

OC-SCAN POLICY BRIEF

Integrated EU approach against the illegal trafficking in heavy firearms

The possession of firearms by members of Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) and lower-level street gangs is considered to be rising. Their willingness to use firearms in populated areas poses a significant threat to both the general public and law enforcement personnel. Although most OCGs prefer handguns, there is a rise in the use of heavy firearms such as assault rifles (e.g. AK-47) and explosive devices. While the amount of heavy firearms in circulation in the EU seems to satisfy much of this demand at present, suppliers in South East Europe are able to meet a rise in demand. The fact that a Kalashnikov or a rocket launcher can be acquired for as little as €300-700 in some parts of the EU indicates their ready availability for OCG's, street gangs or groups orchestrating high profiled attacks resulting in significant numbers of casualties. However, the current nature of the situation regarding local demand, internal circulation and importation represents a significant intelligence gap.

In an effort to fill this intelligence gap and facilitate an integrated EU approach against the illegal trafficking in heavy firearms in the EU, the following measures are recommended as operational priorities (these could be complemented by the coordinated sharing and centralised analysis of intelligence at the EU-level):

- Joint investigations focussed on 'dedicated armourers' and 'specialist brokers' of firearms based in the EU.
- Dedicated efforts to investigate and monitor the flows of firearms leaving South East Europe for the EU.
- Detailed recording of the quantity and types of illegal firearms seized in law enforcement operations, as well as those recovered in interdictions of multi-commodity shipments (e.g. in drug trafficking operations).

Existing national regulations are considered an effective instrument to contain the threat of the increase of heavy firearms. Accordingly, the approximation of targeted national laws is a feasible approach. However, the main challenge lies in the area of implementation. Furthermore, the use of 'heavy firearms' in crime is part of the wider threat of 'access to firearms', which includes converted and lawfully held firearms. The impact of legislative measures that only focus only on heavy firearms will remain limited as long as criminals can flexibly vary the **type** of firearm they use and join local 'firearms pools'.



Selection of AK-47s and other assault rifles, explosive devices and explosives seized by the GIGN in a raid on an illegal reserve stockpile in France

Remark: OC-SCAN Threat Notices aim to fill intelligence gaps within the framework of the European Criminal Intelligence Model (ECIM) and feed directly into the Organised Crime Threat Assessment (OCTA) process. The significance of these threats in relation to the European criminal situation is only assessed in the OCTA.