eastern European countries are commonly seized in Brazil.²¹⁰ According to the Brazilian authorities, these weapons were generally legally exported from the USA, but also directly from Austria, Czech Republic, Israel and Turkey, to authorized arms dealers in Brazil's neighbouring country Paraguay. From Paraguay these firearms were then illegally imported into Brazil where they end up in the hand of Brazilian criminals. The Brazilian authorities explain that this type of illicit firearms trafficking is connected to differences in firearms legislation: Firearms from various calibres are considered as "restricted use" in Brazil and can therefore not be acquired or possessed by private citizens. Several of these firearms can, however, be acquired with less restrictions in Paraguay. According to the Brazilian authorities, the firearms are hidden in cars, buses or trucks in Paraguay and smuggled across the Brazilian border in a similar way as the smuggling of marijuana and cocaine. Some firearms are also believed to be smuggled into Brazil in boats crossing the Parana river and Itaipu lake. The Brazilian authorities further note that firearms are also smuggled

²¹⁰ This entire example is based on the response from Brazil to the IAFQ.

into Brazil from other neighbouring countries such as Argentina, Bolivia and Uruguay. The authorities explain that most of the trafficking of firearms from neighbouring countries is undertaken by Brazilian nationals, sometimes supported by Paraguayan nationals. Some criminal groups from Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo are believed to have “installed” cells or bases in Paraguay in order to receive drugs from Bolivia, Peru and Colombia and manage the firearms trafficking from Paraguay by themselves. While drug and firearms trafficking from Paraguay into Brazil generally go side-by-side, the Brazilian authorities stated there are also criminal groups that focus specifically on illicit firearms trafficking.

Brazilian authorities further reported as response to the IAFQ that European-made firearms have also been trafficked into Brazil directly from the United States. According to the authorities, in 2012 Brazilian Federal Police seized 22 firearms which were smuggled from Miami by boat to Brazil. A criminal group hid Romanian, Hungarian and Chinese Kalashnikov-type assault rifles and ammunition that were legally bought in the United States in cargo containers filled with furniture from Brazilian nationals who were moving from the United States to Brazil. The firearms and ammunition were hidden in mattresses which were very well sewed. Moreover, Brazilian authorities have also observed an increase in firearms seizures at airports due to the increased use of postal services to send parts and components (especially of assault rifles) and ammunition with a false declaration of content from the United States to Brazil.

171. A similar picture has emerged in Mexico. Approximately 25 per cent of illegal firearms in the country were produced in Europe (especially Spain, Italy and Austria). There are, however, no indications that these firearms were trafficked directly from Europe to Mexico. Instead, an expert of the National Centre for Planning, Analysis and Information to Combat Crime explained during the cross-regional meeting that the overwhelming majority of illicit firearms trafficked into Mexico is believed to originate in the United States.²¹¹

172. European Union-manufactured firearms have not only ended up in the hands of criminals, but also in the hands of various non-state armed groups involved in violent conflicts. Research organizations such as Conflict Armament Research and Small Arms Survey have in recent years identified firearms and other weapons seized in contexts of armed conflict across the globe. A three-year investigation between 2014 and 2017 by Conflict Armament Research into the weapons of the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria, for example, demonstrates that about 90 per cent of weapons

211 UNODC Regional Meeting on Firearms Data Collection and Analysis for Member and Observer States of the Middle East and North Africa Region, 5-6 February 2019, Vienna.

and ammunition deployed by IS forces were manufactured primarily in China, Russia, and Eastern European producer states. This investigation indicated that some of these weapons have ended up in arsenal of IS fighters as a result of unauthorized retransfers to Syrian opposition forces by the United States and Saudi Arabia of firearms and ammunition purchased from European Union Member States in Eastern Europe such as Bulgaria and Romania.²¹² Another analysis by Conflict Armament Research indicates that some neighbouring states to South Sudan have supplied weapons to non-state armed actors involved in South Sudan's civil war. In some cases these weapons supplies included firearms and ammunition that were lawfully exported from European Union Member States, such as Bulgaria and Slovakia. The report, however, noted that there are no suggestions that the exporting countries were aware of the intended retransfer or diversion to these groups. In addition, the report also noted that recently exported ammunition from Romania has also fallen in the hands of non-state forces allied with the Sudan People's Liberation Army through a company from the Seychelles that brokered the export via Slovakia to Uganda. Conflict Armament Research further notes that this company is "controlled by an individual whom United Nations investigators named in 2001 for his involvement in exports of Slovak weapons to Uganda and their subsequent diversion to Charles Taylor's regime in Liberia, in collaboration with the well-known arms transporter Victor Bout".²¹³

173. An analysis of the online illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in Libya demonstrates the availability and demand for firearms manufactured in European Union Member States such as Belgium, Italy, Romania, Germany, Austria and Bulgaria.²¹⁴ This analysis reveals that while many of these weapons were manufactured prior to 1990, some of these firearms were also manufactured more recently. Because the research team did not have physical access to the weapons and could therefore not identify their serial numbers, it was unable to trace the weapons and conclusively identify their points of diversion. The analysis, however, suggests that the sources of these weapons varies widely.

174. Another report by Conflict Armament Research explains that non-state armed groups involved in inter-communal herder-farmer

212 Conflict Armament Research (2017), *Weapons of Islamic State: A three-year investigation in Iraq and Syria*, London: Conflict Armament Research, page 5.

213 Conflict Armament Research (2018), *Weapon supplies into South Sudan's civil war: Regional re-transfers and international intermediaries*, London: Conflict Armament Research, page 11.

214 Jenzen-Jones, N.R. and McCollum, I. (2017), *Web Trafficking—Analysing the Online Trade of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Libya*, Geneva: Small Arms Survey, page 15.

conflicts in northern and central Nigeria use locally made artisanal weapons, but also factory-produced weapons manufactured in the European Union and other parts of the world.²¹⁵ According to this report, Belgian-made FN FAL assault rifles, for example, have been seized. The serial numbers on these rifles indicate they were produced around 1975 and formed part of the same order for the same customer as FAL rifles that have been documented in neighbouring Mali and Niger. A tracing request was sent, but in absence of a response, the original export destination of these rifles remains unconfirmed and the point of diversion cannot be identified. The report also states that ammunition manufactured in various European Union Member States (France, Bulgaria, Romania, Czechia, Belgium, Portugal, Poland, Austria and Hungary) has been seized from these non-state armed groups in northern and central Nigeria.

175. Firearms manufactured within the European Union are reported to have been part of the arsenals of non-state armed groups in South America. An analysis of the weapons (mainly firearms) surrendered by the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC) during their demobilization between 2003 and 2006, for example, indicates that about 30 per cent of them were manufactured in Europe and included various types and models.²¹⁶

176. These findings clearly demonstrate a significant demand for firearms manufactured within the European Union from criminals and non-state armed groups across the globe and their use in acts of violence. There are, however, very few concrete cases known of illicit trafficking of these firearms from the European Union to other regions in the world. In the overwhelming majority of known cases, these firearms were legally transferred from the European Union to the intended recipient in another part of the world and subsequently diverted in the destination countries or retransferred to other countries without the approval of the exporting European Union Member State.

215 Conflict Armament Research (2020), *Nigeria's herder-farmer conflict: Domestic, regional, and transcontinental weapon sources*, London: Conflict Armament Research, page 5.

216 Urrutia, N. et al (2009), *Arms tracing: Perspectives on control, traffic and use of illegal weapons in Colombia*, Bogota: Fundación Ideas para la Paz and Universiteit Gent, page 30.

CHAPTER 4: Illicit firearms flows into, from and within the European Union

177. An important yet ambitious target of the Global Firearms Data Project was to identify transnational illicit firearms flows. Up until now, the understanding of such flows at global and regional levels was predominantly based on anecdotal and case-based information, without statistical basis. The long-term collection of data on seized and trafficked firearms from various sources including the IAFQ, the WCO and, in the future potentially other actors, may help authorities in developing more targeted responses to illicit firearms trafficking and promote international law enforcement and judicial cooperation among the concerned authorities. This section analyses the illicit firearms flows into, from and across the European Union by looking into the available data on trafficking routes.

178. As regards the quantification of illicit arms flows, previous research by Transcrime indicates that, compared to other illicit markets such as trafficking in drugs or counterfeit goods, illicit firearms trafficking involving European Union Member States is rather modest in terms of both the size and the number of criminal groups involved.²¹⁷ Reporting by ten European Union Member States to the IAFQ suggests there is no general trend of an increasing or decreasing arms trafficking situation in the European Union: while Hungary noted a large increase in arms trafficking and Sweden and Denmark noted a small increase in arms trafficking into the country, Croatia, Slovakia and Slovenia noted a small decrease of arms trafficking. Four European Union Member States (Lithuania, Portugal, Romania and Spain) stated that the situation with regard to arms trafficking in their country remained stable.

217 Savona E.U. & Riccardi M. (Eds.) (2015), *From illegal markets to legitimate businesses: the portfolio of organised crime in Europe. Final Report of Project OCP – Organised Crime Portfolio*, Trento: Transcrime – Università degli Studi di Trento, page 61.

TABLE 21: Trend of arms trafficking as reported by European Union Member States, 2016-2017

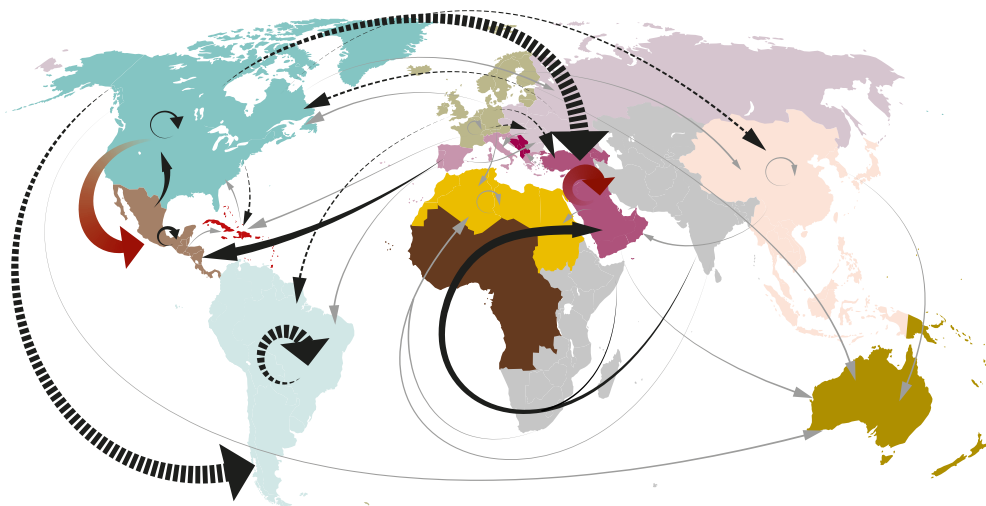
Country	Overall trend	Inbound	Outbound
Croatia	Small decrease	Small decrease	Small decrease
Denmark	Small increase	Small increase	stable
Hungary	Large increase	-	-
Lithuania	Stable	Not known	Not known
Portugal	Stable	Stable	Stable
Romania	Stable	Stable	Stable
Slovakia	Small decrease	Not known	Stable
Slovenia	Small decrease	Small decrease	Small decrease
Spain	Stable	Stable	Stable
Sweden	Small increase	Small increase	Not known

Source: IAFQ

4.1 Trafficking routes

179. The *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020* analysed data on routes that were observed in seizures related to illicit, transnational trafficking available from the IAFQ and the Customs Enforcement Network database maintained by the WCO. The result of this analysis is illustrated in the below maps of transnational firearms trafficking flows by sub-regional groupings.

MAP 3: Main transnational firearms trafficking flows (as defined by routes of seized firearms), 2016-17



Subregions

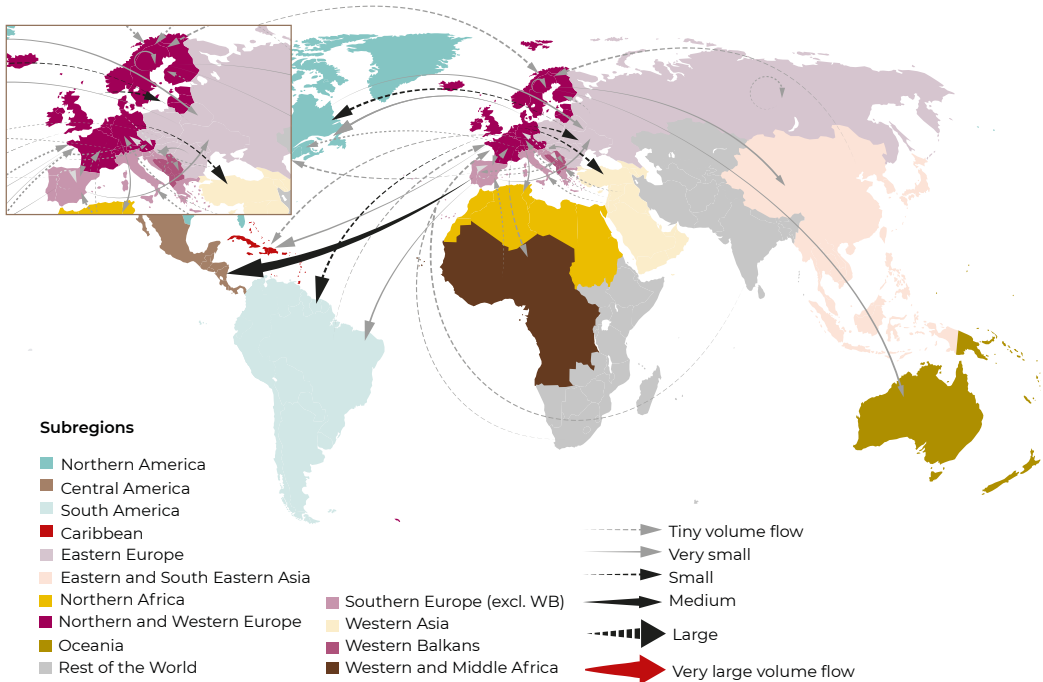
- | | | |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| ■ Northern America | ■ Eastern and South Eastern Asia | ■ Southern Europe (excl. WB) |
| ■ Central America | ■ Northern Africa | ■ Western Asia |
| ■ South America | ■ Northern and Western Europe | ■ Western Balkans |
| ■ Caribbean | ■ Oceania | ■ Western and Middle Africa |
| ■ Eastern Europe | ■ Rest of the World | |

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| → Very small volume flow | → Large |
| → Small | → Very large volume flow |
| → Medium | |

The breakdown into subregional groupings is based on the standard UN classification (M49), adapted to take into account the availability of data and regions of special interest of the study. Please see Methodological Annex for details. Arrows represent flows between subregions (not specific countries). The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. A dispute exists between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas).

Source: UNODC *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020*, page 72.

MAP 4: Transnational firearms trafficking flows affecting Europe (as defined by routes of seized firearms), 2016-17



The breakdown into subregional groupings is based on the standard UN classification (M49), adapted to take into account the availability of data and regions of special interest of the study. Please see Methodological Annex for details. Arrows represent flows between subregions (not specific countries).

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. A dispute exists between the

Source: *UNODC Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020*, page 75.

180. Taking into account the sub-regional classification of countries on which the maps are based, the jurisdiction of the European Union is best represented by the regions of Northern and Western Europe (including: Austria; Belgium; Channel Islands; Denmark; Estonia; Faroe Islands; Finland; France; Iceland; Isle of Man; Latvia; Liechtenstein; Monaco; Netherlands; Norway; Sweden; Switzerland; and United Kingdom) and Southern Europe (including: Andorra; Croatia; Gibraltar; Greece; Holy See; Italy; Malta; Portugal; San Marino; Slovenia; Spain).²¹⁸ Moreover, some European Union Member

²¹⁸ More information on the sub-regional classifications is contained in the statistical and methodological annex to this report.

States fall into the Eastern European region (Bulgaria; Czechia; Hungary; Poland and Romania in addition to Belarus; Republic of Moldova; Russian Federation; Slovakia; Ukraine).

181. The maps indicate that the role of Europe and the European Union as a source of illicit firearms flows was more pronounced in terms of intra-regional flows. Close proximity to each other and potentially also lacking border controls among European Union Member States may thus constitute important circumstances conducive to illicit firearms trafficking affecting the European Union. The analysis of the different *modi operandi* used to traffic firearms in Europe (chapter 5) suggests that in most cases firearms are trafficked into destination countries from neighbouring countries (because cross-border trafficking mainly occurs over land) but with source countries in the Western Balkans (mainly legacy weapons from the armed conflicts in the region), Slovakia (trafficking of deactivated, acoustic expansion, Flobert and reactivated firearms) or other European Union Member States (blank-firing weapons and components). While some cross-regional trafficking has been observed, the available data leads to the conclusion that illicit trafficking of firearms in Europe is mainly a regional phenomenon.

182. The data also reveals a very small volume of illicit arms flows into the European Union from Eastern Europe (which may comprise non-European Union Member States) and tiny volumes of illicit arms flows into the European Union from various other regions, including Northern America, South America, Western Asia, Western and Middle Africa, Western Balkans and the “rest of the world”.

183. As regards outbound illicit arms flows, the data reveals that the largest volume of a trans-regional illicit arms flow originating in regions reflecting the European Union was seized in Central America, corresponding to a medium illicit flow compared to the overall data available to UNODC. Small illicit arms flows originating in these regions were seized in Eastern Europe (which may comprise non-European Union Member States), South America and Western Asia. Very small volumes of such flows were seized in other parts of the Americas (Caribbean and Northern America), Eastern and South Eastern Asia, in North Africa and in Oceania. Moreover, tiny volumes of illicit flows originating in either of the two regions reflecting the European Union were seized in Western and Middle Africa and the Western Balkan region.

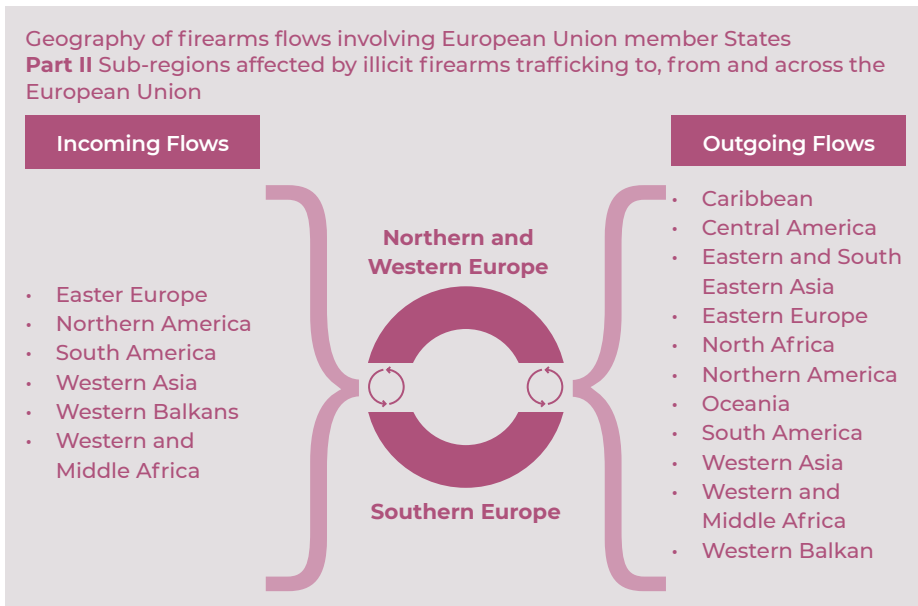
184. Although the origin of seized firearms can often be traced to the country of legal production, it remains often unknown how long these firearms have circulated between and within countries before being seized. The source country as identified in this data collection exercise does therefore not necessarily correlate to the country in which the weapon was diverted. This reservation is further explained by the fact that the data collected as part of the Illicit Arms Flows Dataset is often based on the single transfer during which the seizure occurred and does not always reflect the end results of tracing procedures in which the country of diversion was established.

185. Moreover, in total only seven European Union Member States reported on the most frequent firearms trafficking routes affecting them via the IAFQ (Croatia, Greece, Lithuania, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden), noting that they are mainly recipient countries of these weapons; very few Member States noted that they are (also) a source country. This observation is in line with the *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020*, which explains that there is more data available on inbound seizures than on outbound seizures.²¹⁹ Eleven non-European Union Member States provided information on trafficking routes involving European Union Member States as source countries. In addition, WCO data also includes an indication of trafficking routes that involve European Union Member States. There thus seems to be a clear gap either in the availability or the commitment to share statistical data on illicit arms flows within European Union Member States.

186. While an exact quantification of the above explained illicit flows is hindered by the incompleteness of the dataset and data from other countries may suggest connection between yet other sub-regions, the data reveals that the European region, including European Union Member States, play a multifaceted role with regard to routes of illicit firearms flows including intra-regional, inbound and outbound routes. This role is further illustrated in the below infographic, which reflects illicit flows involving European Union countries at a sub-regional level without quantification of the flow.

187. To further increase the evidence-base on illicit firearms flows involving European Union Member States, this report combines the data available via the Illicit Arms Flows Dataset with data collected by research institutes as well as qualitative information drawn from other Organizations or trafficking cases.

219 See UNODC *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020*, page 71.



188. Previous research commissioned by the European Union confirms that intra-European Union firearms trafficking is an important type of routing as regards illicit firearms flows involving European Union Member States. According to the European Union report, in Finland, for example, 60 - 70 per cent of illicitly-held firearms are the result of international trafficking with only 10 per cent being trafficked directly from countries outside the European Union and often this involved people without apparent criminal motives or who unknowingly returned from holiday with a firearm that requires a license or other type of authorization to possess a firearm in Finland.²²⁰ This observation is also supported by case-based information provided in other chapters of this report, such as the case illustrating illicit firearms trafficking between Austria and Italy (see text box after paragraph 113) and by the research findings of Project SAFTE, as part of which numerous trafficking cases were identified.²²¹

220 Centre for Strategy & Evaluation Services (2014), *Study to Support an Impact Assessment on Options for Combatting Illicit Firearms Trafficking in the European Union*, Brussels: European Commission, page 33.

221 Duquet, N. & Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 106-107.

189. As regards the observations on routes for inbound and outbound trafficking involving European Union Member States, data and information from complementary sources seem to provide different insights.

190. While there are some individual cases that complement the observations on outbound illicit firearms trafficking from the European Union territory, previous research highlights in particular the role that European Union Member States may play as transit countries of illicit firearms flows. In its 2017 annual report, the Hellenic Police, for example, stated that Greece is destination country for weapons coming from countries in the region (Albania, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro) that meet the domestic needs, but at the same time due to its geographical location also a transit country for weapons destined for other European Union Member States and third countries such as Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Libya.²²² An analysis of smuggling activities and routes through South Eastern Europe by a professor affiliated to the Police Academy in Croatia noted that there are indications of weapons smuggling from Bosnia and Herzegovina through the Croatian port of Ploče and the Middle East to Asian countries.²²³ Also research by Conflict Armament Research illustrates the role that European shipping companies may unknowingly play in illicit firearms trafficking. In 2017, for example, Nigerian customs authorities seized four illicit shipments of more than 2,000 pump-action and semi-automatic shotguns that were manufactured in Turkey and were being shipped in containers by sea to the port of Lagos.²²⁴ Investigations by Nigerian and Turkish law enforcement agencies demonstrated that these firearms were disguised and officially declared as various types of consumer goods. Further investigations by Conflict Armament Research indicated that this is an important organized trafficking route exploited by actors based in Nigeria and Turkey and involved major European shipping companies that were unaware of these large-scale arms shipments.

191. At first sight, these examples seem to be in contrast to the quantitative data provided by Member States to the IAFQ and collected by the WCO through the Customs Enforcement Network, which reveal, albeit of very small value, outbound illicit trafficking between European Union Member States and non-European Union countries from several regions. This seemingly different observation may result from the fact that a lot of the data contained in the Illicit Arms Flows Dataset reflects only the

222 Hellenic Police, *Report on serious and organized crime in Greece – Year 2017*, pages 96-99.

223 Antoliš, K. (2007), "Smuggling in South Eastern Europe", *PfP Consortium Quarterly Journal*, Spring 2007, 6(1), pages 71–84.

224 Conflict Armament Research (2020), *Nigeria's Herder-Farmer Conflict*, page 22.

transfer route used for the specific transfer during which the weapons were seized. As previous acts of trafficking of the same item may not be reflected in the data, some cases recorded in the Illicit Arms Flows dataset may indeed relate to cases where European Union Member States were the country of transit rather than the source country. On the other hand, the different observations may also reveal that different data collection methods may provide different components of an evidence-base, all of which are important to fully understand the phenomenon of illicit firearms trafficking and to develop appropriate responses.

192. As regards illicit trafficking into the European Union, data and information from other sources regularly highlight the significant role of the Western Balkan region as source region for illicit weapons within the European Union - a conclusion that the quantitative data collected as part of the Global Firearms Data Project did not allow to draw²²⁵ (see the map above, which only refers to tiny volumes of illicit arms flows originating in the Western Balkan region).²²⁶ Europol, for example, notes that “the weapons and organised criminal groups involved in weapons trafficking primarily originate from the Western Balkans (the weapons will typically have been held illegally after recent conflicts in the area) and the former Soviet Union”.²²⁷

193. The large illicit stockpiles in the Western Balkans are a direct result of the armed conflicts in the region in the 1990s (in Bosnia and Croatia between 1991–95 and in Kosovo²²⁸ in 1999) and the political and economic crises in Albania, which reached its peak in 1997. Before the outbreak of these conflicts in the region, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia had one of

225 A very low confirmed number of firearms seized at the borders of or within the European Union in 2018 and traced back to the Western Balkan was also reported to UNODC after a meeting dedicated to building a baseline for reporting under key performance indicator 5 of the 2018 Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons and their ammunition in the Western Balkans. In fact, only two firearms and 30 rounds of ammunition were reported to be seized at the borders of the European Union and traced to the Western Balkans.

226 Duquet, N. & Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 105; and also Savona, E.U. & Mancuso, M. (eds.) (2017), *Fighting illicit firearms trafficking routes and actors at European level: Final report of Project FIRE*, Milan: Transcrime – Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, page 56.

227 See description of the topic illicit firearms trafficking on the website of Europol, available at <https://www.europol.europa.eu/crime-areas-and-trends/crime-areas/illicit-firearms-trafficking>.

228 References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

the largest armed forces in Europe.²²⁹ However, during and after the conflicts, significant amounts of different types of weapons ended up in the hands of unauthorized private citizens and organized crime groups. According to some estimates more than 600,000 small arms and light weapons were looted in this period and about a quarter of them is believed to have been smuggled to various rebel groups in Kosovo.²³⁰ Croatia, for example, reported to the IAFQ that firearms trafficked from Croatia to other countries are generally legally manufactured prior to the armed conflicts in the region in the 1990s and for the most part remnants of war of these conflicts.²³¹

194. Tracing illicitly trafficked firearms and identifying illicit transfers after their original diversion is not an easy task for law enforcement agencies, especially when it involves legacy weapons from armed conflicts that are eventually used in criminal acts within the European Union. An analysis of 52 firearms in the database French Interior Ministry's *Section Centrale des Armes, Explosifs, et Matières Sensibles* (SCAEMS) that were retrieved or seized in relation to eight terrorism cases from the period 2012 - 2016, for example, indicates that in most cases the tracing request yielded unsatisfactory results. This was especially the case for firearms produced before the outbreak of the armed conflicts in former Yugoslavia. While the French law enforcement agencies were frequently able to identify the last legal users of such weapons, (usually the armed forces), they were generally not able to identify how and when these firearms were trafficked to France.²³²

195. According to a report by the Small Arms Survey, the illicit proliferation of firearms in the Western Balkans is also connected to the high rates of violent crime, the proliferation of illicit activities of organized crime groups and, to a lesser extent, the persistence of a 'gun culture'.²³³ Recent estimates by the Small Arms Survey suggest 3.6 million unregistered firearms in the Western Balkans, especially in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia.²³⁴ Seizure data reported to UNODC by Albania, Montenegro,

229 Carapic, J. (2014), *Handgun Ownership and Armed Violence in the Western Balkans*, Geneva: Small Arms Survey, page 2.

230 Ibid, page 3.

231 Response from Croatia to IAFQ.

232 Florquin, N. and Desmarais, A. (2018), 'Lethal legacies: Illicit firearms and terrorism in France', in Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 169-235.

233 Carapic, J. (2014), *Handgun Ownership and Armed Violence in the Western Balkans*, Geneva: Small Arms Survey, pages 1-5.

234 See information on civilian firearms holdings on the website of Small Arms Survey, available at <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/weapons-and-markets/tools/global-firearms-holdings.html>.

North Macedonia and Serbia indicates that more than 4,400 firearms were seized in these four countries in 2016 - 2017 (see table below). Most of the seized firearms were rifles and pistols. Case-based information provided by these countries also indicates that this involves seizures both from criminals and from individuals not linked to criminal activities. In response to the IAFQ, Albania, for example, reported that in one case authorities arrested eight persons and seized three pistols, two automatic rifles, 934 rounds of ammunition and 73 detonator fuses after members of a criminal gang shot at the police in the city of Elbasan.²³⁵ The Montenegro police for example reported in 2015 to UNODC that its law enforcement agencies frequently seize firearms from individuals who are not connected to criminal activities.²³⁶ Many of these firearms seizures are connected to “legacy weapons”.

TABLE 22: Distribution of seized firearms in Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia in 2016-2017 by type

Type of weapon	Albania	Montenegro	North Macedonia	Serbia	Total	Total %
Pistol	308	n.a.	82	1215	1605	36%
Revolver	10	n.a.	6	78	94	2%
Shotgun	179	n.a.	73	0	252	6%
Rifle	462	n.a.	23	1451	1936	44%
Submachine gun	0	n.a.	1	20	21	0%
Machine gun	4	n.a.	0	36	40	1%
Other weapons	0	n.a.	139	348	487	11%
Total	963	859	324	3148	4435	100%

Source: IAFQ

196. Western Balkan countries do not only represent source countries for illicit firearms within the European Union, but also constitute transit and/or destination countries themselves. In 2015 North Macedonia reported to UNODC that some crime groups traffic firearms from Albania to sell them in North Macedonia, but that the final destination of the weapons are usually other Western Balkan countries or Scandinavian countries.²³⁷ Other data collected in the context of the Global Firearms Monitoring Illicit Arms Flows initiative confirms the observation that some countries in the

²³⁵ Response of Albania to the IAFQ.

²³⁶ UNODC (2015), UNODC Study on Firearms 2015: A study on the transnational nature of and routes and modus operandi used in trafficking in firearms, Vienna: UNODC, page 72.

²³⁷ UNODC (2015), *Country fact sheets. Summary data from country responses on firearms seizures and trafficking*, Vienna: UNODC, pages 95-96.

Western Balkans are not only source countries of such firearms, but also transit countries.

197. Moreover, individual cases related to inbound trafficking seem to highlight the important role that proximity factors may play. According to a media report, for example, in 2017, the Swiss police seized 280 weapons, including an MP5, and Uzi submachine guns and various other handguns, submachine guns, rifles, firearms components and a large amount of ammunition from a legal arms collector in the Sankt Gallen kanton in Switzerland.²³⁸ It was reported that the man was convicted in 2019 to a conditional prison sentence of 18 months and a fine of 8,000 francs for illicitly selling firearms to criminals from Austria. According to the article, at least one of the trafficked firearms was connected to an attempted homicide in Toulouse (France).²³⁹

4.2 Trafficking routes for ammunition

198. Ammunition can end up on illicit markets in various ways: through illicit production, various methods of domestic diversion (for example thefts from government stockpiles or from legal gun owners) and cross-border trafficking. Given that access to ammunition is essential to gun crime activities, it is important to identify points of diversion and analyse trafficking routes of ammunition. Responses to the IAFQ indicate that European Union Member States seized at least 1.1 million rounds of ammunition in 2016 - 2017. Yet, information on the manufacturing countries of this seized ammunition and the trafficking routes used is very often missing. There is also a clear lack of in-depth studies focused specifically on ammunition trafficking in Europe. One of the few studies on illicit ammunition trafficking in Europe focused on the situation in the Netherlands and was published in 2010 by the Dutch National Police. This study concluded that the scope of illicit ammunition trafficking could not be determined due to a lack of systematic recording of seized ammunition.²⁴⁰

199. Although in-depth analyses of the dynamics of ammunition transfers into criminal hands is missing, Dutch law enforcement agencies believe ammunition is generally sold locally and together with a

238 Illegal Waffen verkauft: Degersheimer vor Gericht, FMI Today, 5 September 2019; Waffennarr Hans K. (63) kassiert 18 Monate bedingt, Blick, 5 September 2019.

239 Ibid.

240 De Vries, M. (2010), *Van 'the instrument of delivery' naar 'the actual agent of harm': Munitie in het Nederlandse criminele milieu*, Den Haag: Politie & Wetenschap, page 19.

firearm. Ballistic analyses of crime-related shooting incidents between 2004-2008 in the Netherlands further indicated that mainly pistol ammunition is used in these incidents, especially 9mm Parabellum, 7.65mm Browning, 6.35mm Browning and 9mm Short. When ammunition is seized from criminals this generally involves small quantities, often from different brands.²⁴¹ Ballistic analyses from 2016 of firearms connected to various crimes and offences in France indicates that the most commonly identified calibres were 12 gauge, 9 x 19 mm, 7.65 Browning, .22LR, 7.62 x 39 mm, and .38 Special/.357 Magnum, with 9 x 19 mm Parabellum as the most prominent calibre for cases of delinquency and criminality.²⁴² This is in line with the results of the Dutch study a decade earlier and suggests robust demand for this type of pistol ammunition. French ballistic data demonstrates the use of 7.62 x 39 mm ammunition, which are used in Kalashnikov-type rifles, in about one third of the cases connected to homicides or terrorism. French autopsy data from 89 homicides committed between 2011 and 2017 in the Marseille region confirms this finding: 7.62 x 39 mm calibre firearms were involved in 28 per cent of the cases, 9 x 19 mm in 28 per cent of the cases and shotgun ammunition in 23 per cent.²⁴³

200. The above-mentioned Dutch study concluded that large-scale illicit production of ammunition does not occur in the Netherlands and that ammunition is mainly diverted from legal possession within the country or, in some cases, trafficked into the country. The study explains that large-scale theft of ammunition from stockpiles of the armed forces or law enforcement agencies has not been observed in the Netherlands. A similar observation was made with regard to thefts of ammunition from legal gun dealers and shooting clubs. Instead, the main domestic diversion method of ammunition in the Netherlands is believed to be illicit transfers of ammunition from sport shooters and collectors who have the necessary licenses to possess ammunition legally but illegally sell this ammunition to criminals. This practice is believed to be motivated by high profit margins and facilitated by the lack of controls on the actual use of ammunition by legal gun owners.²⁴⁴

201. Thefts of ammunition have, however, been observed in other European Union Member States. In a targeted theft from a professional sports shooter in France in 2011, for example, thieves stole a crate

241 Ibid, pages 40-45.

242 Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 188-192.

243 Ibid, page 192.

244 De Vries, M. (2010), *Van 'the instrument of delivery' naar 'the actual agent of harm': Munitie in het Nederlandse criminele milieu*, Den Haag: Politie & Wetenschap, pages 36-38.

containing numerous firearms and a crate filled with ammunition. Some of these weapons later ended up in the criminal underworld of drug traffickers in Southern France and one of the stolen firearms was even used in a terrorist attack in 2012.²⁴⁵

202. As regards illicit cross-border trafficking of ammunition, the Dutch study referenced above suggests that ammunition trafficking generally occurs together with firearms, being placed in the same package and shipped from the country of departure by criminals who are not primarily involved in this type of trafficking. The study indicates the existence of various countries of departure and different smuggling methods.²⁴⁶ Yet, ammunition can also be trafficked separately and from different sources than the firearms. Reporting by European Union Member States to IAFQ and data from the WCO on trafficking routes of ammunition suggests that the role of European Union Member States related to ammunition trafficking is equally complex as the role for firearms trafficking.

TABLE 23: Illicit ammunition trafficking routes involving European Union Member States as reported to IAFQ or observed by WCO by sub-regions (2016-2017)

Sub-region of origin	Sub-region of destination
Eastern Europe	Northern America
	Northern and Western Europe
	Western Asia
Northern America	Eastern Europe
	Northern and Western Europe
	Southern Europe (excl. WB)
Northern and Western Europe	Eastern Europe
	Northern America
	Northern and Western Europe
	Southern Europe (excl. WB)
Oceania	Western Asia
	Northern and Western Europe
Southern Europe (excl. WB)	Northern Africa
	Northern and Western Europe
	Southern Europe (excl. WB)
	Western Asia

245 Duquet, N. and Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 200

246 De Vries, M. (2010), *Van 'the instrument of delivery' naar 'the actual agent of harm': Munitie in het Nederlandse criminele milieu*, Den Haag: Politie & Wetenschap, pages 36-38.

Sub-region of origin	Sub-region of destination
Western Asia	Northern and Western Europe
Western Balkans	Eastern Europe
	Northern and Western Europe

Source: WCO + IAFQ

203. The data reveals that ammunition is not only trafficked into and within the European Union, but sometimes also trafficked from European Union Member States to non-European Union countries and vice versa. Within the framework of the Joint Action Days operation “Arktos” a large amount of Flobert ammunition was seized at the Polish-Ukrainian border.²⁴⁷

4.3 Potential future sources

204. The outbreak of armed conflicts in the European Union neighbourhood, such as Ukraine and various countries in the MENA region, have raised concerns about the emergence of new sources of illicit firearms trafficking into the region.²⁴⁸ In 2015, Europol noted that firearms originating from the armed conflicts in Libya, Syria and Mali were already available on the European black market.²⁴⁹ Over the years, Europol repeatedly stated that such conflict zones in the periphery of the European Union have the potential to emerge as major sources of illicit firearms trafficking into the region.²⁵⁰ This has been echoed by, among others, French law enforcement officials who stated that the ongoing conflicts in North Africa, the Sahel, the Middle East and Ukraine can pose trafficking risks as these regions could become source regions in the future once the conflicts have abated and local demand for these weapons decreases.²⁵¹ Within the framework of Project SAFTE several interviewed key actors pointed to Turkey as a potential source country for the trafficking of lethal-purpose firearms to the European Union

247 Interview with Frontex representative, 25 September 2019.

248 Savona, E.U. & Mancuso, M. (eds.) (2017), *Fighting illicit firearms trafficking routes and actors at European level: Final report of Project FIRE*, Milan: Transcrime – Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, page 17.

249 Europol (2015), *Exploring tomorrow's organised crime*, The Hague: Europol, page 41.

250 Europol (2017), *2017 European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment: Crime in the Age of Technology*, Den Haag: Europol, page 54.

251 Florquin, N. & Desmarais, A. (2018), 'Lethal legacies: Illicit firearms and terrorism in France', in Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 196.

due to the fragile security situation in some of its neighbouring countries, the country's porous borders and the observed trafficking routes for other goods through the country.²⁵²

205. Especially the situation in Ukraine is considered critical with regard to future illicit firearms trafficking to the European Union. In 2018, the Small Arms Survey estimated there are almost 3.6 million unregistered firearms in the country compared to approximately 800,000 registered firearms.²⁵³ The country has been the scene of an intense illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons. This proliferation is fuelled by the recent armed conflict in the country and the continuing violence. An analysis of seizure data from 2014-2017, for example, indicates that , most seizures are made in the so-called 'Anti-Terrorist Operation zone' (ATO), especially in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts where the most intense fighting taken place.²⁵⁴ During the armed conflict many firearms were diverted in various ways from state stockpiles. Other elements that exacerbated the illicit proliferation in Ukraine are a historical legacy of surplus weapons from the Cold War, the lack of a comprehensive legal framework for legal firearms possession in Ukraine and the frequent conversion of replica firearms and blank-firing weapons into live-firing firearms.²⁵⁵ Currently most of the illicit firearms trafficking takes place within the country. Yet, fears of illicit firearms trafficking from Ukraine into the European Union have increased. In 2016, for example, a French national was arrested while attempting to smuggle five Kalashnikov-type assault rifles, 5,000 bullets, two anti-tank grenade launchers, detonators, and 125 kg of TNT across the Polish border. The Ukrainian authorities stated this person was planning to carry out terrorist attacks on places of worship, public buildings, and key infrastructure in France a couple of months later.²⁵⁶ Between September 2018 and January 2019 about 300 small arms, almost 1,500 light weapons, more than 140.000 rounds of ammunition and over 200kg of explosives were seized by Ukrainian and Moldovan law enforcement agencies during Joint Operation "Orion", which was

252 Duquet, N. & Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 111.

253 See information on civilian firearms holdings on the webpage of Small Arms Survey (2018).

254 Buscemi, F. et al (2018), "Illicit firearms proliferation in the EU periphery: the case of Ukraine", in: Duquet, N. (Ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 463-465.

255 Ibid, pages 461-480.

256 Ibid, page 462.

coordinated by the European Union Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine in cooperation with Europol.²⁵⁷

206. The armed conflict in Libya has also raised serious concerns on potential illicit trafficking of firearms and ammunition from North Africa into the European Union. The uncontrolled proliferation of weapons in the country during and after the first Libyan civil war in 2011 transformed the country into the epicenter of illicit firearms trafficking in the region. Some sources note that more than a million weapons were diverted in this period, especially as a result of large-scale looting of the stockpiles of the armed forces and battlefield captures, and ended up in the hands of various non-state actors inside and outside the country. Notwithstanding the observation of illegal migrant smuggling and human trafficking from North African countries to the European Union through the central Mediterranean route, significant illicit firearms trafficking from Northern Africa into the European Union has not been observed.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁷ Europol (2019), *Numerous weapons confiscated during the EU-coordinated Joint Operation "Orion"*, Den Haag: Europol Press Release, 17 July 2019.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid*, page 454.

CHAPTER 5: Modus operandi used and perpetrators involved in transnational firearms trafficking to, from and across the European Union

207. Several types of modi operandi can be observed as regards illicit firearms trafficking to, from and across the European Union, including predominantly ant trafficking of illicitly held firearms and ammunition, exploitation of legal differences between source and destination countries, use of postal and fast parcel services, illicit manufacturing and trafficking of homemade firearms and ammunition, and online trafficking. The following chapter analyses the predominant modus operandi used and the perpetrators involved in illicit firearms trafficking involving and affecting the European Union.

5.1 Modus operandi of illicit firearms trafficking

Ant trafficking of illicitly held firearms and ammunition

208. Research on the modi operandi used by criminals to illicitly traffic firearms into and within the European Union reveal that the cross-border trafficking of illicitly held firearms is generally carried out by transport by road with firearms hidden in various compartments of vehicles such as the trunk, fake walls or sometimes even in the tires or the petrol tank of the vehicle.²⁵⁹ The findings suggest further that firearms are generally trafficked together with other types of illicit commodities, especially drugs, along already-existing smuggling routes.²⁶⁰ Sometimes firearms are hidden in other cargoes that are legally transported in private vehicles.²⁶¹

259 Duquet, N. & Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 108.

260 Ibid.

261 UNODC (2015), *Country fact sheets. Summary data from country responses on firearms seizures and trafficking*, Vienna: UNODC, 73.

209. Combined, these observations allow to draw a picture that illicit firearms trafficking involving and affecting the European Union follows patterns of ant trafficking, whereby the illicit flow is facilitated by carrying or transporting small quantities, possibly by numerous individuals. The *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020* explains that the phenomenon of ant trafficking is widely observed and “although ‘ant trafficking’ occurs in small individual consignments, it can result in sizeable illicit flows and accumulation of illicit firearms, and may also be the result of an organized strategy or the outcome of a supply and demand mechanism functioning at a larger scale”.²⁶² Several examples and cases elaborated in the following sections also fall under this specific modus operandi.

210. The individuals involved in firearms trafficking sometimes use very ingenious techniques to hide the firearms in concealed compartments of vehicles.

TEXT BOX 8: Example of concealment method for illicit firearms

Media reported the following unusual case on concealment of illicit firearms:²⁶³ In January 2018, for example, nine members of an organized crime group operating from Scotland were sentenced to a total of 87 years prison sentences between them as a result of ‘Operation Escalade’. Between 2013 and 2017 this crime group imported large quantities of cocaine into the United Kingdom and acted as wholesaler to other crime groups across the country. In addition, to drugs trafficking the men also pleaded guilty to firearms smuggling into the UK. According to the Prosecutor the group was “the most sophisticated encountered by Police Scotland” and “the firepower at the disposal of this crime group is unprecedented in terms of the history of organized crime in Scotland”. The group used ingenious techniques to hide firearms in concealed compartments in a fleet of cars, which was discovered in January 2017 when the police arrested one of the men after a year-long surveillance operation. The man carried a key fob for his vehicle, which contained a button that did not appear to activate any alarm on his vehicle. The police discovered that the fob in fact activated a Bluetooth device in the rear cluster light of the vehicle. When the Bluetooth device was activated a metal plate in the boot of the vehicle came up on a hydraulic ram and a 9mm Glock 17 pistol appeared. In the following weeks the police discovered several sets of car keys with different labels. By cross-referencing the keys to addresses linked

262 UNODC (2020), *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020*, Vienna: UNODC, page 64.

263 The case was reported in “How ‘sophisticated’ crime gang went about business”, *BBC News*, 11 December 2017; and “The downfall of Scotland’s most dangerous crime gang”, *BBC News*, 22 January 2018.

to the crime group, the police discovered the main workshop of the group in a town on the south-eastern outskirts of Glasgow. The workshop was rented under a false name for a monthly of £500 fee. In the workshop the police discovered 11 firearms, all neatly packaged and labelled, in a concealed compartment behind the rear bumper of a vehicle. The firearms include various pistols and military-grade firearms with an estimated resale value of 45,000 euro. The group used the firearms both to enforce their own drug trade interests as well as to supply other criminal groups. Interestingly, the group used a vast array of anti-surveillance technology to keep ahead of the police. The police discovered that the groups used listening devices and mobile phone jammers.

211. As previously mentioned, firearms or ammunition seizures on vessels or in harbours are rather exceptional in the European Union. When trafficking firearms and ammunition to or from islands, for example the Greek islands, traffickers seem to prefer to use vessels over airplanes because of perceived lower detection risks. A media article reported for example that in July 2018 Greek law enforcement officers seized 16 firearms of various types and calibres, 2773 rounds of ammunition, tens of firearm components and other goods that fall under the national arms control act during house searches targeting a criminal group that was illegally smuggling weapons from Bulgaria to Greece.²⁶⁴ Five men and one woman were arrested in Heraklion, the capital of the island Crete, while another man was arrested in the Imathia department in northern Greece. One of the arrested men from Crete played a key role in ordering the weapons from Bulgaria and contacting interested customers across Greece. The weapons were delivered to customers in Crete either in person or by parcel delivery. Weapons destined for customers outside of Crete were supplied through a parcel company, where an accomplice made sure that the parcels were routed by ship rather than by plane to avoid x-ray controls. The article notes that in total 56 cases of illicit arms sales have been identified by the Greek authorities.

212. Similar observations of maritime smuggling of firearms and ammunition have been made in Italy. Project SAFTE noted that Italian law enforcement officials believe that large cargo ships have increasingly been replaced by small speedboats to smuggle firearms and ammunition to Italy due to increased controls on cargo ships in Italian ports.²⁶⁵ According to these findings, sometimes these speedboats tow so-called 'torpedoes' (sealed containers) which contain the smuggled goods.

264 Κύκλωμα διακινούσε όπλα από τη Βουλγαρία στην Κρήτη, *Naftemporiki*, 18 July 2018.

265 Strazzari, F. & Zampagni, F. (2018), Between organised crime and terrorism: Illicit firearms actors and market dynamics in Italy, in: *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 237-283.

These torpedoes are unhooked near the Italian coast and picked up by the recipients at a later moment to lower the risks of detection. In these cases of cross-border trafficking the firearms are destined for Italian criminals, while other countries are mainly transit countries for firearms trafficking by vessels. The Belgian police on the other hand stated that illicit firearms trafficking takes place over sea through the large container harbour of Antwerp, but that they these firearms are generally not intended for illicit gun market in Belgium.²⁶⁶

Exploitation of legal differences between source and destination countries

213. One of the main objectives of the 1991 European Union Firearms Directive and its amendments of 2008 and 2017 is to harmonize national gun legislation within the region. Yet, despite this directive significant differences in national firearms legislation continue to exist. These differences in legislation provide opportunities for illicit firearms trafficking, particularly within the European Union. The map on transnational illicit arms flows contained in chapter 4 reveals that these opportunities are also seized, leading to a relatively high share of cases of intra-regional trafficking, compared to the overall number of firearms seizures linked to illicit trafficking involving the European Union.

214. In the 2017 Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA), Europol noted that “firearms traffickers are highly adept at exploiting legal loopholes and differences in regulatory regimes between Member States to divert firearms from legal suppliers”.²⁶⁷ Especially the trafficking of easy-to-reactivate deactivated or AEW and the trafficking of easy-to-convert blank firing guns are considered items that are often trafficked into and within the European Union. The exploitation of legal loopholes and differences in national legislation are, however, not limited to these products, but can also involve parts and components of firearms and in some cases even live-firing firearms. These weapons are legally acquired from authorized arms dealers based in countries with less stringent firearms legislation and then illicitly trafficked into the destination (or transit) country. The initial source countries can be neighbouring countries, but also countries located further away. The internet and darknet have facilitated illicit firearms trafficking where weapons are bought legally online and shipped to the buyer in a European Union Member State by postal packages or fast-parcel

²⁶⁶ Interview with Federal Judiciary Police of Belgium, 5 April 2017.

²⁶⁷ Europol (2017), *2017 European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment: Crime in the Age of Technology*, Den Haag: Europol, page 54.

services. Importantly, this type of illicit firearms trafficking is not limited to intra-European Union trafficking, but can also involve other countries.

215. The following sections describe the modus operandi used by criminals to illicitly traffic firearms by exploiting differences in legislation with a focus on trafficking of live-firing firearms, trafficking of reactivated and converted firearms, trafficking of Flobert caliber weapons and trafficking of parts and components.

Trafficking of live-firing firearms acquired legally in countries with more permissive licensing or registration requirements

216. A significant type of firearms trafficking into several European Union Member States is the illegal import of live-firing firearms that were legally bought in countries with more permissive licensing systems or registration requirements. In 2016 a French citizen, for example, was arrested on drug-dealing charges, but his arrest also revealed a firearm trafficking scheme where he would visit his supplier near Geneva twice a month and smuggle small numbers of firearms from Switzerland into France. Between 2012 and 2016 he trafficked more than 400 handguns this way.²⁶⁸ Transcrime noted in one of their studies that some organized crime groups were able to avoid detection by exploiting differences in legislation in Europe, providing the example that a large 'Ndrangheta group was able to traffic different kinds of firearms and ammunition, such as pistols, rifles and smaller quantities of shotguns, revolvers, machine and sub-machine guns into Italy after purchasing them legally in Switzerland.²⁶⁹

217. The United States is also source country for live-firing firearms that were acquired legally outside the European Union and subsequently illicitly trafficked into the region. Often these firearms are shipped by using postal or fast parcel services, but sometimes they are also smuggled into the country by the perpetrator himself.

268 Florquin, N. & Desmarais, A. (2018), 'Lethal legacies: Illicit firearms and terrorism in France', in Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 183.

269 Savona, E.U. & Mancuso, M. (eds.) (2017), *Fighting illicit firearms trafficking routes and actors at European level: Final report of Project FIRE*, Milan: Transcrime – Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, page 35.

270 Presentation by NABIS official during the UNODC Regional Meeting on Firearms Data Collection and Analysis for Member and Observer States of the Middle East and North Africa Region, 5-6 February 2019, Vienna.

TEXT BOX 9: Example of a perpetrator exploiting legal differences to legally purchase and subsequently traffic firearms from the United States to the United Kingdom

An expert of the United Kingdom National Ballistics Intelligence Service (NABIS) reported for example that in 2010, a United States national travelled from the United Kingdom to the United States on 12 separate occasions to legally purchase at least 80 handguns (mainly pistols) at several different gun stores in North Carolina, using a conceal-and-carry weapons license.²⁷⁵ The perpetrator then illegally imported these weapons into the United Kingdom by transporting the undeclared weapons in checked-in luggage. This trafficking scheme was discovered when undercover police officers in the United Kingdom bought three Glock 9 mm pistols for £10,500 and forensic analysis was able to restore the (manually removed) serial numbers of the pistols. The serial numbers were sent to the United States in a tracing request, which allowed to trace the pistols to the above-mentioned perpetrator. The United States Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) started monitoring firearms purchases by the individual and arrested him a few months later after checking in four bags of luggage for his flight from North Carolina back to the United Kingdom. In his luggage border control officers discovered 16 pistol slides, pistol barrels and lower pistol receivers. The serial numbers on these components matched the 16 firearms he had just bought. Another piece of luggage contained 32 magazines. Interesting, his luggage also contained a fake document that stated he had the permission to transport the 'inert samples'. The perpetrator was found guilty of violating United States export control laws and sentenced to ten years in prison. Intelligence information revealed that the perpetrator was able to traffic at least 64 handguns into the United Kingdom.

Although this type of firearms trafficking is not always perpetrated by professional criminals, the firearms trafficked this way regularly end up in the criminal underworld. In the above-mentioned case, United Kingdom authorities were able to recover 22 of the trafficked firearms from criminal possession.

218. While this type of trafficking is often carried out by individuals, sometimes organized crime groups are involved, often leading to a high number of trafficked firearms over time. Europol reported for example that in 2019, the French National Gendarmerie arrested seven members of an organized crime group that used an associate to legally acquire firearms in the United States and illicitly traffic them into France by shipping them broken down in parts spread across dozens of packages.²⁷¹ While authorities seized 60 handguns, 20 rifles and nine sticks of dynamite during coordinated raids

²⁷¹ Europol, *Coordinated hit against gun smuggling operation between France and the US*, 11 March 2019.

across France, it is believed that that this organized crime group trafficked over 450 weapons for the year 2018 alone using this method.²⁷² The modus operandi of using a straw purchaser to legally buy and subsequently traffic firearms has also been observed in other European Union Member States, such as the Netherlands.²⁷³

219. Trafficking of live-firing firearms that were acquired legally in countries with more permissive legal frameworks is, however, not limited to trafficking from non-European Union countries into the European Union. This type of trafficking has also been observed between European Union Member States. In Belgium, for example, a legal loophole existed between 2007 and 2013 for the acquisition of a specific list of historic, folkloristic and decorative weapons (so-called 'HFD weapons').²⁷⁴ Purchasers of these firearms did not require an authorisation or registration to obtain them as they were believed to be rare or harmless because of their lack of firepower and accuracy, but also because it was believed that for most of them ammunition was no longer available. Some of the firearms on this list, however, were not rare and large quantities of ammunition were still available, such as for Nagant M1895 revolvers legally sold for around 170 euros. Since acquisition of these firearms did require a license in other European Union Member States, citizens from these countries travelled to Belgium to legally purchase these firearms, for example at arms fairs, and then illegally trafficked them across the border back home. In 2011, for example, a Belgian law enforcement agency dismantled a large trafficking network involving HFD firearms. After a public mass shooting in the city of Liège in December 2011, the Federal Government decided to abolish the list of freely obtainable HFD-firearms and persons possessing these firearms needed to register them. While tens of thousands of these HFD firearms were sold between 2007 and 2013 only 6,000 were eventually registered. It is believed that a significant number of these firearms have ended up on criminal markets across Europe.

272 Ibid.

273 Bruinsma, M. & Spapens, T. (2018), 'Terrorist access to firearms in the Netherlands', in: Duquet, N. (Ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute.

274 Duquet, N. & Goris, K. (2018), The illicit gun market in Belgium: A lethal cocktail of criminal supply and terrorist demand, in: Duquet, N. (red.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 49-50.

Trafficking of reactivated and converted firearms

220. The *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020* concluded that the majority of trafficked firearms are industrially manufactured, but that several other production modalities, such as conversion, reactivation and artisanal manufacturing, have been observed. The study further adds that especially in Europe a geographical concentration of different methods to convert weapons seems to exist.²⁷⁵ The data reported by 11 European Union Member States to the IAFQ on the technical condition of the seized firearms demonstrates that in some Member States very high levels of modified, converted and reactivated firearms were seized. In the United Kingdom, for example, 39 per cent of all seized firearms in 2017 were either modified (23 per cent), converted (12 per cent) or reactivated (four per cent) (see table ° in section 2.1.2 of this report). The reported seizure data further indicates that 14 per cent of all seizures involve “other weapons” which suggests also significant seizures of blank firing weapons in their original condition (see figure ° in section 2.1.2 of this report). These figures are in line with conclusions of project SAFTE that the conversion of blank-firing weapons and the reactivation of poorly deactivated firearms and AEW have strongly increased the availability of firearms on illicit markets across Europe in recent years.²⁷⁶

221. Recent studies by the Small Arms Survey and the Flemish Peace Institute have indicated that converted blank-firing weapons are widely available on illicit gun markets across the European Union.²⁷⁷ Blank firing weapons resemble real firearms, especially handguns, but are unable to fire bulletted ammunition. Such weapons are seized from criminals across Europe, but are especially apparent in European Union Member States with more restrictive firearms legislation.²⁷⁸

222. Until 2017, the European Union Firearms Directive did not require a license or registration for the acquisition and possession of blank firing weapons. As a result, the registration of such weapons was only

275 UNODC (2020), *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020*, Vienna: UNODC, page 38.

276 Duquet, N. & Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 159.

277 Florquin, N. & King, B. (2018), *From Legal to Lethal: Converted Firearms in Europe*, Geneva, Small Arms Survey; Duquet, N. & Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 92.

278 Florquin, N. & King, B. (2018), *From Legal to Lethal: Converted Firearms in Europe*, Geneva, Small Arms Survey.

acquired in about half of all European Union Member States in 2014.²⁷⁹ Often the trafficking of (converted blank firing weapons) is carried out by individuals who take advantage of differences in legislation. Such weapons are being ordered online and internationally shipped to customers with postal and fast parcel packages. In July 2019 the United Kingdom NCA, for example, announced it had seized 100 firearms and arrested 27 people in the context of a national operation targeting customers who bought illegal blank-firing weapons online.²⁸⁰

223. Convertible blank-firing weapons are attractive for petty criminals since they can often be acquired legally, are cheap and fit the purpose of threatening victims. In addition, certain types can easily be converted into live-firing firearms. Law enforcement agencies from different European Union Member States such as the Netherlands, Portugal and France started seizing converted blank-firing weapons in the late 1990s. From the early 2000s onwards converted blank firing weapons proliferated in the European Union and became a widespread security problem across Europe. Most of the converted blank firing weapons that were seized in the late 1990s and early 2000s were legally produced in other European countries such as Germany (Umarex and Röhm) and Italy (Bruni, Chiappa Firearms and Tanfoglio), but also in other countries such as the Russian Federation (Baikal).²⁸¹ In the Netherlands, for example, the police seized 1,276 blank firing weapons between 2002 and 2006.²⁸² Almost all of these seized weapons were converted and 758 of them were Tanfoglio pistols (especially the GT28 model). The Dutch police reported that investigations into the trafficking of these weapons showed that many of them were legally acquired in unaltered state and then converted in specialised small workshops in Portugal.²⁸³ The converted weapons were then trafficked over land by intermediaries to criminal customers – often involved in drug dealing – in the Netherlands. Currently these types of converted blank firing weapons are encountered much less often by law enforcement agencies across Europe. In response to the observed trafficking of converted weapons, the Italian manufacturer

279 EY & SIPRI (2014), *Study to support an impact assessment on a possible initiative related to improving rules on deactivation, destruction and marking procedures of firearms in the EU, as well as on alarm weapons and replicas*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, pages 24-25.

280 National Crime Agency, *Illegal firearms seized across UK in second national operation targeting online customers*, 19 July 2019.

281 Ibid.

282 Ibid.

283 De Vries, M. (2008), *De handel in omgebouwde gas- en alarmwapens: Vanuit een criminaliteitskundig perspectief*, Apeldoorn: Politieacademie.

Tanfoglio of these weapons stopped the production of its GT28 model.²⁸⁴

224. Since 2010, Turkish-made converted blank-firing weapons (especially the brands Ekol and Zoraki) have become the most often observed types of converted blank firing weapons across Europe: law enforcement agencies from Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom have noted that that such weapons are commonly used in gun crime in their respective country.²⁸⁵ Several models of these Turkish-made blank firing weapons are near replicas of existing models of live-firing firearms, are easy to convert and are produced with strong materials. Because these weapons also caused problems inside Turkey, the Turkish Government in 2008 introduced manufacturing specifications for such weapons sold in Turkey, but these specifications do not apply to all exported blank firing weapons.²⁸⁶

225. Firearms conversion workshops have been observed in various countries across Europe. Often the conversion takes place in the destination countries of these trafficked weapons, possibly because it lowers the risks of smuggling these weapons.²⁸⁷ Since only basic tools and engineering skills are required to convert some of these blank-firing weapons, many of the conversions are undertaken by final users themselves, for example with the assistance of online tutorials, or by individuals operating independently from organized criminal groups. In some cases, however, the conversion takes place on a larger scale and is undertaken by organized criminal groups, including in European Union Member States such as France and the Netherlands, but also in other countries such as Albania or Macedonia.²⁸⁸ In 2015, the authorities of Northern Macedonia, for example, reported to UNODC that the conversion of Turkish made gas or signal pistols generally takes place in improvised workshops back on the Macedonian territory. The converted weapons were then sold to customers in Macedonia for €100-€150 per piece or trafficked to other countries in the Western Balkans, Western Europe and Scandinavia where they could

284 Duquet, N. & Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute.

285 Florquin, N. & King, B. (2018), *From Legal to Lethal: Converted Firearms in Europe*, Geneva, Small Arms Survey, pages 28-30.

286 Ibid, page 29.

287 Ibid, page 53.

288 Duquet, N. & Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 93.

be sold for approximately €300–€500 per piece.²⁸⁹ Forensic institutions from several European Union Member States have also observed the conversion of certain models of blank firing weapons into full automatic handguns.²⁹⁰

226. Responses from European Union Member States to the IAFQ on the prices of different types of firearms in their country demonstrate that (converted) blank-firing guns are generally cheaper than other industrially manufactured firearms. In 2016–2017 in Spain, for example, a converted pistol was about six times cheaper than a reactivated pistol, while in Sweden a converted starting/gas pistol costed about 7,500–15,000 SEK compared to 10,000–20,000 SEK for an original pistol.²⁹¹ Because of their low prices, original and converted blank firing weapons seem to be primarily used by petty criminals and low-level criminals, but there is a growing concern that organized criminal groups and terrorist actors will increasingly acquire such weapons.²⁹² In recent years converted blank-firing weapons are reported to be also seized from higher-level criminals in various European Union Member States.²⁹³

227. In several European Union Member States the trafficking of blank-firing weapons is mainly carried out by individuals who legally acquire a small number of such weapons in a neighbouring country and then illegally transport them back into their own country. Project SAFTE included a closer look at the trafficking in such weapons in Romania, a country where the possession of such weapons is subject to licence: According to the findings, trafficking in blank firing weapons is the most prevalent type of illicit arms trafficking in the country.²⁹⁴ Most of the blank-firing weapons seized in Romania are Turkish-made made and legally sold in Bulgaria for low prices, where the customers are only registered in the gun shop's arms register. The weapons are mainly trafficked by bus or private vehicle through the border crossings Varna-Vama Veche, Ruse-Giurgiu, Silistra, Calafat, and Corabia. In some cases, these weapons were trafficked for individual use

289 UNODC (2015), *Country fact sheets: Summary data from country responses on firearms seizures and trafficking*, Vienna: UNODC, page 96.

290 Florquin, N. & King, B. (2018), *From Legal to Lethal: Converted Firearms in Europe*, Geneva, Small Arms Survey, page 41.

291 UNODC (2020), *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020*, Vienna: UNODC, page 59.

292 Florquin, N. & King, B. (2018), *From Legal to Lethal: Converted Firearms in Europe*, Geneva, Small Arms Survey, pages 36 and 37.

293 Florquin, N. & King, B. (2018), *From Legal to Lethal: Converted Firearms in Europe*, Geneva, Small Arms Survey, pages 37 and 38.

294 Albisteanu, R., Dena, A. & Lewis, M. (2017), Romania: firearms and security at the EU eastern border, in: Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 327–368.

by the smuggler, while in other cases these weapons were smuggled for Romanian criminals in exchange for a fee. The quantities of smuggled blank-firing weapons are small to lower the risk of detection. This type of trafficking is believed to be very attractive for Romanian criminals because it is an easy way for them to acquire a weapon that resembles a real firearm, they are cheap and can easily be converted into a live-firing firearm. In addition, they can also be easily converted back into their original blank-firing state, which reduces penalties in case they are caught. Romanian criminals are reported to use these weapons to protect the trafficking of other illicit commodities and to threaten victims or rival criminals.

228. Seizures from across Europe demonstrate that (converted) blank-firing weapons are also trafficked internationally in large quantities.

TEXT BOX 10: Examples of large-scale trafficking in (converted) blank-firing weapons

In 2017, Swedish customs and police, for example, arrested a couple for illegally importing 90 gas pistols and converting them into live-firing firearms. The police suspect the couple sold these weapons to criminals in Sweden and Denmark.²⁹⁵

According to media articles, in 2018, a high-level criminal from the criminal underworld of Marseille, France, was sentenced to four years in prison for trafficking 80 Zoraki blank firing weapons from Bulgaria to France.²⁹⁶ The weapons were reportedly ordered from criminals in Bulgaria for 30.000 euro. The weapons were supposed to be converted into live-firing weapons before being trafficked to Marseille, but upon arrival in France it turned out that the conversion was not successful. The media article further noted that two other men were convicted to three years in prison, including a Bulgarian bricklayer who acted as an intermediary with the Bulgarian criminals.

As a result of a United Kingdom NCA investigation, British Force officers seized 60 Zoraki blank firing handguns in 2019.²⁹⁷ At least one of the seized firearms was

295 Grip, L. (2018), 'Illegal weapons, gangs and violent extremism in Denmark', in Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 123-168.

296 Marseille: Une figure du banditisme marseillais aurait acheté 30.000 euros des pistolets à billes; *20 Minutes*, 19 October 2018; Quatre ans de prison pour une figure du banditisme marseillais, *Le Figaro*, 19 October 2018; Marseille: des figures du grand banditisme achètent pour 30.000 euros de fausses armes, *BFMTV*, 21 October 2018.

297 National Crime Agency, *Man admits smuggling 60 guns into the country in his car*, 6 September 2019.

converted to fire live ammunition. The firearms were seized at the Port of Dover en route from Calais. The perpetrator, who had a 3,000 euros gambling debt, left the United Kingdom through Dover a few days earlier. Most of the smuggled firearms were stored in hidden spaces in the car such as deep in the car's bumper. It took the Border Police several hours to discover all of the hidden firearms. The perpetrator admitted to gun trafficking but stated he did not know the firearms were hidden in his car. The NCA believe these firearms were destined for the domestic criminal market.

229. In recent years, European Union Member States have responded to this threat in various ways. Portugal, for example, made its legislation on blank firing weapons more restrictive in 2006²⁹⁸ and recently noted that it was able to halt the threat of alarm weapons produced in Turkey through various police operations and an awareness raising campaign by using the media.²⁹⁹ Several European Union Member States have also started cooperating in tackling the trafficking of blank firing weapons as part of Operation Bosphorus, a series of international actions coordinated by Romania and developed under the 2015 operational action plan of the firearms chapter of the European Multidisciplinary Platform against Criminal Threats (EMPACT). In 2016, law enforcement agencies from 10 European Union Member States, supported by Europol, seized 556 blank firing weapons and arrested 245 individuals as part of Operation Bosphorus.³⁰⁰ It total 131 of these weapons were converted. In addition, at least 108 other firearms, 33,748 rounds of ammunition, grenades, silencers, magazines and tools for converting the weapons to live-firing weapons were seized. Also at least four illicit workshops for the conversion of blank-firing weapons and the production of ammunition were identified and dismantled in Spain.

230. The reactivation of deactivated firearms - real firearms that have been modified so they can no longer expel a projectile or fire blank ammunition usually as the result of a mechanical alteration that blocks the firearm from performing a firing cycle – has become an important source of illicit firearms trafficking in Europe. Reactivated firearms and converted acoustic expansion weapons AEW³⁰¹ have been trafficked in significant

298 De Vries, M. (2008), *De handel in omgebouwde gas- en alarmwapens: Vanuit een criminaliteitskundig perspectief*, Apeldoorn: Politieacademie, page 35.

299 Responses of Portugal to the IAFQ.

300 Europol (2017), *Operation Bosphorus against firearms trafficking results in nearly 250 arrests in 2016*, 23 January 2017.

301 AEW are a specific type of deactivated firearms. AEW were originally real firearms, but have been modified so that they can no longer expel a projectile (mostly by inserting obstructions into the barrel). These weapons, however, still allow to fire blank ammunition.

numbers in Europe in recent years. Weapons trafficked in this way have also been used by organized criminal groups and terrorists in Europe.³⁰² The most notorious example of this was the attack on a Jewish supermarket in Paris in January 2015, two days after the Charlie Hebdo attack. The perpetrator of this attack used two reactivated Vz.58 automatic assault rifles and two reactivated Tokarev 33TT pistols that were legally acquired in Slovakia as deactivated weapons and then trafficked to France through Belgium.³⁰³ After the attack police seized four more converted Tokarev pistols and a Nagant revolver in the perpetrator's apartment. The tracing of his firearms and the police investigation into their supply chains showed that all of the perpetrator's firearms were previously deactivated by one company and legally sold in one gun store in Slovakia, but were trafficked into France in at least two different ways. One of the rifles was purchased from the gun store by a Belgian customer, who then subsequently illegally sold it online. It is still unclear where the conversion of this firearm happened, but the Belgian police apparently discovered tools that could be used to convert firearms during a search in the arms dealer's house. The other rifle and two pistols were legally purchased from the same Slovakian store by a French national living in Belgium. The man had ordered dozens of deactivated firearms including pistols, machine guns and Vz.58 assault rifles, reactivated these weapons himself in his workshop and then sold them to local criminals. As a result of the police investigations, several suspected intermediaries were arrested with trials expected to be held in 2020.³⁰⁴ After the use of these reactivated firearms in the 2015 Paris attacks, the European Union amended its Firearms Directive to strengthen and foster the harmonization of its Member States' rules on the deactivation of firearms.

231. The reactivation of deactivated firearms is not a new phenomenon. As early as the 1970s cases of reactivated firearms have been observed in Europe. In 1972, West German police, for example, started seizing reactivated police service pistols that were previously sold as deactivated firearms to German civilians³⁰⁵, while in Italy mafia groups were known until the 1980s to reactivate firearms left by United States soldiers

302 Florquin, N. & King, B. (2018), *From Legal to Lethal: Converted Firearms in Europe*, Geneva, Small Arms Survey, pages 9 and 38.

303 Duquet, N. et al (2019), *Armed to kill: A comprehensive analysis of the guns used in public mass shootings in Europe between 2009 and 2018*, pages 36-39

304 Duquet, N. et al (2019), *Armed to kill: A comprehensive analysis of the guns used in public mass shootings in Europe between 2009 and 2018*, pages 36-39

305 Florquin, N. & King, B. (2018), *From Legal to Lethal: Converted Firearms in Europe*, Geneva, Small Arms Survey, page 26.

at the end of the Second World War.³⁰⁶ More recent seizures suggest that reactivation continues to be a significant source of illicit firearms trafficking in various European Union Member States. Project SAFTE for example described two examples stemming from the United Kingdom:³⁰⁷

- In 2005 – 2007, the London Metropolitan Police dismantled an illegal workshop near Reading (United Kingdom). During this operation the police seized two reactivated MAC-10 machine pistols, nine deactivated MAC-10s, 10 replica handguns and various firearms parts and components. In the workshop they also found material to produce ammunition, and machinery, tools and documentation for the reactivation of firearms.
- In 2009 the Merseyside Police dismantled an illegal workshop in Liverpool (United Kingdom) where at least 45 firearms had been reactivated, including Uzi sub-machine guns and Sten guns.

232. In various European Union Member States the reactivation of decommissioned firearms from state stockpiles has become an important security threat. In Finland, for example the reactivation of deactivated firearms has become much more common in the last decade. Finish police has noted that tens of thousands of reactivated firearms circulate illegally in Finland. These firearms were often the property of the Finnish Defence Forces and were sold as deactivated firearms. They include various types of pistols, military-grade assault rifles and submachine guns. Since the 1980s such deactivated firearms have also been given as gifts. Also firearms that were originally used by the Polish police in the 1950s have ended up as reactivated firearms on the Finish illicit gun market. Reactivated firearms from the Finnish illicit gun markets have also been trafficked to neighbouring countries such as Estonia and Russia.³⁰⁸ Reactivated military-grade firearms have been seized in Finland from different types of criminal actors, including outlaw motorcycle gangs that are involved in large-scale drug trafficking. In 2017, for example, Helsinki police seized a large number of firearms, including a

306 Strazzari, F. & Zampagni, F. (2018), Between organised crime and terrorism: Illicit firearms actors and market dynamics in Italy, in: *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 264.

307 Holtom, P., James, P. & Patmore, C. (2018), 'From the IRA to ISIS: Exploring terrorist access to the UK's illicit firearms market', in: Duquet, N. (red.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 401-402.

308 UNODC (2015), *Country fact sheets. Summary data from country responses on firearms seizures and trafficking*, Vienna: UNODC; Yle: Suomessa kymmeniä tuhansia laittomia sarjattulaseita - Näin deaktivoitu ase muutetaan taas toimivaksi, *Tekniikka & Talous*, 20 June 2016; Suomi-konepistoolit palaavat myyntiin - ostaja saa kuitenkin varautua asioimaan poliisin kanssa, *Kauppa-lehti*, 17 August 2014.

number of reactivated firearms, from two outlaw motorcycle gangs (Bandidos MC and United Brotherhood) and individuals associated with these gangs as part of two investigations into the illegal import and distribution of cocaine, methamphetamine, ecstasy and cannabis.³⁰⁹

233. In 2017 Europol stated that the reactivation of deactivated firearms has become one of the main sources of illicit firearms in the European Union, with traffickers exploiting legal loopholes and differences in national legislation.³¹⁰ Many of these firearms were previously surplus weapons from the armed forces or police that were deactivated or modified into AEW.³¹¹ In recent years especially easy-to-convert AEW have been trafficked. In general AEW are easier to convert than other deactivated firearms since the firing mechanism remains operational. Experts noted that the reactivation of AEW from Slovakia did not require much technical skills since the pins obstructing the barrels could easily be removed by drilling through them, replacing the barrel or just firing a real round of ammunition to clear the barrel. The reactivated AEW were originally industrially manufactured as real firearms and are therefore more powerful, robust and capable than converted blank-firing weapons which were manufactured from weaker materials.³¹² According to an in-depth analysis by the Small Arms Survey from 2018 “the available evidence points to the existence of firearms conversion workshops in a range of countries. A number of recent cases and reports suggest that conversion actually often occurs in the same countries where guns are finally acquired or used, sometimes on a large scale. This practice may be attractive to traffickers and end users because it limits the risks associated with smuggling fully functioning firearms across borders”.³¹³

234. Most of the converted AEW that are currently being trafficked in Europe were surplus weapons from the Czechoslovakian armed forces and were legally sold in Slovakia. According to the Slovak police the vz.58 automatic rifles and Skorpion vz.61 sub-machine guns are the most notorious AEW models, but AEW versions of various handgun models exist

309 Katso kuvat - Poliisi teki isoja asetakavarikkoja jengeiltä Suomessa, *Savon Sanomat*, 8 November 2017.

310 Europol (2017), *Huge firearms depot seized during Operation Portu now revealed*, 14 March 2017.

311 Duquet, N. & Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 96.

312 Florquin, N. & King, B. (2018), *From Legal to Lethal: Converted Firearms in Europe*, Geneva, Small Arms Survey, page 23.

313 Ibid, page 40.

as well.³¹⁴ In 2018 the Small Arms Survey stated that almost all of the AEW recently seen by police originated from Slovakia, where these weapons were sold without restrictions to adults upon presentation of an identity card until legislation in the country changed in July 2015. Many of these weapons were also sold online from Slovakia. Starting in 2013 law enforcement agencies across Europe started seizing converted AEW of Slovak origin in criminal cases.³¹⁵ Europol believes more than 20,000 deactivated and AEW were sold by Slovakian gun stores to customers across the European Union.³¹⁶ While a large amount of deactivated firearms from Slovakia were trafficked in Europe, especially in 2014-2015, the trafficking of reactivated firearms also involves firearms that were deactivated in other European Union Member States. In 2014, for example, a Marseille-based retiree was sentenced to four years' imprisonment for illicit trafficking of firearms that were deactivated and legally purchased in Spain. Over several years the trafficker purchased 132 deactivated handguns, including 75 Glock pistols, from a gun store in Barcelona (Spain) and smuggled them into France in small quantities hidden in his vehicle. After reactivation at home by replacing the original barrel with a barrel he purchased online from the United States. He sold the reactivated firearms to criminal some several of the reactivated pistols were later used in homicides.³¹⁷

235. The actors involved in the trafficking of reactivated and converted AEW are both individual opportunists and organized crime groups. Several reports note for example that Italian mafia groups were involved in reactivating firearms and trafficking them across Europe.³¹⁸ In 2016, for example, Italian law enforcement officials arrested two leading members of the Ceusi Mafia clan, an affiliate of the Cosa Nostra for illicit firearms trafficking, following the seizure of a parcel containing firearms and ammunition in Italy and the interception of a parcel containing three pistols and a military grade firearm in France. Both parcels were traced back to the Ceusi members. The two individuals had legally purchased more than 160 deactivated firearms from a shop in Slovakia (for a total value of approximately

314 Ibid, page 23.

315 Ibid, page 23.

316 Interview with Europol representative, 25 September 2019.

317 Florquin, N. & King, B. (2018), *From Legal to Lethal: Converted Firearms in Europe*, Geneva, Small Arms Survey, page 47.

318 Europol (2016), *Weapon smugglers arrested in Italy with the support of Europol*, 9 June 2016; Strazzari, F. & Zampagni, F. (2018), *Between organised crime and terrorism: Illicit firearms actors and market dynamics in Italy*, in: *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 258 and 261.

45,000 euro), but illegally imported them into Italy. The firearms were first trafficked to Austria through fast parcel services and from there to Catania. The firearms were reactivated in Catania by simply removing a lever from the barrel. On their way to Malta with a fast parcel service the firearms were detected by X-ray and seized by Italian authorities. Later investigations showed linkages between the Italian suspects and Egyptian organized criminal groups involved in human trafficking.

236. Several other cases confirm the trafficking of reactivated firearms from European Union Member States to non-European Union countries. Finnish officials, for example, reported the trafficking of deactivated and reactivated Kalashnikov-type assault rifles from Austria, Czechia and Germany through Finland into the Russian Federation. These officials suspect this trafficking is carried out by organized crime groups as well as politically motivated groups.³¹⁹ A similar trafficking scheme was identified and dismantled in 2015 by the Estonian Internal Security Service (KAPO). The firearms included reactivated pistols, automatic rifles and submachine guns. The police investigation started when the police was tipped about the illegal activities of a 40-year old Estonian national, who was already convicted for illicit arms trafficking in 2010, and his associates. They acquired deactivated firearms at militaria markets and online from sellers in Estonia, Germany, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. The weapons were reactivated in Estonia by two associated metalworkers. They used middlemen to acquire the necessary components. To test the reactivated firearms they had set up an improvised shooting range in stables. The trafficking scheme started very small, but soon expanded across Estonia and to Russia. The individuals involved were not gun enthusiasts, but criminals involved in a lucrative business. The KAPO seized in total 37 firearms, thousands of rounds of ammunition and kilos of explosives. The men were convicted for illicit firearms trafficking, but it is unknown how many firearms have been sold in total by this organized criminal group.³²⁰

237. The profile of individuals engaged in the illicit reactivation of firearms seems to vary from people with specific technical expertise to individual who use simple tools and online tutorials to reactivate a weapon.

319 Florquin, N. & King, B. (2018), *From Legal to Lethal: Converted Firearms in Europe*, Geneva, Small Arms Survey, page 47.

320 Estonian Supreme Court, *Case No. 1-16-1036/96*, 1 December 2017, <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/kohtulahendid/detailid.html?id=218649096>; Kapo paljastas viimaste aastate suurima illegaalse relvaärikate grupeeringu, *ERR*, 8 February 2017.

TEXT BOX 11: Case examples reflecting the different profiles of individuals engaged in the illicit reactivation of firearms

Multiple cases of illicit reactivation of firearms involve individuals with specific technical expertise on firearms, including authorised arms dealers, (former) personnel of legal gun stores or production sites, (former) soldiers as well as legal gun owners.

- In 2017 the Spanish National Police seized more than 10 000 assault rifles, anti-aerial machine guns, 400 shells and grenades, pistols, revolvers and firearm parts from a sports equipment and militaria store as a result of Operation Portu.³²¹ The police also discovered an illegal workshop with different machinery to manipulate and reactivate weapons. Spanish law enforcement agencies suspect this store served as cover for extensive sales of deactivated firearms that could easily be reactivated. Some of the firearms seized were deactivated firearms that had been acquired legally before Spain strengthened its deactivation standards in 2011. The police suspects trafficked these weapons to customers in Spain and abroad by using fast parcel services.
- A media article reports for example that in October 2014, an authorised arms dealer in France was convicted for selling reactivated military-grade firearms to organized crime groups through wholesale firearms traffickers from the criminal underworld and to Corsican nationalists through an accomplice.³²²
- In another case, in Belgium, police seized about 50 firearms and a number of hand grenades in 2015 during an operation that targeted four former FN Herstal employees.³²³ Police suspects that these men used their technical expertise to reactivate legally purchased deactivated firearms and sold them to criminals.
- Not only (former) personnel of legal gun stores or production sites seem to have the required technical expertise to reactivate or convert firearms, but also (former) soldiers and legal gun owners. In 2016, for example, a former

³²¹ Europol, *Huge firearms depot seized during Opeation Portu now revealed*, 14 March 2017.

³²² Neuf ans de prison requis contre un ancien instituteur reconverti dans les ventes d'armes, *L'Obs*, 30 October 2014.

³²³ Duquet, N. & Goris, K. (2018), *The illicit gun market in Belgium: A lethal cocktail of criminal supply and terrorist demand*, in: Duquet, N. (red.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 45.

soldier was found guilty of reactivating more than 40 firearms, including Kalashnikov-type assault rifles, and producing ammunition at his workshop in London.³²⁴ In another case media reports that in 2019, the Belgian Federal Police announced it seized 480 firearms during 11 house searches that were part of an operational action targeting illicit firearms trafficking by gun enthusiasts.³²⁵ The seized firearms were reactivated and included pistols, revolvers, automatic assault rifles, pump-actions shotguns and Mauser rifles from the Second World War. In total seven older individuals - almost all previously known by the police - were arrested, including an active soldier. The men acquired the deactivated firearms online and at military fairs.

While technical expertise may be useful to reactivate firearms, case-based examples also show that such prior technical expertise may not always be required. Required knowledge can be gained online, contributing potentially to the eroding of the typically closed illicit gun markets within the European Union.

- In 2013, for example, a 19-year-old man killed three people in Istres (France) using a Romanian-manufactured AIM AK-pattern-rifle that had been deactivated in Germany. ³²⁶ The perpetrator had purchased the weapon in deactivated condition online through a German website in 2012 and reactivated the firearm himself using a hydraulic press and by following instructions he found on online forums.

324 Holtom, P., James, P. & Patmore, C. (2018), From the IRA to ISIS: Exploring terrorist access to the UK's illicit firearms market, in: Duquet, N. (Ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 402.

325 News, *Radio 2 West-Vlaanderen*, 8 October 2019; Monstervangst: Parket neemt bijna 500 verboden vuurwapens in beslag, *Focus WTV*, 8 October 2019; Politie neemt 480 illegale wapens in beslag bij bendes, *De Standaard*, 9 October 2019.

326 Florquin, N. & Desmarais, A. (2018), 'Lethal legacies: Illicit firearms and terrorism in France', in Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 201.

Flobert-calibre weapons

238. Flobert-calibre weapons are real firearms that have limited firepower (up to 7.5 joule) and use rim-fire ammunition of a small calibre (generally 4-6 mm). These firearms can be purchased legally without an authorisation in several European Union Member States, including in Slovakia. Flobert-calibre weapons can, however, easily be converted to fire more lethal types of ammunition. Since the change of legislation in Slovakia regarding AEWs, the companies that previously manufactured such weapons shifted their production to Flobert-calibre weapons.³²⁷ Also several prominent alarm gun manufacturers have started to produce several of their popular alarm guns in a Flobert calibre.³²⁸ In addition to purpose-built Floberts, real firearms have also been modified to only be capable of shooting Flobert-calibre ammunition by reducing the internal diameter of the barrel. According to the Small Arms Survey, almost all of the firearms that have been modified to Flobert-calibre come from Slovakia. Such weapons include the vz.58 automatic rifle and other firearms that were previously modified as AEW.³²⁹ Organized crime groups from across Europe have exploited this loophole. In the United Kingdom, for example, the NCA identified the use of converted Flobert calibre firearms or blank firing weapons in 99 crimes, including a murder, between May 2017 and May 2018.³³⁰ Law enforcement agencies from various European Union Member States, such as Belgium³³¹, France³³², Germany³³³, Portugal³³⁴ and the Netherlands³³⁵ have noticed the trafficking of converted Flobert-calibre firearms and raised concerns about this new type of illicit firearms trafficking. Also Europol has stated that trafficking of converted Flobert firearms will become a significant security problem in the coming years.³³⁶

327 Florquin, N. & King, B. (2018), *From Legal to Lethal: Converted Firearms in Europe*, Geneva, Small Arms Survey, page 31

328 Ibid, page 23

329 Ibid, page 23.

330 From a Czech warehouse to a street near you: the journey of a gun, *The Guardian*, 18 November 2018.

331 Politie strijdt tegen opmars van gevaarlijke alarmwapens, *De Tijd*, 18 mei 2019.

332 Florquin, N. & Desmarais, A. (2018), 'Lethal legacies: Illicit firearms and terrorism in France', in Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 199.

333 Bundeskriminalamt (2019), *Waffenkriminalität: Bundeslagebild 2018*.

334 Response of Portugal to IAFQ.

335 Bruinsma, M. & Spapens, T. (2018), 'Terrorist access to firearms in the Netherlands', in: Duquet, N. (Ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 301.

336 Duquet, N. & Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 103.

239. Europol reported that in December 2019, the Slovak National Crime Agency seized hundreds of illegally held firearms and ammunition, including deactivated firearms that had been restored to their full operation, in the region of Košice.³³⁷ Six individuals were arrested and charged for their involvement in illicit firearms trafficking with a specific focus on the conversion of Flobert-calibre firearms into lethal live-firing firearms. The Slovak authorities suspect this criminal group trafficked over 1,500 firearms into the European criminal market. This operation was undertaken under the banner of a Europol Operational Taskforce between Slovakia, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Belgium and Poland. The evidence seized during the operation is now being analysed to identify further investigative leads across Europe.

240. The large-scale trafficking of Flobert firearms can be a lucrative business. A limited number of organized criminal groups from Slovakia are reportedly involved in the large-scale trafficking of Flobert firearms to other countries within and outside the European Union. It is believed these are the same groups that were previously involved in trafficking deactivated and AEWs from the country across Europe. The firearms are reportedly often transferred from Slovakia to a neighbouring country where they are modified and then smuggled to West and North European countries where high prices are paid for live-firing automatic rifles.³³⁸

241. Converted Flobert-calibre firearms are also trafficked online. The perpetrator of public mass shooting in Munich in 2016, for example, used a converted Glock pistol that was previously sold legally as a Flobert-calibre firearm in Slovakia. The firearm reportedly changed hands several times and was subsequently converted. An illicit firearms dealer who was active on the dark web sold the weapon and about 450 rounds of ammunition for €4,000 to the perpetrator after having met in a dark web forum. They met each other twice in person to physically deliver the firearm and the ammunition. The arms dealer was sentenced to seven years in prison for this illegal transaction. During their investigation, the German police discovered that the arms dealer had trafficked several firearms on various dark web sites by purchasing the firearms for relatively cheap prices in Czechia and selling them with a profit to German customers.³³⁹

³³⁷ Europol, *6 arrested and scores of weapons seized in raids across Slovakia*, 12 March 2020.

³³⁸ UNODC Cross-Regional Meeting on Illicit Arms Trafficking, Vienna, 7-8 October 2019.

³³⁹ Duquet, N. et al (2019), *Armed to kill: A comprehensive analysis of the guns used in public mass shootings in Europe between 2009 and 2018*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 48 and 49.

Trafficking of parts and components

242. In several European Union Member States the trafficking of parts and components is significant in scope. Lithuania for example reported to the IAFQ that the trafficking of firearms illegally assembled from parts and components is one the main types of trafficking and that the parts and components most often found are silencers, magazines, frames or receivers and barrels.³⁴⁰ According to the Dutch Police the trafficking of firearms parts and components is also on the rise in the Netherlands.³⁴¹

243. Especially parts and components that are legally acquired in the United States are subsequently illegally trafficked into the European Union.³⁴² In general, these parts and components are shipped to European Union Members States by using postal packages with false customs declarations. In some cases this type of trafficking is limited to a small number of parts and components and not intended for criminal use. Yet, sophisticated large-scale trafficking of parts and components has also been observed and firearms assembled with trafficked parts and components have been used in acts of violence. The United States Department of Justice reported for example that in 2016, a United States citizen was sentenced to 33 months in prison for illegally exporting hundreds of firearm parts - including lower receivers, barrels and flash suppressors of various firearm models such as M16, M4, AR15 rifles, Glock pistols and Uzi submachine guns - to people in 20 countries, including several European countries (France, Finland, Germany and Spain).³⁴³ He acquired many of these components on an auction website specialized in firearms and related products, and then shipped the components overseas using postal services. On his customs declaration forms he lied about the content and the value of the products, for example by describing them as airsoft, replica firearms or aluminium sculptures. He instructed his customers to pay for the products using PayPal and told them not to mention gun

340 Response from Lithuania to IAFQ.

341 Bruinsma, M. & Spapens, T. (2018), 'Terrorist access to firearms in the Netherlands', in: Duquet, N. (Ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 294 and 295.

342 Duquet, N. & Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 84.

343 Department of Justice - U.S. Attorney's Office - District of Massachusetts (2016), Southbridge Man Pleads Guilty to Illegally Exporting Assault Rifle and Pistol Parts, 25 August 2016 ; Department of Justice - U.S. Attorney's Office - District of Massachusetts (2015), Man Arrested for Illegally Exporting Assault Rifle and Pistol Parts, 29 May 2015;

Florquin, N. & Desmarais, A. (2018), 'Lethal legacies: Illicit firearms and terrorism in France', in Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute

parts. One of his customers was a Finnish citizen, who sold them to criminal organizations in Finland, including an outlaw motorcycle gang. In total, more than \$100,000 worth of firearm parts were shipped from the United States to Finland between November 2010 and March 2012. Several of these parts were later found in firearms used in at least two shootings in Finland that resulted in one fatality and one seriously injured person.

244. The internet has significantly increased the possibilities for this type of trafficking. In 2011, for example, several members of British organized crime groups were convicted for illicit firearms trafficking, illegally trafficking 13 firearms into the United Kingdom over a 12-month period. The perpetrators purchased the firearms from a seller in Texas (United States), who broke down the firearms into separate parts and concealed them in 27 separate parcels (with ‘electronic items’ as stated content) to straw recipients, not directly involved with criminal activities, across West Yorkshire. The initial contact between the American seller and the British buyers was made on an online platform, and the firearms were paid for through PayPal.³⁴⁴

245. Europol has also observed the trafficking of nearly-finished polymer frames from the United States to European Union Member States. Polymer frames that are less than 80 per cent finished are not considered firearms components in the United States. Traffickers have been sending kits consisting of such frames together with a tutorial and the material needed to finish them to several European Union Member States.³⁴⁵ Also kits to convert semi-automatic Glock pistols into full automatic pistols have in recent years been trafficked from the United States, where no authorisation is required for these conversion kits, to the European Union.³⁴⁶ American arms dealers are no longer authorized to send firearm components to international addresses, but malign individuals have found different ways to evade these restrictions, for example by having them delivered by middlemen in the United States through postal and fast parcel services. This type of firearms assembly is not only illegal if performed by an unauthorized person, but also less expensive than purchasing the firearm as a whole on the legal market.

344 Holtom, P., James, P. & Patmore, C. (2018), ‘From the IRA to ISIS: Exploring terrorist access to the UK’s illicit firearms market’, in: Duquet, N. (red.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 388; Gun smuggling gang leaders jailed for 24 years, *The Guardian*, 21 October 2011.

345 Interview with Europol representative, 25 September 2019.

346 CEPOL Meeting 14/2019 ‘Firearms linked to organised crime and terrorism: implementation of the EU Firearms Directive, Lisbon, 23-27 September 2019.

246. Firearm components that are trafficked to European Union Member States, however, not only originate from the United States, but also from other countries. Especially Glock pistols are often ordered online and assembled at home in Europe since the frames for Glock pistols are available without an authorization in Austria and can be ordered online, while most of the other remaining parts can be purchased in the United States.³⁴⁷ French customs officials noted that especially barrels for Glock pistols are trafficked from the United States to supplement other parts of these pistols acquired in Europe.³⁴⁸

247. In some cases, firearm components were bought online not to assemble, but to illegally reactivate firearms, highlighting the connection that exist between different modalities of exploiting legal differences in national firearms regimes to illicitly traffic and acquire firearms. In 2014, for example, a pensioner from Marseille (France) was convicted to four years in prison for reactivating handguns that he had bought from a shop in Barcelona (Spain). Over the period of several years he acquired 132 of these deactivated handguns, including 75 Glock pistols. He reactivated the firearms at home by replacing the original barrels with barrels he purchased online from the United States. After reactivation he sold the handguns to individuals linked to the criminal underworld. Several of these firearms were later used to commit murders.³⁴⁹ In another example, as part of Operation ALPES, the Spanish authorities arrested in December 2018 an individual who had been trafficking different models of Glock frames from Austria to Sevilla (Spain) since 2016. He illegally imported parts and components and used some of these components to reactivate firearms that were previously deactivated. The purchaser ordered the components online and used different strategies to conceal his identity, for example by using a straw email address and payments via PayPal or by using straw individuals as receivers of the shipments. The firearms were later sold on the local black market. Two house searches were conducted and led to the seizure of two automatic submachine guns together with several pieces to be reactivated, different types of rifles, 14 Glock frames, other parts and components, calibre 5.56 ammunition and more than 5,000 9mm cartridges.³⁵⁰

347 Bruinsma, M. & Spapens, T. (2018), 'Terrorist access to firearms in the Netherlands', in: Duquet, N. (Ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 299 and 300.

348 Florquin, N. & Desmarais, A. (2018), 'Lethal legacies: Illicit firearms and terrorism in France', in Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 197.

349 Ibid, page 201.

350 Ministerio del Interior, *Los servicios antiterroristas de la Policía Nacional realizan numerosas operaciones contra el tráfico ilegal de armas de fuego*, 3 January 2019.

248. While parts and components from non-European Union countries, especially the United States, are frequently trafficked into the European Union, cross-regional flows of parts and components for firearms from European Union Member States to other countries across the globe have also been observed. In addition, sometimes firearms that have been assembled in European Union Member States with parts and components acquired within the region are subsequently trafficked as entire firearms to other countries, including those outside the European Union.

TEXT BOX 12: Examples of cross-regional trafficking of firearms parts and components from European Union Member States

In March 2012, three men were arrested in Australia for illicit firearms trafficking using fast parcel services.³⁵¹ Between October 2011 and February 2012 a criminal enterprise, operating in the Sidney region, illegally imported 22 separate packages which included hundreds of parts for at least 129 complete and 14 partial Glock semiautomatic pistols (models 17, 19, 26 and 27), Glock pistols and magazines for use with Glock pistols into Australia. Eighteen of these packages were sent from legitimate suppliers in Germany to Australia, the other packages came from legitimate suppliers in Switzerland and the United States. Additionally, 80 parts for a further 20 complete Glock pistols were seized by the police in Germany. The leader of the criminal enterprise ordered firearms parts from Germany and the United States using false personal and corporate identities. He also supplied his German supplier, who stated he was unaware of the trafficking scheme, with counterfeit official Australian import permits. He directed his German supplier to send the pistols disassembled in separate parts. In total he paid his German and United States suppliers approximately AUD\$120,000 (in 12 separate transactions). Some of these firearms were unlawfully sold – either in assembled or disassembled states - to customers in Australia, including a member of an outlaw motorcycle gang. According to the Court the complete pistols were worth between AUD\$792,00 and AUD\$1.98 million on the local black market. The two other arrested individuals facilitated this type of international trafficking. One of them was employed by a multinational freight forwarding business, while the other one was the licensee and operator of an Australia Post business. They used their knowledge and experience with respect to international shipping to arrange the successful shipment of these packages to Australia by monitoring the progress of the shipments and taking actions to minimize the risks of detection by the authorities such as providing alternative paperwork and packaging labels. Australian authorities were able to recover 23 Glock pistols. Many of these

351 District Court New South Wales, R v Karnib, 7 May 2015, File number 2012/81495; District Court New South Wales, R v Khoder El Ali, 17 March 2017, File numbers 11/286048 – 12/81507 – 14/30842 .

pistols were illegally possessed by persons involved in serious organized and other criminal activities such as armed robbery and drug manufacturing and trafficking. Some of these pistols have also been used in shootings.

In another example, in 2019 the Spanish national Police and the Argentinean National Gendarmerie dismantled an international arms trafficking network supplying various types of firearms to Brazilian drug traffickers. The arms traffickers developed a triangular organization in which firearms components were sent to Argentina from the United States, while ammunition and magazines were trafficked to Argentina from the European Union. The ammunition and magazines were acquired in Germany and sent to Spain and from there to the Netherlands. In the Netherlands they were hidden in containers in vessels destined for Argentina. In Argentina the components were used to assemble complete firearms. Once assembled, they were trafficked over land through Paraguay to Brazil, where they were sold to drug cartels. In total 26 individuals were arrested as part of this joint operation (22 in Argentina, three in Miami and one in Spain) and more than 1,400 weapons were seized (including handguns, Kalashnikov-type rifles, FAL rifles, Mausers, carbines, shotguns, machine guns, grenades, mortar type rockets and a large amount of ammunition for different calibres).³⁵⁷

Use of postal and fast parcel services

249. The *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020* reported that some illicit firearms traffickers use methods in which their physical involvement is reduced and therefore considered less risky. The use of postal and fast parcel services is such a firearm trafficking method and was reported to the IAFQ by Albania, Slovakia and Lithuania.³⁵³

250. In 2017 Europol stated that the use of postal and parcel services has become the most common way of firearms trafficking in the European Union.³⁵⁴ This is mainly the result of the increased use of the internet to acquire firearms or parts and components either legally from countries with less restrictive regulations or illegally, for example on the darkweb (see 5.2.4). Given the weight and size of firearms the use of postal and fast parcel services entails detection risks by handlers of the goods such as customs agents or

352 Policia Nacional, *La Policía Nacional colabora con Argentina en la mayor operación contra el tráfico de armas realizada hasta la fecha en ese país*, 12 October 2019; International arms trafficking gang dismantled in Spain and Argentina, *EU-OCS*, 11 July 2019.

353 UNODC (2020), *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020*, Vienna: UNODC, page 62.

354 Europol (2017), *2017 European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment: Crime in the Age of Technology*, The Hague, page 54.

postal employees. To mitigate these risks vendors sometimes use delivery drop-off locations at a significant distance from their house or professional location³⁵⁵ or the customers use acquaintances as middlemen to receive and transfer these packages to them.³⁵⁶ Other ways to mitigate detection risks are deliberately mislabelling the parts and shipping them as different types of good³⁵⁷, packaging firearm parts in packages that contain other materials, for example, old electronics material,³⁵⁸ or by involving employees of postal and fast parcel companies in their trafficking scheme (see case described in text box after paragraph 245^o). According to Lithuanian officials the companies involved are generally not aware of the concealed weapon within the transported package or parcel.³⁵⁹

251. In 2015 Sweden reported to UNODC that illicit firearms trafficking through postal and fast parcel services is common, particularly from the United States and other European Union Member States such as Germany and Czechia.³⁶⁰ A similar picture has emerged from an analysis in the United Kingdom with cases of illicit trafficking of firearms, blank-firing weapons and firearm parts and components through postal and fast parcel services into the country from the United States and Germany.³⁶¹ Police statistics from Belgium also demonstrate the practice of illicit firearms trafficking through postal and fast parcel services in the country: between 2009-2015 the police recorded 85 cases of illicit firearms trafficking through 'postal services/internet'. The trafficked weapons are generally firearms that require an authorisation for possession, but also prohibited firearms.³⁶²

355 Persi Paoli, G., Aldridge, J., Ryan, N. & Warnes, R. (2017), *Behind the curtain: The illicit trade of firearms, explosives and ammunition on the dark web*, Cambridge: Rand Europe, pages 21 and 22.

356 Holtom, P., James, P. and Patmore, C. (2018), From the IRA to ISIS: Exploring terrorist access to the UK's illicit firearms market, in: Duquet, N. (red.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 164; Boerman, F. et al (2017), 2017 National Threat Assessment Organised Crime, Zoetermeer: National police of the Netherlands, page 96.

357 Boerman, F. et al (2017), 2017 National Threat Assessment Organised Crime, Zoetermeer: National police of the Netherlands, page 96.

358 Florquin, N. and Desmarais, A. (2018), 'Lethal legacies: Illicit firearms and terrorism in France', in Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 198.

359 Response from Lithuania to IAFQ.

360 UNODC (2015), UNODC Study on Firearms 2015, Vienna: UNODC, page 92.

361 Holtom, P., James, P. and Patmore, C. (2018), From the IRA to ISIS: Exploring terrorist access to the UK's illicit firearms market, in: Duquet, N. (red.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 407.

362 Duquet, N. & Goris, K. (2017), *De Belgische illegale vuurwapenmarkt in beeld*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 78.

252. An increase in trafficking through postal and fast parcel services has been observed in various European Union Member States in the past decade. In 2015, for example, Romania reported to UNODC an increase in the use of (fast) parcel services for illicit firearms trafficking in the country.³⁶³ In the Netherlands law enforcement agencies observed that since 2012 criminals increasingly ordered firearms online and had them delivered by postal and fast parcel services.³⁶⁴ According to the authorities, this method was being used by both petty as well as high-level criminals. Dutch police further noted that local criminals have recently also started experimenting with a new trafficking method by hiding firearms components in large postal parcels sent to various individuals in the Netherlands.³⁶⁵

253. In other European Union Member States few seizures have been made involving the use of postal or fast parcel services. Denmark, for example, reported to the IAFQ that the extent of parcel deliveries containing firearms is not known as no significant seizures of this kind have been made in 2016-2017.³⁶⁶ Such observations may result from the use of other trafficking modus operandi by criminals or potential challenges in detecting trafficking of firearms or their parts and components when concealed in postal and fast parcel packages.

254. Arms trafficking through postal and fast parcel services is also carried out by criminals with extremist political views. Media reports state that in December 2018, for example, the Berlin district court sentenced a right-wing extremist to two years and 10 months in prison for illicit firearms trafficking.³⁶⁷ The man from Thuringia (Germany) sold blank-firing weapons online via the website “Migrantenschreck” (‘Migrant scare’) which specifically targeted German customers. He sold the weapons from Hungary, where a license for the possession of these weapons was not required. After the order from his German customers the man shipped the weapons by parcel services to Germany, where these weapons are subject to authorization due to their high muzzle energy. According to the indictment at least 193 Germans ordered the weapons for prices around 400 euro per

363 UNODC (2020), *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020*, Vienna: UNODC, page 84.

364 Bruinsma, M. & Spapens, T. (2018), *Terrorist access to firearms in the Netherlands*, in: Duquet, N. (Ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 303.

365 Ibid.

366 Response from Denmark to IAFQ.

367 Prozess gegen „Migrantenschreck“-Betreiber, *Deutschlandfunk*, 4 December 2018; Betreiber von “Migrantenschreck“-Website soll ins Gefängnis, *Die Zeit*, 18 December 2018.

piece. In July 2017 customs officials seized 13 weapons acquired this way during house searches in Berlin, Brandenburg and Thuringia. Several of the customers of this website have also been convicted, while others are still under investigation.

255. Postal and fast parcel packages are not only used to traffic firearms into or within the European Union, but also from European Union Member States to other countries. The Cuban authorities, for example, reported to the IAFQ that they seized a pistol coming from the Netherlands and a pistol coming from Germany in post offices.³⁶⁸ Moreover, the media reported that in 2018 Polish border guards seized a large amount of components for Kalashnikov type rifles in a parcel at the Poznan Lawica airport.³⁶⁹ These components were reportedly destined for the United States and were shipped by a company that had no authorization to trade in arms. In one of the buildings of this company Polish law enforcement officials discovered a production line for firearm components, technical plans to produce components for Kalashnikov type firearms and two shipments, containing 6,338 Kalashnikov type components, ready for transport. The total value of the seized commodities was almost 2.5 million PLN (more than 500,000 Euro).

256. The trend of illicitly trafficking parts and components is likely to be further accelerated in the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic, in which travel restrictions and strict border controls across the globe have herald in a thriving period for online markets and postal deliveries. Detecting trafficked firearms, their parts and components shipped via postal services becomes even more difficult with the increased volume of parcels being shipped. This may provide criminals with additional opportunities for trafficking these items, thereby reinforcing the previously observed trends of illicit online trade and postal deliveries in many regions.³⁷⁰

368 Response from Cuba to IAFQ.

369 Ławica: udaremniono wywóz 1000 elementów karabinków kałasznikow, *Epoznan*, 1 February 2018.

370 See for example Dressler, M. & Duquet, N., Illicit firearms trafficking in Europe during and after COVID-19, June 2020.

Illicit manufacturing and trafficking of homemade firearms and ammunition

257. Apart from the conversion and illicit reactivation of firearms, which may be considered as illicit manufacture of firearms in line with article 3 (d) of the Firearms Protocol, illicit manufacturing of firearms is not considered an important source for illicit gun markets across Europe.³⁷¹ The data provided on the technical condition by 11 European Union Member States for the IAFQ confirms this observation. Most of these countries responded no illicitly manufactured firearms were seized in 2016-2017 and in the countries that reported such seizures, for example the United Kingdom and Portugal, these illicitly manufactured firearms only account for a very small share of the total number of seized firearms (see table °). Yet, qualitative research has demonstrated that some of the firearms that are trafficked into and within the European Union are illicitly manufactured or assembled weapons. The trafficking of such weapons often involves the active or passive cooperation of employees of legal production sites (see below).

258. While the illicit manufacture of firearms is often meant to supply local demand, some of these firearms are also trafficked to other countries. In 2005 Europol, for example, noted that cheap Bulgarian hand-made weapons are trafficked by Bulgarian crime groups and can be sold in countries such as Greece, the Netherlands, Spain, and Turkey for a huge profit.³⁷²

259. In several European Union Member States fake 'R9 arms' submachine guns have been seized that are believed to have been manufactured in small workshops in Croatia.³⁷³ The wars of the 1990s left a legacy of unauthorized firearms production in Croatia. The illicit manufacturing of firearms is not only undertaken by, but sometimes also involves persons that were previously active on the legal firearms market in the country.³⁷⁴ Although illicitly manufactured firearms only take up a small

371 Duquet, N. & Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 82.

372 Europol (2005), *2005 EU Organised Crime Report. Public version*. The Hague: Europol, page 7.

373 Bruinsma, M. & Spapens, T. (2018), Terrorist access to firearms in the Netherlands, in: Duquet, N. (Ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 203.

374 Dragovic, F. et al (2017), Availability of illegal weapons: connecting the dots Case study of the Republic of Croatia, in: Duquet, N. (red.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 110.

percentage of the firearms trafficked into and within the European Union, these weapons can have severe consequences if they end up in the wrong hands. In 2005, for example, an illicitly manufactured submachine gun from Croatia was seized from suspected terrorists in the Netherlands, who used it to practice their shooting skills.³⁷⁵

260. According to the South East European Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC) that refers to the Bulgarian National Service for Combating Organised Crime (NSCOC), illegal firearms production is most often encountered in the Stara Zagora region, which has a long firearms production history and is still home to the largest firearms producing company in the country.³⁷⁶ The report notes that some of the components used to illegally assemble firearms have been stolen from the production site by employees of the company and then sold to local handymen who pay between 10 and 50 euro for each component. Especially barrels are reported to be stolen before they are marked, since the production of this component requires specialised production methods. Also components considered as 'defective' are reported to be stolen from the production site. It is believed that sometimes security guards are bribed to allow the movement of these components out of the production site. While illicit firearms production is believed to have decreased, the NSCOC in 2005 estimated approximately 300 individuals in the region were still involved in illicit production and assembly of firearms.

261. In Belgium, where there is considerable knowledge about firearms production due to its long history as a firearms-producing country, the police recorded 79 cases of illicit production or repair of firearms, nine cases of production or repair of ammunition and 10 cases of illegal production of parts and components between 2009 and 2015.³⁷⁷ As mentioned above, official crime statistics from the Belgian police indicate that identified cases of illicit firearms production are particularly prevalent in the province of Liège, which has a longstanding history of firearms production and where the largest Belgian firearms producer is located.³⁷⁸

375 Bruinsma, M. & Spapens, T. (2018), 'Terrorist access to firearms in The Netherlands', in: Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering Terror: Illicit Gun Markets and Firearms Acquisition of Terrorist Networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 309.

376 Rynn, S., Gounev, P., and Jackson, T. (2005), *Taming the Arsenal: Small Arms and Light Weapons in Bulgaria*, South East European Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC), pages 17 and 21.

377 Duquet, N. & Goris, K. (2017), *De Belgische illegale vuurwapenmarkt in beeld*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 66 and 67.

378 Ibid, page 70.

262. Cases of trafficking of illicitly manufactured firearms have also been observed in other European Union Member States. In April 2018 the National Organised Crime Center of the Czech police, for example, seized approximately 100 firearms (pistols, rifles and submachine guns), more than 10,000 rounds of ammunition and firearm silencers from a group of men from northern Bohemia who were involved in illegal firearms production. The components used to assemble the firearms were acquired from a legal production site. The components were ‘defective’ components that were removed from the production process and intended for destruction. These unmarked firearms were sold to the criminal underworld.³⁷⁹ Spanish law enforcement agencies have also seized illicitly manufactured firearms and observed that the quality of homemade weapons varies depending on the skills of the craft producer. The manufacturing can be simple and rudimentary (“chimbas o chilenas”) or more sophisticated and reliable (for example the so-called “gun pens”).³⁸⁰

263. Notwithstanding that parts needed to illegally manufacture firearms are often sourced through local diversion methods, such parts are often also ordered online. The internet is sometimes also used to improve manufacturing skills of the perpetrators. In 2019 the Spanish National Police, for example, arrested an individual who had been managing a YouTube-channel that included videos and tutorials that showed how artisanal firearms could be manufactured by using products that could be acquired from any hardware store.³⁸¹

264. Media also reported that in 2013 a 28-year old man from Sussex (United Kingdom) was sentenced to nine years and four months in prison after the Metropolitan Police Service’s anti-gun Trident Gang Crime Command arrested him while in possession of two handguns, hundreds of rounds of ammunition, gun-making equipment and a large quantity of cannabis. This sentence included a three year sentence for attempting to manufacture an improvised single shot pistol and a one year sentence for manufacturing ammunition. From his garage the police seized among other things a partially-homemade firearm, items for the manufacturing of firearms and ammunition and a ‘blueprint’ on how to make the firearm. Bank account enquiries later showed the man had purchased the majority of the firearms items recovered from his garage online from stores in the United States and the United Kingdom. Hidden in a block of wood, the police also found a USB

379 Policie ČR: NCOZ zadržela prodejce nelegálních zbraní, *Parlamentni*, 1 June 2018;

380 Response from Spain to IAFQ.

381 El Semanal, *Los servicios antiterroristas de la Policía Nacional realizan numerosas operaciones contra el tráfico ilegal de armas de fuego*, 4 January 2019.

memory stick that contained 18 manuals, taken from the internet, on how to manufacture both handguns and machine guns, as well as ammunition. The police suspect the man supplied guns and ammunition to gangs across the London region.³⁸²

265. Research by Armament Research Services (ARES) concluded that craft-produced firearms are primarily designed and built by gun enthusiasts for personal use instead of criminals.³⁸³ Yet, the examples above demonstrate that such weapons can still end up in the hands of criminals. While many of these home gunsmiths manufacture firearms as part of a hobby and have no intention in profiting from their activities, criminal groups can convince these individuals to manufacture and supply such weapons to them.³⁸⁴ In Belgium two types of handymen involved in assembling and reactivating firearms have been identified by law enforcement agencies. A first type consists of handymen who assemble and reactivate historically interesting firearms and sell them to gun enthusiasts, without criminal intentions, who collect weapons. The second type consists of handymen who mainly operate for the criminal underworld, for example for an outlaw motorcycle gang. For criminals having such a handyman in their network can significantly increase the availability of firearms.³⁸⁵ Illicitly manufactured firearms also have multiple advantages for terrorists since it allows them to operate more independently and circumvent traditional logistics concerns for the acquisition of their weapons, resulting in fewer detection risks.³⁸⁶

266. A lot of media attention has been given to the possibility to manufacture firearms by using 3D-printing. Additive manufacturing – known colloquially as three-dimensional, or 3D, printing – is an emerging technology and a significant innovation in small arms manufacturing, which could substantially accelerate the proliferation of firearms and have dramatic effects on conflict, terrorism, violent extremism and everyday crime. In 2018 Project SAFTE noted that the trafficking of 3D printed firearms has not been observed in the eight European Union Member States it focused on. In its 2015 report “Exploring tomorrow’s organised crime” Europol

382 London and South East ‘gang armourer’ Thomas Keatley jailed, *BBC News*, 8 October 2013; Gangland armourer who was caught with improvised single-shot handgun, a revolver and hundreds of bullets is jailed for nine years, *Daily Mail*, 7 October 2013.

383 Hays, G. & Ivan T. with Jenzen-Jones, N.R. (2020), *Desktop Firearms: Emergent Small Arms Craft production Technologies*. Perth: Armament Research Services (ARES), page 17.

384 Ibid.

385 Duquet, N. & Goris, K. (2017), *De Belgische illegale vuurwapenmarkt in beeld*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 69.

386 Woods, E. (2020), ‘Right-Wing Extremists’ New Weapon’, *Lawfare blog*.

noted that 3D could potentially offer new opportunities for illicit firearms traffickers³⁸⁷, but also that "3D printing technology is unlikely to become a major source for the proliferation of firearms due to the technical complexity of manufacturing functioning firearms using a 3D printer, combined with the ease of access and relatively low prices of firearms traditionally available on the black market in the European Union."³⁸⁸ After analysing the emerging technologies related to 3D-printing, ARES however warned in 2020 that the cost of producing capable 3D-printed firearms is rapidly decreasing and that new technologies are now allowing that of viable and capable hybrid firearms can be produced by home gunsmith without using regulated components. 3D-printed firearms have additional advantages: they can be acquired without having access to criminal networks and are very difficult to trace.³⁸⁹ ARES therefore concludes that 3D-printed firearms "may have the potential to rival or outstrip previous trends in the acquisition of illegal firearms modified from replica and deactivated firearms—themselves subject to increasing legislation".³⁹⁰ Moreover, 3D printed firearms may have a negative impact on the operation and efficacy of firearms registration and licensing schemes and ballistic databases used for police investigations.³⁹¹ The Internet and the dark web can provide ordinary citizens, criminals and terrorists alike with ready access to printable designs of new and ever more dangerous weapons. Moreover, persons with access to industrial grade equipment may be in a position to print guns by making unauthorized use of company 3D printers. Accordingly, some Member States have incorporated specific provisions related to 3D manufactured firearms in their legal frameworks.³⁹²

Online trafficking

267. While the exact scope of online illicit firearms trafficking is unknown, the internet is considered an important enabler of illicit firearms trafficking and of access to firearms, components and ammunition which are already illegally held and circulating on the illicit market or which

387 Europol (2015), Exploring tomorrow's organised crime, The Hague: Europol, page 27.

388 Ibid, page 41.

389 Hays, G. & Ivan T. with Jenzen-Jones, N.R. (2020), *Desktop Firearms: Emergent Small Arms Craft production Technologies*. Perth: Armament Research Services (ARES), pages 17 and 49.

390 Ibid.

391 See background paper prepared by UNODC for the seventh session of the Working Group on Firearms, CTOC/COP/WG.6/2020/2, paragraph 49.

392 Ibid.

are diverted from the legal market.³⁹³ In its 2017 SOCTA, Europol noted that a wide range of illicit commodities, including firearms, are traded online, either through dedicated criminal online marketplaces or by exploiting legal online platforms.³⁹⁴ Similar observations have also been made by law enforcement agencies across Europe. Between 2009 and 2015 the Belgian police, for example, recorded 85 cases of illicit firearms trafficking by mail or the internet³⁹⁵, while in France the Gendarmerie identified 160 illicit online firearms transactions in 2016.³⁹⁶

268. According to Europol both individual criminals and organized crime groups illegally acquire firearms online.³⁹⁷ Europol further noted that online firearms trafficking has increased in recent years and is expected to continue to increase over the coming years, noting that “illegal firearms are increasingly accessible due to their availability online [...]. It is expected that this trade will continue to grow rapidly for the foreseeable future and that online platforms will emerge as a key distribution platform for all types of illicit goods in the EU”.³⁹⁸

269. When analysing online illicit firearms trafficking it is important to distinguish between the surface web and the darknet. On the surface web firearms are being sold on regular webpages, legal online marketplaces and social media. According to Europol the surface web is mainly used for selling certain types of firearms (such as deactivated firearms, easy-to-convert blank firing guns and Flobert-calibre firearms) and firearm parts components which can be legally acquired from authorized arms dealers based in countries with more permissive licensing rules and registration requirements.³⁹⁹ On the darknet, on the other hand, firearms are being sold on illegal online marketplaces that can be reached through TOR

393 Persi Paoli, G., Aldridge, J., Ryan, N. & Warnes, R. (2017), *Behind the curtain: The illicit trade of firearms, explosives and ammunition on the dark web*, Cambridge: RAND Europe, pages 78 and 79.

394 Europol (2017), *2017 European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment: Crime in the Age of Technology*, Den Haag: Europol, page 10.

395 Duquet, N. & Goris, K. (2017), *De Belgische illegale vuurwapenmarkt in beeld*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 77.

396 Florquin, N. & Desmarais, A. (2018), ‘Lethal legacies: Illicit firearms and terrorism in France’, in Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 169-235.

397 Europol (2017), *2017 European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment: Crime in the Age of Technology*, Den Haag: Europol, page 54.

398 Ibid.

399 Europol (2017), *2017 European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment: Crime in the Age of Technology*, Den Haag: Europol, pages 23 and 54.

browsing, which anonymises internet users' IP addresses, or on peer-to-peer (P2P) platforms and are paid for commonly with cryptocurrency, allowing a high level of anonymity of the parties involved. According to the Internet Organized crime Crime Assessment of Europol, this demand for firearms on the dark web is motivated by a multitude of elements such as feelings of insecurity, collection purposes, the preparation for private disputes and possible planned criminal and terrorist offences.⁴⁰⁰

270. The experience with illicit firearms trafficking on the dark web varies among European Union Member States. In December 2016, for example, the Slovenian national police seized a large quantity of weapons and arrested two Slovenian national suspected of selling various live firing weapons, including automatic rifles, explosives and ammunition via a prominent darknet marketplace to customers across Europe in exchange for Bitcoin.⁴⁰¹ Several responses to the IAFQ attest on the other hand that not all national law enforcement agencies have observed significant dark web firearms trafficking in their country. In Denmark, for example, law enforcement agencies have observed some cases of darkweb purchases of firearms, but the scope of the problem is not considered significant in the country.⁴⁰² Lithuanian authorities noted that no cases have been identified of online firearms trafficking via the surface or dark web in the country. Yet, Lithuanian citizens have been identified as customers of this type of trafficking in investigations carried out by national law enforcement agencies from other countries.⁴⁰³ In Spain, the use of the darkweb to acquire firearms has recently been detected for the first time.⁴⁰⁴

271. An in-depth study by RAND Europe on illicit firearms trafficking on the darkweb concluded that, compared to other commodities, rather small quantities of firearms are listed on darkweb marketplaces.⁴⁰⁵ The results of the study by RAND and Project FIRE suggest that a wide range of the most common makes and models are available on the darkweb, that the majority of the firearms listed on the darkweb are handguns, that

400 Europol, Internet Organised Crime Threat Analysis 2018, page 50.

401 Europol (2017), *2017 European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment: Crime in the Age of Technology*, Den Haag: Europol, page 23; Europol (2017), *IOCTA 2017: Internet Organized crime Crime Threat Assessment*, Den Haag: Europol, page 51.

402 Response from Denmark to IAFQ.

403 Response from Lithuania to IAFQ.

404 Response from Spain to IAFQ.

405 Persi Paoli, G., Aldridge, J., Ryan, N. & Warnes, R. (2017), *Behind the curtain: The illicit trade of firearms, explosives and ammunition on the dark web*, Cambridge: RAND Europe, pages 78-82.

military-grade firearms accounted for only a small share of the listings and that many of the submachine guns listed were 'replicas'. The two studies further conclude that ammunition is generally sold together with firearms. The observation that firearm components do not account for a significant share of the firearms-related listing suggests that the darkweb customers are mainly searching for fully assembled firearms. In addition to firearms, also manuals on how to assemble firearms and 3D printing files are listed. These studies have further suggested that the origin countries of the listed firearms for European customers are the United States and European countries.⁴⁰⁶ Yet, caution is needed when analysing the listings for firearms on the dark web. Italian police for example has observed through their monitoring of the darkweb that many of these listings are in reality fraudulent.⁴⁰⁷ Some observers doubt the viability of using the dark web as a long-term and reliable source for the acquisition of firearms and ammunition because of the risk of scams and increased policing of the dark web.⁴⁰⁸

272. In recent years several large-scale international law enforcement operations have targeted the darkweb. Interestingly, the remaining marketplaces handle weapons sales differently. While some darkweb marketplaces do not allow weapon sales, other do allow it and some even openly list them. In June 2018 the darkweb platform 'Berlusconi market', which was reportedly shut down by Italian law enforcement authorities in November 2019, for example, had over 700 listings of 'weapons', including firearms, ammunition and explosives.⁴⁰⁹

273. Online trade has several advantages; one of them being that it offers opportunities to acquire firearms to a high number of potential customers from across the world. In 2019, for example, a man was sentenced to five years' imprisonment for illegally importing a Glock pistol,

406 Persi Paoli, G., Aldridge, J., Ryan, N. & Warnes, R. (2017), *Behind the curtain: The illicit trade of firearms, explosives and ammunition on the dark web*, Cambridge: RAND Europe; Savona, E.U. & Mancuso, M. (eds.) (2017), *Fighting illicit firearms trafficking routes and actors at European level: Final report of Project FIRE*, Milan: Transcrime – Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, pages 64-67.

407 Strazzari, F. and Zampagni, F. (2018), Between organised crime and terrorism: Illicit firearms actors and market dynamics in Italy, in: *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 261.

408 Persi Paoli, G., Aldridge, J., Ryan, N. & Warnes, R. (2017), *Behind the curtain: The illicit trade of firearms, explosives and ammunition on the dark web*, Cambridge: RAND Europe, pages 78 and 79.

409 Europol (2018), *IOCTA 2018: Internet Organized crime Crime Assessment*, Den Haag: Europol, page 50; Italian police shut down darkweb Berlusconi market and arrested admins, *Security Affairs – wordpress*, 8 November 2019.

ammunition and silencer from the US to Scotland, after purchasing them via the dark web.⁴¹⁰ Also persons who normally have no or little opportunities to acquire such weapons, for example because they lack the necessary criminal connections, can gain easier access to firearms through online trafficking. The expanding online trade in firearms is therefore making it easier to acquire such weapons for European citizens with little or no linkages to organized crime.⁴¹¹ Such individuals acquire firearms this way for many different reasons. In 2016, for example, an IT professional from Belgium, with no connections to the criminal underworld, was convicted for attempting to buy a Kalashnikov-type assault rifle with 8,000 rounds of ammunition, a Glock pistol with 2,000 rounds of ammunition and a silencer on the darkweb from an individual located in North America. The buyer explained to the court that he wanted these weapons to protect his family against ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant).⁴¹²

274. Investigations by Danish law enforcement agencies suggest that mainly gun enthusiasts who have no criminal intent illicitly traffic firearms on the darkweb. Experienced criminals are believed to consider online firearms trafficking as too risky and therefore avoid using it, while younger and less experienced criminals might be less risk averse and sometimes use social media to illicitly acquire firearms.⁴¹³ In the Netherlands, however, the Dutch police observed that petty criminals as well as more experienced criminals are using this type of trafficking.⁴¹⁴ The 2016 public mass shooting that resulted in the death of nine innocent bystanders in Munich (Germany) with a converted Flobert firearm that was acquired through the darkweb illustrates the possible far-reaching consequences of online firearms trafficking (see section 5.2.2).

410 National Crime Agency (2019), *National Strategic Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime*, page 28.

411 Europol (2017), *2017 European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment: Crime in the Age of Technology*, Den Haag: Europol, page 54; Interview with DJSOC/ Weapons, 5 April 2017; National Crime Agency (2019), *National Strategic Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime*, page 28.

412 “Die AK-47 is om mijn gezin te beschermen tegen IS”, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 28 September 2016.

413 Grip, L (2018), ‘Illegal weapons, Gangs and Violent Extremism in Denmark’, in: Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering Terror: Illicit Gun Markets and Firearms Acquisition of Terrorist Networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 142.

414 Bruinsma, M. & Spapens, T. (2018), ‘Terrorist access to firearms in The Netherlands’, in: Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering Terror: Illicit Gun Markets and Firearms Acquisition of Terrorist Networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 303.

275. Online trafficking also illustrates how *modus operandi* used by criminals can be connected: The persons involved in online firearms trafficking generally rely on postal and fast parcel services for the delivery of firearms, ammunition and components bought online.⁴¹⁵ Europol noted that the increased use of online marketplace to illicitly acquire firearms and components “has resulted in a significant increase in the use of parcel and postal services to traffic firearms and firearm components”⁴¹⁶. Sellers have mitigated detection risks in various ways, for example by selecting delivery drop-off locations at a distance from their homes or workplaces.⁴¹⁷ While firearms are mostly delivered to the customer through postal or fast parcel deliveries, sometimes face-to-face meetings are organized to physically transfer the products, especially when dealing with domestic transactions.⁴¹⁸ The darkweb arms dealer who sold the pistol to the perpetrator of the 2016 public mass shooting in Munich, for example, always met his customers in person to transfer the weapons he sold them.⁴¹⁹

Other types of trafficking: Illegal arms transfer and illegal re-export from European Union Member States to Latin American countries: two case studies

In recent years, the German judiciary has adjudicated several cases involving illicit exports due to fraudulently obtained export authorizations or illegal re-exports. As this constitutes a particular form of illicit firearms trafficking that requires further analysis from a legal and operational point of view, the following text box provides relevant case-based examples as a starting point for future discussions.

415 Europol (2017), *SOCTA 2017. Serious and organized crime threat assessment: Crime in the age of technology*, The Hague: Europol, page 22; Persi Paoli, G., Aldridge, J., Ryan, N. & Warnes, R. (2017), *Behind the curtain: The illicit trade of firearms, explosives and ammunition on the dark web*, Cambridge: Rand Europe, page 21.

416 Europol (2017), *SOCTA 2017. Serious and organized crime threat assessment: Crime in the age of technology*, The Hague: Europol, page 54.

417 Persi Paoli, G., Aldridge, J., Ryan, N. & Warnes, R. (2017), *Behind the curtain: The illicit trade of firearms, explosives and ammunition on the dark web*, Cambridge: Rand Europe, pages 21 and 22

418 Duquet, N. & Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 118 and 119.

419 Duquet, N. et al (2019), *Armed to Kill: A comprehensive analysis of the guns used in public mass shootings in Europe between 2009 and 2018*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 104.

TEXT BOX 13: Case-based examples involving fraudulently obtained export authorizations

- In February 2019 the Stuttgart Regional Court convicted two employees of Heckler & Koch to suspended sentences for illegal arms exports. The German arms manufacturer illegally exported 4219 assault rifles, two submachine guns and 1759 magazines to Mexico between 2006 and 2009. Although these shipments were covered by approved export licenses from the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy and the Federal Office of Economics and Export Control, the export licenses deliberately included incorrect information in the end-use declarations. According to the Court, the main players in the illegal export business are the former head of the Mexican sales team, who had already died, and a sales representative of the arms manufacturer who is in Mexico and has not appeared in the process. The two convicted employees, a sales manager and a clerical worker, were implicated by an email exchange that showed the company attempting to influence the end-user agreement. They manipulated end-use documents so that the export could take place although they knew the firearms were destined for regions in Mexico that were not authorized by the German authorities, such as Chihuahua, Chiapas, Guerrero, and Jalisco because of the high risks of misuse of weapons. Three other defendants, including two former directors and export executives and a deputy sales manager, were acquitted.⁴²⁰
- In April 2019 three top executives of the German firearms manufacturer Sig Sauer received suspended sentences for illegal firearms exports to Colombia. They were accused of exporting more than 38,000 semi-automatic pistols with a value of €11 million to a US sister company of Sig Sauer (the New Hampshire-based Sig Sauer inc;) between 2009 and 2011 that were subsequently shipped to the Colombian National Guard. According to the media articles, Sig Sauer delivered in total around 70,000 SP2022 pistols to its US sister company between 2009 and 2012, but more than half of them ended up in the hands of Colombian police. The German licenses for this arms export only allowed for export to the United States. The German authorities stated that a license for firearms export to Colombia would not have been issued at that time because of the then-ongoing civil war. During the court case the three men confessed their role in the illegal export as part of a deal with the prosecutor. Two of the executives were sentenced to

⁴²⁰ Landgericht Stuttgart, *Zwei Mitarbeiter von Heckler & Koch wegen illegaler Waffenexporte zu Bewährungsstrafen verurteilt*, 21 February 2019; Heckler & Koch's illegal arms deal with Mexico, *DW*, 20 February 2019; Heckler & Koch fined €3.7 million over illegal arms sales to Mexico, *DW*, 21 February 2019.

18 and 10 months probation and a fine of € 600,000 each, while the third one was sentenced to 10 months probation and a fine of € 60,000.⁴²¹

5.2 Perpetrators of illicit firearms trafficking into, within or from the European Union

276. An in-depth study on the portfolio of organized crime groups in Europe identified various types of groups involved in trafficking illicit firearms and ammunition to and across Europe, including:⁴²²

- Crime groups from the Western Balkans trafficking firearms and ammunition from their region to criminals in the European Union
- Italian mafia groups exploiting their connections with Albanian, Balkan and other groups based in Eastern European countries, often exchanging firearms for other illicit commodities (mainly drugs). The research establishes that these groups generally combine illicit firearms trafficking with other illicit activities and rely on well-established trafficking routes and contacts.⁴²³ Moreover, an analysis of the Italian crime scene from 2013 noted that Italian organized crime groups are "increasingly succeeding in penetrating the 'wholesale' sector of international arms trafficking, participating in sizable and highly profitable transactions"⁴²⁴
- Russian organized crime groups who transfer illicit weapons and ammunition from Eastern European countries to Spain where they conduct other illicit activities, and
- Outlaw motorcycle gangs who traffic firearms especially from South-Eastern Europe to the Scandinavian countries. Europol notes that the recent geographic expansion of such gangs in Europe is explained by their ambition to increase their role in criminal markets by opening chapters in

421 Pistolen nach Kolumbien - Manager verurteilt, *DW*, 3 April 2019; Germany's Sig Sauer accused of illegally sending weapons to Colombia, *DW*, 12 April 2018; Sig Sauer: German gun maker execs strike court deal over illegal sales, *DW*, 3 April 2019.

422 Savona E.U. & Riccardi M. (Eds.) (2015), *From illegal markets to legitimate businesses: the portfolio of organised crime in Europe. Final Report of Project OCP – Organised Crime Portfolio*, Trento: Transcrime – Università degli Studi di Trento, pages 62-63.

423 Strazzari, F. & Zampagni, F. (2018), Between organised crime and terrorism: Illicit firearms actors and market dynamics in Italy, in: *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, 237-283.

424 Paoli, L. (2013), 'The integration of the Italian crime scene', in: Albrecht H.J and A. Klip (eds.) *Crime, criminal law and criminal justice in Europe*, Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff publishers, 3-42.

strategic locations, for instance along arms trafficking routes.⁴²⁵

277. This list of groups shows that the actors involved in illicit firearms trafficking to and within the European Union are often the same as the actors with criminal demand for illicit firearms in that same region.

278. Transcrime concluded in one of their studies that organized crime groups “exploit consolidated routes, contacts, networks, and skills used in other criminal activities to traffic illicit firearms”.⁴²⁶ According to Europol illicit firearms trafficking is often a supplementary source of income for criminals that are primarily involved in other criminal activities. According to the EMCDDA, especially the illicit drug trade is believed to be a significant factor in the proliferation of illicit firearms in the European Union.⁴²⁷ Similar observations have also been made by national law enforcement agencies of various European Union Member States. The Swedish authorities, for example, stated in the *UNODC Study on Firearms 2015* that “we have, nationally and in international cooperation, looked hard and long for groups specialized in the trafficking in firearms. We have not found such groups. Where criminal networks have been active, they have been generally involved in smuggling, most often of narcotics. Trafficking in firearms has been a supplementary activity to trafficking in narcotics”.⁴²⁸ Not only in destination countries, but also in countries often considered important source countries of illicit firearms trafficking a similar observation has been made. The authorities of Montenegro reported in 2015 to UNODC, for example, that “currently there are no criminal groups dealing exclusively with this type of crime; [they are] multi-purpose international criminal groups which usually perform smuggling of narcotics”.⁴²⁹ The authorities added that weapons were mainly smuggled along the same routes used to smuggle narcotics, often by the same actors transporting illegal commodities or migrants.⁴³⁰ Other reports suggest that in Bulgaria illicit firearms trafficking is conducted by various crime groups,

425 Europol (2012), *Fear of turf war between outlaw motorcycle gangs in Europe*, Den Haag: Europol Press Release.

426 Savona, E.U. & Mancuso, M. (eds.) (2017), *Fighting illicit firearms trafficking routes and actors at European level: Final report of Project FIRE*, Milan: Transcrime – Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, page 34

427 European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction and Europol (2019), *EU Drug Markets Report 2019*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, pages 40-42.

428 UNODC (2015), *Country fact sheets. Summary data from country responses on firearms seizures and trafficking*, Vienna: UNODC, page 92.

429 UNODC (2015), *Country fact sheets. Summary data from country responses on firearms seizures and trafficking*, Vienna: UNODC, pages 72 and 73.

430 Ibid.

neither of which consider this type of business as their main activity.⁴³¹

279. Yet, in other European Union Member States, illicit firearms trafficking is carried out by criminal groups focused mainly on this type of trafficking. In 2015, for example, Estonia reported to UNODC that criminal groups involved in illicit firearms trafficking are “transnational, multi-ethnic and dedicated mainly to firearms”.⁴³²

280. The often-observed nexus between illicit firearms trafficking and drug trafficking is twofold. As mentioned earlier, crime groups involved in drugs trafficking are prime customers on illicit gun markets across the European Union and use firearms as tools in their criminal activities. Such crime groups are, however, also important traffickers of firearms, with a limited number of firearms being trafficked together in the same packages as drugs.⁴³³ A recent report by EMCDDA and Europol noted that the distinction between these two forms is not always clear as organized crime groups that traffic both firearms and drugs are also likely to use firearms in the course of their criminal activities. The report gives several examples of organized crime groups known to be engaged in both drugs and firearms trafficking, for example (1) outlaw motorcycle gangs using existing criminal routes to traffic firearms and drugs into and within the European Union, (2) transnational highly poly-criminal organized crime networks involved in large-scale cannabis trafficking from North Africa to the European Union, whose vessels are believed to be also involved in the trafficking of firearms and explosives to conflict areas in the MENA region, such as Syria and Libya, and (3) Dutch organized crime groups who supply both firearms and wholesale quantities of drugs to organized crime groups based in other Member States.⁴³⁴

431 UNDP SEESAC (2005), *Taming the Arsenal – Small Arms and Light Weapons in Bulgaria*, page 48.

432 UNODC (2015), *Country fact sheets. Summary data from country responses on firearms seizures and trafficking*, Vienna: UNODC, page 36.

433 Duquet, N. & Goris, K. (2018), *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pages 159-160.

434 European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction and Europol (2019), *EU Drug Markets Report 2019*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, page 41.

281. The Dutch National Police noted that a relatively small group of firearms dealers is responsible for most of the illicit firearms trafficking into the country. These persons not only possess varied assortment of firearms, but also anti-tank guns and hand grenades. Most of these persons have been active in arms trafficking for years and together form a network of persons knowing each other directly or indirectly. There seems to be no stiff competition or any associated violence between them.⁴³⁵

282. Having the right connections in source countries can be considered crucial in the cross-border trafficking of firearms and ammunition. Local actors usually directly divert weapons or collect previously diverted weapons and deliver them themselves or through intermediaries to criminals in the destination countries. Not surprisingly, police investigations into international firearms trafficking networks usually involve law enforcement agencies from different countries and frequently result in the arrest of persons involved in both destination as well as source countries. In 2016, for example, Bosnian and Swedish law enforcement agencies arrested several members of an organized crime group suspected of trafficking firearms and explosives from Bosnia to Sweden, where these weapons were sold to other criminals.⁴³⁶ In total the authorities seized nine firearms including two Kalashnikov type assault rifles, six rocket launchers, 16 hand grenades, three transmitter/remote control for improvised explosive devices (IED) and 1kg of Amphetamine. Individuals connected to this crime group were also arrested for trafficking firearms and explosives in 2015 in Germany (seizure of four Kalashnikov-type rifles, 25 hand grenades, 1 MHXA mine and 500 grams of explosives) and in Denmark (seizure of nine pistols, four Kalashnikov-type rifles and 10 hand grenades).⁴³⁷

283. The previous example suggests that established trafficking network and routes are used repeatedly by the same crime groups. In some cases, the criminal networks have been trafficking firearms and ammunition for several years before being apprehended by the authorities and in these cases, it is often unknown how many firearms and rounds of ammunition were trafficked by the same network. According to a media article, in May 2016 Austrian police arrested a 50-year old Croatian citizen living in the Austrian town of Graz while trying to traffic firearms and

435 Boerman, F., Grapendaal, M., Nieuwenhuis, F. & Stoffers, E. (2017), *2017 National Threat Assessment Organised Crime*, Zoetermeer: National Police of the Netherlands.

436 Akcija "Volf RS": Uhapšeno petoro osumnjičenih za šverc oružjem, *Nezvisne*, 12 May 2016; Akcija "Wolf RS": Oružje iz RS švercovali i prodavali u Švedskoj, *Nezvisne*, 12 May 2016.

437 Akcija "Volf RS": Uhapšeno petoro osumnjičenih za šverc oružjem, *Nezvisne*, 12 May 2016; Akcija "Wolf RS": Oružje iz RS švercovali i prodavali u Švedskoj, *Nezvisne*, 12 May 2016.

drugs across the border from Slovenia into Austria.⁴³⁸ According to the media, Austrian police had been investigating the individual's illegal activities since June 2015 and believe the man is the leader of a group involved in smuggling different types of firearms and drugs (including marijuana, amphetamines and ecstasy) from the Western Balkans into Austria since at least 2011. The smuggled firearms reportedly include handguns, long weapons and military-grade assault rifles, but the group also smuggled ammunition, silencers and hand grenades. These weapons were then reported to be sold to various customers in Austria. The investigation revealed that the man worked with accomplices from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia., but it is unknown how many firearms have been trafficked by this criminal network.⁴³⁹

284. Swedish law enforcement officials noted in 2015 that one of the main types of illicit firearms trafficking into the country involves trafficking these weapons in vehicles coming from the Western Balkans by Swedish citizens with roots in the region.⁴⁴⁰ According to the Dutch Police, firearms traffickers from the Netherlands generally use contacts with their families abroad or within their ethnic communities to illegally import these weapons.⁴⁴¹ In 2017, the Dutch Police noted that the major illegal importers of firearms have such connections countries as Poland, Croatia, Slovakia and, to a less extent, the Netherlands Antilles.⁴⁴² Similar observations have also been made in other European Union Member States. The 2015 Strategic Analysis of the Danish Police, for example, notes that there are a number of organized criminal networks in Denmark where members' national or ethnic origin is central to their illicit activities.⁴⁴³ The analysis mentions the existence of a Serbian network that has been actively involved in arms and drug trafficking into Denmark since the early 2000s.⁴⁴⁴

285. However, cross-border illicit firearms trafficking is not only carried out by criminal groups with connections to source countries, but also by individuals without criminal connections or intent. General Inspectorate of Romanian Police some of the firearms trafficking into Romania, for example, is due to Romanian citizens who live or work in

438 Waffen- und Drogenhandel: Mega-Erfolg für Steirer-Polizei, *Futter*, 19 December 2016.

439 Ibid.

440 UNODC (2015), *Country fact sheets. Summary data from country responses on firearms seizures and trafficking*, Vienna: UNODC, page 92.

441 Boerman, F., Grapendaal, M., Nieuwenhuis, F. & Stoffers, E. (2017), *2017 National Threat Assessment Organised Crime*, Zoetermeer: National Police of the Netherlands, page 98.

442 Ibid.

443 Politi (2015), *Strategisk Analyse 2015*.

444 Ibis.

other countries and bring weapons back from these countries. Often these individuals declared not to be aware that it is not legal to hold these weapons in Romania without a license.⁴⁴⁵

286. Sometimes border guards or other officials are also actively or passively involved in the cross-border trafficking of firearms. The NCA reported a case in which, in 2018 a British border officer was found guilty of attempting to traffic firearms and drugs coming from France into the United Kingdom.⁴⁴⁶ The perpetrator was arrested by French law enforcement officers in October 2017 after receiving three bags from two organized criminal groups at a supermarket car park in Loon-Plage in Northern France, containing eight pistols, two revolvers, a large quantity of ammunition, 28 kg of cocaine and six kg of heroin. It is believed that the officer would have been paid £20,000 for trafficking the bags into the United Kingdom. He was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment for attempting to illegally import firearms, eight years for attempting to smuggle heroin and cocaine, and three years for misconduct in public office. Also Transcrime noted in one of their studies that criminal organizations were able to avoid detection with the complicity of corrupt government officials and highlighted an example of an 'Ndrangheta group who acquired firearms in exchange for cocaine and sold the firearms, mainly handguns and ammunition but also some submachine guns, to Calabrian criminals.⁴⁴⁷ This group reportedly relied on secret information regarding possible police controls they received from corrupt officials to lower the risk of detection.⁴⁴⁸ Also the illicit firearms trafficking from the Western Balkans is believed to be exacerbated by, among other things, the presence of significant levels of corruption in the region.

445 Albisteanu, R., Dena, A. & Lewis, M. (2017), Romania: firearms and security at the EU eastern border, in: Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, page 350.

446 National Crime Agency (2019), *National Strategic Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime 2019*, page 8.

447 Savona, E.U. & Mancuso, M. (eds.) (2017), *Fighting illicit firearms trafficking routes and actors at European level: Final report of Project FIRE*, Milan: Transcrime – Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, pages 36-37.

448 Ibid.

Conclusions and policy implications

287. The analysis allowed to identify various modus operandi of illicit trafficking of firearms, ammunition, parts and components involving and affecting the European Union, such as ant trafficking, the exploitation of legal differences in source and destination countries, and online trafficking, to name a few. This underlines that illicit firearms trafficking is a multifaceted security phenomenon and implies the need for a comprehensive approach to combat this trafficking and mitigate diversion risks. The available data on illicit firearms trafficking involving European Union Member States suggests a generally small volume of illicit arms flows compared to the overall data collected at global level. However, firearms have a long-life cycle, can be reused several times and can cause dreadful impacts. The European Union and its Member States are therefore taking important steps to countering firearms-related criminality developing related strategies and supporting operational platforms, such as the firearms chapter of the European Multidisciplinary Platform against Criminal Threats (EMPACT) and the Group of European Firearms Experts (EFE).

288. The findings of the analysis allow to provide the following conclusions for consideration by relevant policymakers:

1. Closing loopholes and harmonizing legislative and regulatory frameworks, including by taking into account question of legal and illegal accessibility as well as concealability of parts and components, where possible also among countries outside the European Union along trafficking routes;
2. Improving export risk assessments to prevent the diversion of legally exported firearms from the early stages of the supply chain;
3. Strengthening border control and law enforcement capacities to detect and investigate illicitly trafficked firearms and promoting an effective criminal justice approach to related crimes;
4. Reinforcing international cooperation and information exchange;
5. Continue improving the knowledge and intelligence picture on illicit arms flows involving European Union Member States by improving firearms data collection and analysis capacities, developing deeper understanding

of the phenomenon from a quantitative and qualitative perspective and prioritizing investigations into the illicit origin of firearms.

289. Close loopholes and harmonize legislative and regulatory frameworks, including by taking into account question of legal and illegal accessibility as well as concealability of parts and components, where possible also among countries outside the European Union along trafficking routes

An import share of the trafficking of firearms, parts and components is connected to differences in legislation. Despite the efforts of the European Union to harmonize firearms legislation, significant differences in legislation continue to exist. In recent years high numbers of easy-to-reactivate deactivated or AEW and easy-to-convert blank firing guns have been trafficked within the European Union. This has eroded the traditional closed character of illicit gun markets in the region and therefore provide additional opportunities for various types of criminals to access lethal firearms. Compared to other regions in the world, European Union Member States tend to seize high shares of modified, converted or reactivated firearms. It is therefore important to closely monitor the implementation of the recently amended European Union Firearms Directive, which aims to prevent and address this threat. European Union Member States also seized in average approximately seven times the number of entire firearms than the number of parts and components. This figure presents a much lower ration compared to the global average, where the number of seized firearms was 20 times higher than the number of seized parts and components. Moreover, case-based information provided in the report confirms a dangerous trend of illegally shipping firearms parts and components via parcel and courier services, often exploiting legal differences between source and destination countries or difficulties by custom officers in detecting individual components hidden in a parcel. This trend has likely increased during the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. Question of legal and illegal accessibility as well as concealability of parts and components should therefore be taken into account when developing responses to the various forms of illicit firearms manufacture and trafficking. The observation that some organized criminal groups who previously trafficked deactivated firearms reacted to changes in legislation by exploiting the legal loophole of Flobert calibre firearms illustrates that such groups are very adaptive. This underlines the need for maintaining an up-to-date intelligence picture on the illicit trafficking of firearms, their parts and components and ammunition, for continuously monitoring the legal framework and for adapting it where necessary. By immediately closing new loopholes a constant pressure can be applied on illicit gun markets and the actors involved in this market. This

will not only contribute to combating illicit firearms trafficking, but also to safeguarding the licit market and limiting diversion risks.

290. Improving export risk assessments to prevent the diversion of legally exported firearms from the early stages of the supply chain as a means to further increase accountability for firearms exports from European Union Member States

The quantitative and qualitative data and information from different sources analysed in this report reveals a complex set of roles that European Union Member States assume when it comes to illicit firearms flows, including countries of destination, transit and source as well as countries of legal manufacture and transfer of weapons that are seized in crime across the globe. In addition to the identified illicit intra and interregional arms flows, many firearms seizures of European Union manufactured firearms in other regions are the result of diversion of a legal export from the manufacturing country. Also, cases involving fraudulently obtained export authorizations were observed. In these cases, strategic information exchange between seizing and exporting countries constitutes an important step to improve or put in place preventive measures at the early stages of the supply chain and may provide essential information for the export risk assessment to be undertaken by the exporting country. The high volume of legal trade in firearms originating within the European Union also implies a high level of responsibility as regards the use of the exported weapons. Thus, it is important for European Union Member States as well as for other countries to take these different roles into account when developing effective responses to illicit firearms flows, including a thorough analysis of diversion risks in export control procedures. This conclusion highlights the reinforcing nature and fundamental complementarity between the Arms Trade Treaty, which provides for a comprehensive export risk assessment, and the Firearms Protocol, which provides for a cooperative framework as regards exports, imports and transits of firearms, their parts and components and ammunition.

291. Strengthening border control and law enforcement and border control capacities to detect and investigate illicitly trafficked firearms and promoting an effective criminal justice approach to related crimes

Sustained operational capacities of and cooperation among criminal justice authorities are crucial in combating illicit firearms trafficking. Detecting and investigating illicit firearms trafficking is not an easy endeavor for law

enforcement and border control agencies. This is due to the technical nature, legislative complexities, transnational features and the various diversion risks during the long (mainly legal) lifecycle of firearms. To overcome these difficulties a long-term and proactive law enforcement and criminal justice approach is needed.

While progress has been made, the trafficking routes of seized firearms are often not sufficiently investigated by law enforcement agencies. When firearms are seized in connection to other offences, they are generally considered only a 'byproduct'. By adopting a more proactive 'investigate the gun' approach, law enforcement agencies can detect and dismantle larger trafficking schemes. To achieve this, however, a fundamental change of perspective is needed; the 'investigate the gun' approach should be considered an investment in a larger crime prevention strategy instead of an additional burden. Because of the instrumental nature of firearms for carrying out various criminal activities and the close connections between firearms trafficking and other types of trafficking, such an approach will also benefit the combat against other types of trafficking and contribute to more general crime prevention. European Union Member States need to invest in specialized law enforcement teams with sufficient expertise, equipment and legal means to successfully implement an 'investigate the gun approach'. Equally important is good cooperation between the various government actors involved in the combat against illicit firearms trafficking such as law enforcement agencies, border control agencies, judicial authorities, domestic gun control agencies and export control agencies.

Such a shift in perspective can lead to the adoption of comprehensive investigative strategies that are based on three aspects: investigations on the illicit firearms, the individuals involved and their illicit assets. This will allow stakeholders to combat two crucial enablers of organized crime and reduce illicit financial and arms flows, in line with target 16.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

292. Reinforcing international cooperation and information exchange

Illicit firearms trafficking is a transnational phenomenon that requires international cooperation and information exchange to tackle it. The European Union is not only the destination of illicitly trafficked firearms, parts and components, and ammunition, but often also the (legal or illegal) source and transit region. This implies that European Union Member states need to collaborate with each other, but also with countries in other regions and with relevant regional and international organizations, such as Europol and similar

organizations in other regions, Frontex, Interpol and UNODC. This cooperation can and should take many forms such as exchanging information and best practices, facilitating tracing, setting up joint or parallel investigations and conducting joint international action days, providing expertise and trainings, and so on. Important to keep in mind is that several of the conclusions and policy implications drawn at international level and presented in the *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020*, such as on the need to increase efforts to provide the full picture on illicit firearms flows and to develop evidence-based responses as well as on the importance of scaling up capacities, procedures and tools to identify the illicit origin of seized, found and surrendered firearms and to record the results in an accessible manner, apply equally to European Union Member States. The observation on synergies between conclusions from the global study and this paper implies that areas for strategic approaches against illicit firearms trafficking often coincide between European Union Member States and other countries and this provides an important argument for enhanced cross-regional cooperation and information exchange to counter illicit arms flows.

293. Continue improving the overall knowledge and the intelligence picture on illicit arms flows involving European Union Member States by improving firearms data collection and analysis capacities, developing deeper understanding of the phenomenon from a quantitative and qualitative perspective and prioritizing investigations into the illicit origin of firearms

Because of shortcomings with regard to the quality and comprehensiveness of seizure data due to poor registration procedures, the lack of a uniform collection and registration approach and the lack of firearms expertise among local law enforcement officials seizing firearms, it is currently impossible to realistically quantify the illicit firearms flows into, within and from the European Union.

Similar to other regions, monitoring illicit firearms flows is crucial for the development of a better understanding on the scope, characteristics and evolution of illicit firearms trafficking in the European Union. This is in turn needed for developing appropriate policy initiatives and strengthening law enforcement activities and criminal justice responses to combating this security phenomenon and mitigate diversion risks. Reliable, comprehensive and detailed quantitative and qualitative data on firearms seizures and the specific contexts of these seizures is essential for monitoring illicit firearms flows. Yet, in many countries in the European Union and abroad such data is currently lacking due to a lack of technical skills, resources, analytical capacities and to some extent also political will. While efforts to improve this situation

have increased in recent years, more is needed to significantly improve our understanding of this important security phenomenon.

Since illicit firearms trafficking is a transnational phenomenon we do not only need comprehensive data on firearms seizures at national level, but also need a harmonized data collection of firearms seizures that enables us to compare and connect national data, so that we can develop a better intelligence picture at regional and global levels. As part of the European Union-funded “Global Firearms Data Project”, UNODC has proactively stimulated efforts to improve such a harmonization of national data and developed the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire (IAFQ), a standardized methodology for data collection on seized and trafficked firearms, their parts and components and ammunition. By collecting data on seized and trafficked firearms, UNODC aims to support authorities in developing more targeted responses to illicit firearms trafficking, to promote international law enforcement and judicial cooperation among the concerned authorities and to support the attainment and monitoring of Sustainable Development Target 16.4 to significantly reduce illicit arms flows, among other forms of crime.

Improving the strategic intelligence picture on illicit arms flows and possession in Europe will allow legislators, law enforcement agencies, and other relevant actors to prioritise and act in a well-informed and appropriate way. While the European Union and several of its Member States have been driving forces in promoting and supporting evidence-based action to counter illicit firearms trafficking, more efforts are required to enhance the quality and completeness of statistical data on seized and trafficked firearms at European and global levels and to increase the participation rate in the UNODC firearms data collection exercise. Only 16 European Union Member States submitted quantitative data to the IAFQ, which is the only global tool to collect in-depth data on seized and trafficked firearms. Moreover, the response rate to the different questions in the IAFQ declined in almost all countries, including below the 50 per cent margin for topics such as tracing outcomes, tracing requests and routing. These figures reveal that also European Union countries often still face challenges with providing data on seized and trafficked firearms, particularly such data that goes beyond basic information about the number and types of seized firearms.

A crucial element in improving the intelligence picture and developing an evidence-based approach is to thoroughly investigate firearms trafficking cases and to prioritize the tracing of seized firearms and criminal investigations into their possible trafficking. During the long lifecycle of firearms various actors are involved in the control of the legal market in firearms in Europe. To improve the intelligence picture, it is essential to improve the information sharing between these actors, nationally and internationally, and to break out of the different

'silos' connected to the control of the legal possession and flows of firearms and associated items on the one hand, and to the combat of illicit possession and flows of these items on the other.

Yet, only collecting and sharing data will not suffice; it is important to invest in the necessary analytical capacities to thoroughly analyse the data. Here, cooperation with the research community can provide important opportunities. In 2007, the Council of the European Union noted how little was known about the situation related to illicit firearms trafficking. Since then several European Union initiatives have been taken to improve the intelligence picture, for example by supporting information-sharing between the actors involved and by funding different studies on various aspects of illicit firearms trafficking. This has resulted in significant improvements in the intelligence picture on illicit arms flows in Europe, but more is needed to understand the global implications and to combat this evolving security phenomenon with far-reaching societal consequences that are not limited to the European region more effectively and efficiently. Special attention should also be given to analyse the trafficking of ammunition, to monitor new trends such as online arms trafficking and the use of postal and fast parcel services and to identify and monitor possible threats such as 3D-printing and modular weapons.

Authorities should aim to understand the phenomenon of illicit firearms trafficking from a quantitative and qualitative perspective, as different data collection methodologies may reveal different aspects of a phenomenon, all of which provide important considerations for a comprehensive evidence base. This research exercise used an innovative approach of combining quantitative data with qualitative and case-based information from interviews, official (law enforcement or court) cases and media publications. The results of this exercise reveal that different data collection methodologies may sometimes lead to different results. The statistical data collected in the context of the Global Firearms Data project was more revealing about the existence of illicit firearms flows from the European Union compared to information available through interviews and cases. On the other hand, the latter type of information provided deeper insights, both in terms of quantity and quality, as regards illicit firearms trafficking from the Western Balkan region into the European Union. While it may not be possible to simply add up results of different data collection methodologies for the purpose of developing one single picture of a phenomenon, the analytical exercise confirmed the merit of different data collection methodologies and revealed the importance of combining them for the purpose of increasing the evidence-base on illicit firearms trafficking to, from and across the European Union.



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

For more information on the work of UNODC to counter the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition, please contact:

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This document was produced with the financial support of the European Union.