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From: Europol  
To: Standing Committee on Operational Cooperation on Internal Security  
Subject: The nexus between organised crime and terrorism in the EU

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Delegations will find attached a document from Europol on "The nexus between organised crime and terrorism in the EU".



## THE NEXUS BETWEEN ORGANISED CRIME AND TERRORISM

JULY 2015

### KEY FINDINGS

- The nexus between organised crime and terrorism in the EU remains a limited phenomenon. Individuals that are linked to terrorism and organised crime are involved in religiously- inspired terrorism, a minority is involved in separatist terrorism. Notwithstanding this fact a number of isolated cases have emerged of apparent connections between organised crime and terrorism in specific circumstances.
- A significant number of persons involved in both organised crime and terrorism are foreign fighters.
- The identified links have revealed several possible avenues of funding for terrorist groups. A number of potential terrorists are suspected of money laundering and organised property crimes.
- Several locations provide opportunities for members of terrorist groups and members of organised crime groups to meet and form alliances, these include: prison communities, diaspora communities and online communities.
- The core motivations of organised crime and terrorism remain largely divergent.
- There is no clear evidence that terrorist groups consistently rely on, or cooperate with, organised crime groups for their illicit activities.

The nexus between organised crime groups (OCGs) and religiously inspired terrorist groups is repeatedly cited in media reports. Europol investigated the relationship between organised crime and terrorist groups, the types of crimes committed, level of cooperation and factors for divergence, inhibiting cooperation between the two types of groups.

Recent analysis<sup>1</sup> of Europol’s database revealed nearly 200 persons involved in both organised crime and terrorist activities. This represents a small but still important figure. 80% of these persons are related to religiously inspired terrorism. Almost half of these persons are linked to religiously inspired terrorist cases are foreign fighters (49%). Another considerable number of persons involved in religiously inspired terrorism represent Jihadists originating from the North Caucasus region (20%). The remainder is associates of established organisations such as Hezbollah, Al Qaeda, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Al Shabaab and Hamas.

The persons identified are involved in five main crime areas. The links involve suspected money laundering (34%), organised property crime (29%) with smaller representation in firearms (12%), facilitation of illegal immigration (12%) and drugs trafficking (10%).

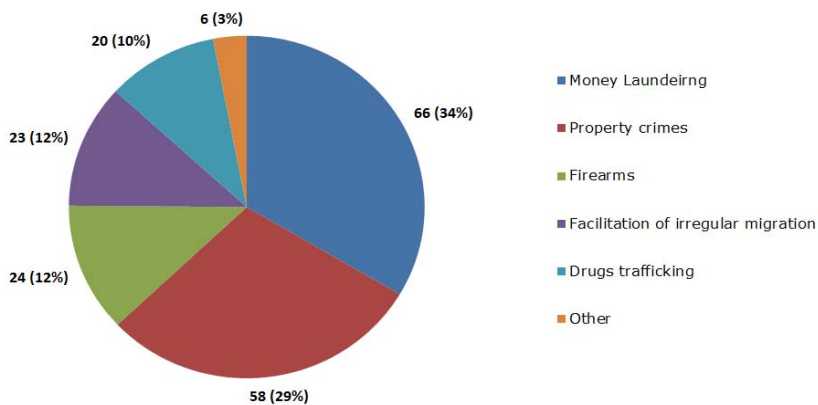


Figure: Potential links between organised crime and terrorism (per crime area)

Links for **money laundering** activities in relation to terrorist funding are connected to members of Hezbollah. The cases analysed demonstrate that members or supporters of terrorist groups tend to operate their own money laundering schemes.

<sup>1</sup> Analysis took place 18 March 2015

29% of persons were identified for their involvement in **organised property crime** and terrorism. The majority of these cases concern foreign fighters, who were on a list of high profile burglars as reported by EU MS. In some cases, foreign fighters were involved in serious property crime offences, such as armed robbery and extortion. This indicates that some, but not all, of the foreign fighters may finance their terrorist activities by committing organised property crime offences in EU MS. Cases analysed show that members of terrorist groups can be self-reliant, through committing organised property crime offences.

Only 12% of persons were identified for **firearms** activities. This relatively limited amount may be explained by the fact that firearms has only recently become an EU priority. Evaluation and analyses of these cases reveals that this involves mainly foreign fighters and Jihadists originating from the North Caucasus region. Links with organised crime are not always so clearly identified, however, there are indications that intermediaries may be members of an OCG or suppliers for OCGs. It is possible to conclude that terrorists are able to purchase weapons from intermediaries of organised crime groups. Opportunities for buying weapons on online marketplaces facilitate the possibility of avoiding cooperation or reliance on organised crime groups. Convergence between members of organised crime and members of terrorist groups for weapons trafficking most likely consists of incidental supplier-customer relationships.

Irregular migration services are often provided by specialised facilitating networks or OCGs. Most cases involved EU foreign fighters travelling back and forth to conflict areas in Syria and Iraq. Jihadists from the North Caucasus region are also noted for their involvement in **facilitation of illegal immigration**. Evaluation of these cases reveals that criminal networks operate mainly in Poland to provide access for Chechen criminals and terrorists to enter the Schengen zone. Syria and Iraq are also destinations for Chechen fighters, and the same facilitation networks provide services for travel to Islamic State -controlled conflict areas. The cases evaluated indicate that due to their need to travel to and from EU territory, members of terrorist groups receive support from their own facilitation networks. However, if these resources are not available, a few cases indicate the use of facilitation services from organised crime groups.

**Drugs trafficking** can provide a stable source of income for terrorist groups, as demonstrated in recent years by the FARC<sup>2</sup> in Colombia. Most of the cases identified foreign fighters participating in drug trafficking activities as couriers or facilitators. Control over smuggling routes or specific geographical territories that are strategically important for the production or smuggling of drugs may facilitate the involvement of terrorist groups in this crime area.

### **Crime as a Service**

Europol has identified the importance of “crime as a service” whereby OCGs hire the expertise or services of individuals on an ad hoc basis. The same may be true for terrorist groups. Opportunities for creating connections through intermediaries providing specialist services include: the forgery of identity documents, hawala banking, sophisticated money laundering services, use of corruption and infiltration of legitimate businesses. These examples show that through the use of the same experts, tools and services, organised crime and terrorist groups have points of convergence which may not involve direct cooperation.

### **Opportunities for networking**

Analysis of foreign fighters responsible for attacks in the EU demonstrates a similar pattern concerning the path to radicalisation. Several of the foreign fighters were imprisoned for organised property crimes and it was in prison communities that they became radicalised. This is a major nexus point at which members of organised crime groups and terrorist groups are most likely to meet and form an alliance. Diaspora communities also provide opportunities in which to meet and form alliances. The internet is also considered a potential opportunity for connection. The anonymity provided by online marketplaces on the Dark Web lowers the risk of detection for the exchange of illegal goods, services and expertise between OCGs and terrorist groups.

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<sup>2</sup> Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia

## **Geographical vulnerabilities**

Some key geographical hubs can be identified that make the EU more vulnerable to terrorist groups. Greece and Italy are the countries receiving the largest influx of irregular migrants and refugees. Libya remains the key staging point for irregular migrants entering the EU by sea. The Greek-Turkish land borders present substantial vulnerabilities in terms of foreign fighters re-entering the EU. Spain's proximity to Morocco presents another key vulnerability for the EU. Turkey remains the main transit hub into Syria due to its shared land borders and proximity to other conflict zones such as Iraq and Palestine. The Balkan Route is heavily controlled by organised crime and any activity along this route is likely to present an opportunity for convergence. Based on the geography of these areas, it appears that convergence between organised crime and terrorist groups is more likely to occur at the borders between the relatively stable EU region and its borders with less stable countries across the Mediterranean Sea.

## **Factors for divergence**

Besides mutual benefits, initiating cooperation with the other party may increase risk of detection, infiltration or exposure. Use of the internet and use of their own money laundering and facilitation networks allow terrorist groups and organised crime groups to operate independently. Online communities are extensively used by terrorist groups for spreading propaganda and for recruitment purposes. Encrypted messaging programmes enable the sharing of expertise, guidelines and money transfers, limiting terrorists' dependence on the services provided by OCGs. Visa-free travel also inhibits the co-dependence between groups as they are not always reliant on facilitation networks. Moreover, terrorist groups are ideologically and politically driven and seek media attention to promote their causes. OCGs, on the other hand, are profit driven and prefer to operate under the radar. These factors will inhibit close collaboration or direct cooperation between terrorist and organised crime groups.

## Conclusion

In light of the available evidence, convergence between organised crime and terrorism in the EU seems a limited phenomenon. Terrorist and organised crime groups have learned to adapt to changing circumstances such as governmental interventions or changed environments. This makes their structures, activities and methods opportunistic in nature. The relationship between terrorist and organised crime groups can be characterised as changeable. Based on the cases available in the Europol databases, it can be concluded that convergence in the EU often consists of isolated incidents.

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