



# The Crime-Terror Nexus in the Czech Republic and Slovakia

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- The objective of this working paper is to present an overview of links between crime and terrorism (the crime-terror nexus) in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, highlight potential risks, and make a series of recommendations for how such risks can be mitigated.
  - It is part of a Europe-wide survey that will produce similar papers for all 28 member states of the European Union. In doing so, the aim is to generate a more holistic understanding of threats from crime and terrorism, and promote new and innovative ways of tackling them.
  - Although organised crime groups are present and active in the two countries, there is barely any terrorist activity, which means that direct links between crime and terrorism do not exist.
  - However, there is an indirect link between crime and terrorism, resulting from the abundance of accessible and easy-to-reactive weapons from Slovakia.
  - Our recommendations include action on terrorist financing, information sharing, illicit trafficking, and collaboration between security agencies as well as between government and non-government actors.
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# 1 Introduction

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The Czech Republic and Slovakia have undergone a series of profound transformations in recent decades. Not only have the two countries gone from socialism to capitalism, and from authoritarian rule to democracy, they have also separated from each other. While those transformations are widely seen as successful, they may also have created opportunities for “bad actors” to establish themselves.

The objective of this working paper is to present an overview of crime and terrorism, as well as potential links between the two, in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Our aim is to highlight potential risks and make recommendations for how such risks can be mitigated. It is part of a Europe-wide survey that will produce similar papers for all 28 member states of the European Union. In doing so, the aim is to generate a more holistic understanding of threats from crime and terrorism, and promote new and innovative ways of tackling them.

The paper’s empirical basis is a survey of open sources, including relevant government and inter-governmental reports, academic research, court documents, newspaper articles, as well as interviews with practitioners and subject matter experts. The research took place between March and May 2018, and was carried out by a team of Czech and British researchers.<sup>1</sup>

Although organised crime groups are active in the two countries, there is barely any terrorist activity, which means that direct links between crime and terrorism do not exist. However, there is an indirect link between crime and terrorism, resulting from the abundance of accessible and easy-to-reactive weapons from Slovakia.

Our recommendations include action on terrorist financing, illicit trafficking, information sharing, and collaboration between security agencies as well as between government and non-government actors.

The paper starts with overviews of organised crime and terrorism in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, before exploring potential links between terrorism and crime. It concludes with a series of recommendations for policymakers and practitioners.

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<sup>1</sup> The authors of this report are Peter R. Neumann and Rajan Basra. We wish to thank Linda Slapakova and Thomas McEnchroe for their research support. We are also grateful to all interviewees, whether named or anonymous.

## Box 1: What is the Crime-Terror Nexus?

The concept of the crime-terror nexus emerged in the early 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of globalisation. Amidst shifting geopolitics and the birth of the information age, analysts noticed that terrorist and insurgent groups were increasingly adapting criminal modus operandi to further their aims.

Since then, scholars have identified *three types of crime-terror nexus: institutional, organisational, and social*.

### Institutional

One of the pioneers was Tamara Makarenko.<sup>2</sup> On her “crime-terror continuum”, she identified three types of institutional linkages between criminal and terrorist groups:

- At one end, criminal and terrorist groups engaged in *co-operation*, either in limited, transaction-based alliances, or in more sophisticated coalitions.
- Nearing the middle, *convergence* indicated when groups adapted skills belonging to the other, resulting in “hybrid criminal-terrorist groups”.
- At the other end was *transformation*, in which a group had completely transformed into the other by way of a shift in motivation.

Among the most prominent examples have been the Taliban, which have at times depended on Afghanistan’s heroin production; the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces’ (FARC) involvement in their country’s narcotics industry; and the smuggling of petrol and counterfeit goods by the Irish Republican Army (IRA).

### Organisational

Writing at the same time as Makarenko, Letizia Paoli focused on the structural and organisational similarities between youth gangs and terrorist groups, which she categorised as “clannish” organisations:<sup>3</sup>

- They were involved in illegal activity, including violence;
- They required members’ “absolute commitment”;
- They offered *emotional benefits*, such as status, “brotherhood”, identity, and belonging.

*continues...*

<sup>2</sup> Tamara Makarenko, “The Crime-Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism”, *Global Crime*, Vol 6, No 1, 2004, pp.129-145.

<sup>3</sup> Letizia Paoli, “The Paradoxes of Organized Crime”, *Crime, Law, and Social Change*, Vol 37, No 1, 2002, pp.51-97.

In Paoli's view, drawing sharp distinctions between actors based on their stated aims – criminal versus political – could be misleading, because the distinctions might be blurred and “goals [could] change”.

As an example, she cited white supremacist gangs in the United States, which recruited their membership according to ideological principles and professed to have a political programme but were heavily involved in “ordinary” crime.

## Social

In a recent study of jihadist recruitment in Europe, Rajan Basra and Peter R. Neumann highlighted not the convergence of criminals and terrorists as groups or organisations but of their social networks, environments, or milieus.<sup>4</sup> Rather than formalised collaboration or even transformation, they found that criminal and terrorist groups recruited from sociologically similar pools of people, creating (often unintended) synergies and overlaps.

This “new” crime-terror nexus had four facets:

- It affected processes of *radicalisation*, because involvement in terrorism could offer redemption and legitimise crime.
- It highlighted the *role of prisons* as environments for radicalisation and networking among criminals and extremists.
- It emphasised the *development of skills and experiences* that could be useful for terrorists, particularly access to weapons, forged documents, and the familiarity with violence.
- It facilitated the *financing* of terrorism, especially through petty crime.

Despite differences in approach and perspective, the *three types of nexus – institutional, organisational, and social* – are not mutually exclusive. Taken together, they provide the analytical framework of the Crime Terror Nexus Project.

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<sup>4</sup> Rajan Basra and Peter R. Neumann, “Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol 10, No 6, 2016, pp.25-40.

## 2 Organised crime

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The rapid changes that the Czech Republic and Slovakia have experienced in recent decades, together with the countries' strategic location between south-eastern and western Europe, have created opportunities for organised crime groups to take root and establish themselves. This section provides an overview of the organised crime scene in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, covering the groups involved, their activities, and the locations in which they operate.

### Groups

Organised crime is not a new phenomenon in either country.<sup>5</sup> Slovak authorities, for example, have noted the presence of crime groups since the mid-1990s, when a number of organised crime groups consolidated their activities, establishing “extremely dangerous movements with invisible internal organisational structure and an uncompromising attitude towards securing their interests”.<sup>6</sup>

It is unknown whether or not most organised criminals are native to the countries they operate in. This may have historically been the case in Slovakia, though transnational crime groups – whether from the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, or the Western Balkans – have had an increased presence over the past decade.<sup>7</sup> The latest report by the *Slovenská informačná služba* (Slovak Information Service, or SIS) states that the country has largely shifted its attention to transnational, rather than domestic, crime groups.<sup>8</sup> Czech authorities, meanwhile, have noted a growing trend of groups “being continuously more diverse in terms of nationality”,<sup>9</sup> even though the plurality of individuals prosecuted for organised crime are Czech nationals.<sup>10</sup>

Czech authorities consider organised crime as the most serious non-military threat facing the country.<sup>11</sup> The country's Security Information Service (*Bezpečnostní informační služba*, or BIS) warned of a potential

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5 As per §129 (2) of Act No 300/2005 Z.z of the Slovak Criminal Code, an organised crime group is defined as an “association of at least three persons for the purpose of committing a criminal act, with a division of tasks among members of the group, whose activities in consequence have a planned and coordinated characteristic, which increases the probability of a criminal act being committed”. As per Section 129, Act No. 40/2009 Coll. of the Czech Criminal Code, an organised crime group is defined as “a community of persons with an internal organisational structure and a division of functions and activities, which focuses on the systematic perpetration of intentional crimes”.

6 Miroslav Lisoň and Jozef Meteňko, “Aktivity kriminálnych skupín na území Slovenskej Republiky”, *Science & Military*, Vol 1, 2007, pp.51-58.

7 “Správa o činnosti SIS za rok 2014”, *Slovenská informačná služba*, June 2015.

8 “Správa o činnosti SIS za rok 2016”, *Slovenská informačná služba*, June 2017.

9 *Strategy to Combat Organised Crime for the Years 2015-2017*, Odbor bezpečnostní politiky a prevence kriminality Ministerstva vnitra České republiky, November 2014, p.12.

10 *Ibid.*, p.10.

11 “Bezpečnostní hrozby”, Odbor bezpečnostní politiky a prevence kriminality Ministerstva vnitra České republiky, April 2016.

crime-terror nexus as early as 2007, highlighting the threat from trafficking of firearms, forged documents, and criminal networks.<sup>12</sup> As per the Czech authorities, the most common organised crime activities are the manufacturing and selling of drugs, fraud, and manipulation of public tenders.<sup>13</sup>

Much of the public knowledge about groups in Slovakia comes from the leaking of three internal police lists – in 2005, 2010, and 2011 – which revealed the personal details of various organised criminals and their group affiliations. The 2010 “mafia list” highlighted four groups in particular: the *Takáčovci*, *Pitšovci*, *Borbélyovci*, and *Jakšíkovci* groups, all named after their former or current leaders.<sup>14</sup> The 2010 list also highlighted three categories of criminals: 1) *vlamači*, who carry out burglaries; 2) *autičkári*, involved in large-scale car thefts; and 3) *defektári*, who rob businessmen after sabotaging their car tyres.<sup>15</sup> The latest list, from 2011, contained over 400 names and photographs of suspected organised criminals, loosely categorised in accordance to the previous two lists.

Of the most prominent groups, *Pitšovci* are said to be the most violent, and are linked to several murders.<sup>16</sup> The fallout from the leaks led to several high-level prosecutions and convictions of group members,<sup>17</sup> though it is not known whether these groups remain active, or if the “categories” of criminals have since changed.

Foreign crime groups are also active in Slovakia, particularly in drug trafficking.<sup>18</sup> The most prominent groups are Russian-speaking groups from Eastern Europe – which are active across the Slovak-Ukrainian border – and those from the Balkans, whether Macedonian, Serbian, Croatian, or Albanian.<sup>19</sup>

In the Czech Republic, Asian, Ukrainian, and Russian groups are active, and involved in a range of criminal activity – from theft of luxury goods, to drug trafficking and VAT fraud.<sup>20</sup> There are also smaller, more specialised groups from Bulgaria, Albania, Nigeria, and Romania.<sup>21</sup> Vietnamese crime groups are considered to have “decisive control over crimes committed in the Czech Republic, exhibiting an exceptional stability and durability”, as per the country’s Ministry of Interior. Their most important crimes include: direct and indirect tax evasion; customs duty fraud, mainly on goods imported Chinese products; and the production and distribution of drugs.<sup>22</sup>

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12 “Spojí se terorismus s organizovaným zločinem?”, *Bezpečnostní Informační Služba*, 1 March 2007.

13 *Strategy to Combat Organised Crime for the Years 2015-2017*, Odbor bezpečnostní politiky a prevence kriminality Ministerstva vnitra České republiky, November 2014, p.9.

14 “Mafiánske zoznamy: Viaceré verzie zoznamov”, *sme.sk*, 17 June 2005.

15 “Na mafiánských zoznamoch je 321 mien! Aj vplyvní podnikatelia”, *Čas.sk*, 1 October 2011.

16 “Mafiáni sa priznali. Pitšovci prehovorili o vražde bosa Takáča, študenta Tupého aj Ernesta Valka”, *centrum.sk*, 3 May 2017; “Policia objasnila skutky zločineckej skupiny pitšovci, obvinila tri osoby”, *SITA Slovenská tlačová agentúra*, 13 June 2017.

17 “Takáčovci skončili, trinásť členov gangu je za mrežami”, *Noviny.sk*, 5 May 2016; “Borbély was wrong”, *The Slovak Spectator*, 20 April 2016.

18 “Správa o stave a vývoji drogovej scény na uzemi Slovenskej Republiky v roku 2014 (v kontexte s historickým vývojom od roku 1989)”, *Národná protidrogová jednotka, Ministerstvo vnútra SR*, 16 March 2015.

19 *Trestná činnosť v Slovenskej republike v roku 2014*, Ministerstvo vnútra SR, Prezídium Policajného zboru, 2014.

20 *Strategy to Combat Organised Crime for the Years 2015-2017*, pp.12-14.

21 For a breakdown of the activities of these groups, see *Strategy to Combat Organised Crime for the Years 2015-2017*, pp.12-14, and “Balkan Organized Crime Sets up in Prague”, *Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP)*, 23 November 2015.

22 *Strategy to Combat Organised Crime for the Years 2015-2017*, p.13.

Italian crime groups – especially the ‘Ndrangheta – appear to be particularly active in Slovakia. Besides financial crime, they are active in cross-border trafficking of drugs and firearms between Slovakia and Italy. In 2016, several members of the *Ceusi* clan from the Italian *Cosa Nostra* were arrested by Italian police on charges of trafficking over 160 decommissioned weapons (purchased for €45,000) from Slovakia through Austria.<sup>23</sup> After reactivation, the weapons were sent to Malta for onward travel, possibly to Egypt.<sup>24</sup>

The murder of Slovak investigative journalist Ján Kuciak in February 2018 only served to further highlight the role of organised crime in the country.<sup>25</sup> Kuciak had been investigating the activities of the ‘Ndrangheta and other Italian mafia groups in Slovakia.<sup>26</sup> His final publication before his murder covered the activities of Carmine Cinnante, who was arrested in 2010 by Slovak and Italian police for arms trafficking to Italy under the auspices of Belvedere Spinello, one of the branches of the ‘Ndrangheta.<sup>27</sup>

Kuciak’s reporting also alleged links between the ‘Ndrangheta and leading Slovak politicians, involving cases of tax fraud, money laundering, and embezzlement of EU funds.<sup>28</sup> In particular, his work highlighted that Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico had hired an assistant who had business connections with Antonino Vadala, a suspected member of the ‘Ndrangheta mafia.<sup>29</sup> In March 2018, Slovak police executed a European Arrest Warrant against Antonino Vadala related to drug trafficking,<sup>30</sup> and Prime Minister Robert Fico resigned given the fallout from the scandal.

## Activities and Locations

*Cross-border smuggling* – especially of drugs – is one of the primary sources of revenue for organised crime groups,<sup>31</sup> alongside economic, financial, and property crime.<sup>32</sup> Slovakia does not have a large domestic market for drug consumption. Instead, it mostly serves as a transit country for the international drug trade, sitting at the confluence of East-West and South-North smuggling routes in Europe.<sup>33</sup> According to the leaked Slovakian “mafia lists”, organised crime groups are present throughout the country, with their activities concentrated in large cities such as Bratislava and Banská Bystrica.<sup>34</sup>

23 “Weapons smugglers arrested in Italy with the support of Europol”, *Europol*, 9 June 2016.

24 Nils Duquet (eds), *Triggering Terror: Illicit Gun Markets and Firearms Acquisitions of Terrorist Networks in Europe*, Flemish Peace Institute, 2018, p.264.

25 Kuciak and his partner, Martina Kušnírová, were both shot and killed while at their home in the village of Veľká Mača.

26 “Murdered Slovak Reporter Sought to Expose Italian Organized Crime”, *The New York Times*, 28 February 2018.

27 Ján Kuciak, “Talianska mafia na Slovensku. Jej chápadlá siahajú aj do politiky”, *aktuality.sk*, 28 February 2018; “A Murdered Journalist’s Last Investigation”, *OCCRP*, available at: <https://www.occrp.org/en/amurderedjournalistslastinvestigation/>.

28 “Slovak Reporter’s Assassination May Be Tied to Italian Mafia”, *Bloomberg*, 27 February 2018.

29 “The Model, the Mafia, and the Murderers”, *OCCRP*, 28 February 2018.

30 “Italian entrepreneur Vadala reportedly detained due to drugs”, *The Slovak Spectator*, 13 March 2018.

31 *Správa o činnosti SIS za rok 2016*, Slovenská informačná služba, June 2017; Miroslav Lisoň and Jozef Meteňko, “Aktivity kriminálnych skupín na území Slovenskej Republiky”, *Science & Military*, Vol 1, 2007, pp.51-58.

32 “Správa o bezpečnosti Slovenskej republiky za rok 2016”, Predseda Vlády a Predseda Bezpečnostnej Rady SR, 28 June 2017.

33 Samuel Goda and Jaroslav Ušiak, “What is the Threat Perception of the Slovak Republic?”, *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies*, Vol 10, No 1, pp.61-87; *European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA) 2017: Crime in the age of technology*, Europol, 2017, pp.35-40.

34 Miroslav Lisoň and Jozef Meteňko, “Aktivity kriminálnych skupín na území Slovenskej Republiky”, *Science & Military*, Vol 1, 2007, pp.51-58.

The Czech Republic is considered a major producer of marijuana and methamphetamines – particularly crystal meth. According to the country's National Centre for Combating Drugs, Vietnamese gangs dominate this field.<sup>35</sup> Vietnamese markets – which are almost all located in Czech border towns – have become known as destination points for drug users from neighbouring countries.<sup>36</sup> This is particularly popular amongst Germans who cross the border in search of crystal meth – where the phenomenon is known as *Crystal-tourismus* (“crystal tourism”) – which has led to a surge of drug-related activity in German states such as Saxony and Bavaria.<sup>37</sup>

Long-standing organised criminality, such as *extortion* and *protection rackets*, is also present.<sup>38</sup> František Borbély, who was the leader of the *Borbélyovci* crime group, for example, owned the “DKFB” security company which was used to win public tenders. This company was allegedly used to launder the proceeds of his extortion racket.<sup>39</sup>

Organised criminals have also expanded into *financial crimes* such as bank and tax fraud.<sup>40</sup> In fact, the rate of sophisticated financial and economic crime in Slovakia has risen, while the number of “conventional” violent crimes has decreased.<sup>41</sup> Law enforcement has, in contrast, made a concerted effort to target and incapacitate those groups committing violent crimes.<sup>42</sup>

“Clientelism” is often portrayed as a major driver behind organised crime. This form of corruption involves state officials, politicians, and organised criminals, operating a system of political patronage.<sup>43</sup> Related to this, financial crime in the Czech Republic centres on fraud in the form of securing government tenders and EU funds, as well as preying on those in debt through bankruptcy proceedings.<sup>44</sup>

*Human trafficking* is a persistent issue in both countries. Most victims are trafficked for sexual exploitation – with the Czech Republic and Slovakia as both transit and destination countries – or to work as slave labour.<sup>45</sup> According to two researchers, Miroslav Lisoň and Jozef Meteňko, the coordination of illegal migration is highly controlled by organised criminals, and often coordinated with groups in neighbouring Hungary and the Czech Republic.<sup>46</sup> The scale of the problem is difficult to gauge, as victims may be afraid to contact the police, and the crime generally remains

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35 “Český trh s drogami ovládají Vietnamci. „Jsou schopni vyrobit na jeden var stonásobek pervitinu“, *Lidovky.cz*, 10 September 2016.

36 “Nakupuje tu drogy celá Evropa. Ve vietnamsko-českých večerkách a tržnicích je pervitin levný, vysvětluje šéf české protidrogové centrály a vypráví, jak to chodí“, *Krajskélisty.cz*, 27 November 2015.

37 “Rising Crystal meth industry winning drugs war”, *Euronews*, 29 April 2016; Jens Kastern, “Germany’s drug tourism problem: Vietnamese blamed for surge in drug-buying trips to Czech Republic”, *Post Magazine*, 3 April 2018.

38 “Takáčovci skončili, trinásť členov gangu je za mrežami”, *Noviny.sk*, 5 May 2016; “Borbély was wrong”, *The Slovak Spectator*, 20 April 2016.

39 *Ibid.*

40 Miroslav Lisoň and Jozef Meteňko, pp.51-58.

41 *Správa o činnosti SIS za rok 2016*, Slovenská informačná služba, June 2017; “Na Slovensko sa snažia infiltrovať zločinecké skupiny z iných štátov”, *sme.sk*, 6 August 2017.

42 *Ibid.*

43 Jaroslav Kolomek, *Krátkodobá prognóza vybraných druhov kriminality v SR na roky 2013-2016*, Akadémia Policajného Zboru v Bratislave, 2013.

44 *Strategy to Combat Organised Crime for the Years 2015-2017*, pp.13-14.

45 “Mafia na vojenský spôsob: príbeh piťovcov z Lamača”, *aktuality.sk*, 6 September 2016; *2016 Status Report on Trafficking in Human Beings in the Czech Republic*, Odbor bezpečnostní politiky a prevence kriminality Ministerstva vnitra České republiky, 2017, pp.5-9.

46 Miroslav Lisoň and Jozef Meteňko, pp.51-58.

underreported. In 2016, there were only 38 identified cases of human trafficking in the Czech Republic,<sup>47</sup> and 88 cases in Slovakia.<sup>48</sup>

The *conflict in neighbouring Ukraine* may influence the Slovakian crime scene. The Slovak Information Service (*Slovenská informačná služba*, or SIS) has reported increased activity of groups involved in the trafficking of drugs and weapons across the Ukrainian border.<sup>49</sup> This area is a known human trafficking point,<sup>50</sup> with Ukrainian and Balkan groups particularly active in the border area.<sup>51</sup>

In summary, the two countries have experienced a range of organised criminal activities, though – as will be shown in the following section – the linkages between these activities and terrorism are limited.

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47 *Zpráva o stavu obchodování s lidmi v České Republice za rok 2016*, Odbor bezpečnostní politiky a prevence criminality Ministerstva Vnitra, 2017, p.6.

48 *Situácia v oblasti obchodovania s ľuďmi na Slovensku*, Ministerstvo vnútra SR, 2018.

49 *Správa o činnosti SIS za rok 2016*, Slovenská informačná služba, June 2017.

50 Miroslav Lisoň and Jozef Meteňko, pp.51-58.

51 *Ibid.*

## 3 Terrorism

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Europe has witnessed a wave of jihadist terrorist attacks in recent years, ranging from coordinated bombings to vehicle-ramming and knife attacks, that have left hundreds killed and many more injured.<sup>52</sup> In contrast to their experiences with organised crime, neither the Czech Republic nor Slovakia have had much exposure to terrorism. While there has not been a single fatal terrorist attack in either country, terrorism – and the fears surrounding it – has still affected their social fabric, with security concerns dominating the domestic agendas.

Historical examples of terrorism in either country are very rare. The Czech Republic has only ever prosecuted a handful of terrorism-related cases, none of which have claimed any lives.<sup>53</sup> Slovakia's only case of terrorism to date took place in 2011, when lone-actor Ladislav Kuc placed an improvised explosive device in a bin outside a McDonald's restaurant in the city of Košice. No one was killed or injured when Kuc's bomb partially exploded. It is suspected that Kuc was an animal-rights extremist, and he was initially prosecuted for acts of terrorism, though the original verdict was later changed to charges of public endangerment.<sup>54</sup>

### Jihadist

Both countries have virtually non-existent jihadist scenes. There have been no jihadist attacks in either country. While thousands of European “foreign fighters” have joined jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq, the Czech Republic and Slovakia have been minimally affected. (There are no official figures on the number that travelled.) In February 2016, a 20-year-old Czech national named Jan Silovsky was stopped en route to Islamic State held territory. He had planned to fly to Gaziantep in south eastern Turkey, and from there cross over into Syria, though he was arrested during a stopover in Istanbul Airport and deported to the Czech Republic. He was eventually convicted of terrorism-related offences.<sup>55</sup>

There have only been a handful of other cases. In 2017, the Czech BIS intelligence agency reported on money having been sent from the country to help finance Islamic State fighters, though no further details were

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52 We define terrorism as symbolic acts of politically motivated violence. See Peter R. Neumann and M.L.R. Smith, *The Strategy of Terrorism* (London: Routledge, 2008), p.8.

53 These were: the 2015 Revolutionary Cell Network case; the 2016 arrest of a would-be jihadist foreign fighter, Jan Silovsky; the 2017 “mock attacks” case; and the 2018 arrests of three suspected jihadists.

54 *Správa o bezpečnosti Slovenskej republiky za rok 2011*, Bezpečnostná rada Slovenskej republiky, 27 June 2012; Jaroslav Naď and Juraj Krúpa, *ZaBEZPEČ si vedomosti: Terorizmus*, Slovak Security Policy Institute, October 2016, pp.1-10.; “Slovakia's first eco-terrorist may have his sentence extended”, *The Slovak Spectator*, 24 January 2018.

55 “Would be Czech Islamic State Soldier Testifies to Police”, *Radio Prague*, 13 October 2016; “Czech Is Sentenced to Prison for Trying to Join ISIS”, *New York Times*, 24 February 2017.

specified.<sup>56</sup> In January 2018, Czech authorities accused three nationals – two brothers and one woman – of supporting Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, formerly known as Jabhat al-Nusra. One of the brothers had travelled to Idlib, Syria, where he married the woman who arrived later. The other brother is accused of facilitating their travel.<sup>57</sup>

Curiously, Salah Abdeslam – a member of the Islamic State network that carried out attacks the November 2015 Paris attacks – had a connection to Slovakia. Abdeslam had travelled there a few months before the attacks, reportedly staying in the city of Nitra for a few weeks in the summer of 2015.<sup>58</sup> The exact purpose of Abdeslam's stay in Slovakia is not clear. It may have been a staging point for his journeys to Budapest, as it is known that he made four trips there in the months before the attacks to pick up other Islamic State militants.<sup>59</sup>

Despite the minimal jihadist threat, some Czech and Slovak groups have sought to capitalise on the widespread fears of insecurity and terrorism. In August 2016, men staged a pseudo-jihadist attack by driving a Humvee into a public square in Prague, dressed in army fatigues and wielding replica guns. The men – accompanied by a camel and a man dressed as an imam – began shouting “Allahu Akbar”, while tourists ran away, believing a genuine terrorist attack was taking place.<sup>60</sup>

Two other dangerous “mock attacks” took place in 2017, when tree branches were sawn in a way as to result in them falling on train tracks in June and July to cause a train accident. In both incidents there was a nearby plaque with the phrase “Allah is great!” written in the Latin alphabet.<sup>61</sup> The perpetrator was a 70-year-old Czech man who had previously disseminated fake Islamist-style flyers warning of an imminent attack on the country.<sup>62</sup> The events were initially investigated as acts of terrorism, though in February 2018 the man was charged with inciting hatred against Muslims.

## Far-Right Extremists

By contrast, there are established far-right scenes in both the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In Slovakia, there are approximately 900 active members of far-right organisations, in addition to 3000 “sympathisers”, according to a 2012 estimate.<sup>63</sup> The Czech Republic, as per a 2014 estimate, has approximately 150 active members, drawn from a wider pool of 5,000 supporters.<sup>64</sup>

56 Zpráva o situaci v oblasti vnitřní bezpečnosti a veřejného pořádku na území České republiky v roce 2016, Odbor bezpečnostní politiky a prevence kriminality Ministerstva vnitra České republiky, May 2017.

57 “Tři Češi obviněni z terorismu. Pomáhali prý v Sýrii organizaci Al-Káidy”, *Deník.cz*, 23 January 2018.

58 “Pařížský atentátník mal byt vlani na Slovensku. V Nitre údajne strávil tri týždne”, *aktuality.sk*, 6 April 2017.

59 Jean-Charles Brisard and Kevin Jackson, “The Islamic State’s External Operations and the French-Belgian Nexus”, *CTC Sentinel*, Vol 9, Issue 11, 2016, pp.8-15.

60 *Annual Report of the Security Information Service for 2016*, Bezpečnostní Informační Služba, 2017; “Fake ISIS Attack in Prague, Intended as Protest, Causes Panic”, *New York Times*, 22 August 2016.

61 “Zlom v kauze srážky vlaku se stromem. Vyšetřuje se jako teroristický útok”, *Lidovky.cz*, 5 December 2017.

62 “Způsobil srážky vlaků se stromy, aby vyvolal nenávisť proti muslimům. Policie obvinila Čecha z terorismu”, *iRozhlas*, 28 February 2018.

63 Jaromír Mlýnek, *Příčiny rastu radikalizácie a agresivity určitých skupín obyvateľstva – výskumná správa*, Akadémia Policajného Zboru v Bratislave, 2012.

64 Zpráva o extremismu na území České republiky v roce 2013, Odbor bezpečnostní politiky Ministerstva Vnitra, May 2014, p.7.

Far-right extremism has traditionally targeted Roma communities,<sup>65</sup> although in recent years groups have increasingly adopted hardline anti-immigrant and anti-Islamic rhetoric.<sup>66</sup> This support can often translate into direct action. In 2016, the Slovak police recorded 80 “extremist criminal acts”, most of which were related to the far-right,<sup>67</sup> and the Office of the Special Prosecutor noted that most extremist crimes involve hate speech, verbal attacks against ethnic minorities, and the publication of fascist commentaries and symbols.<sup>68</sup>

The rise of far-right groups culminated in electoral success for the “People’s Party – Our Slovakia” (Ľudová strana – Naše Slovensko, or ĽSNS) in the 2016 parliamentary elections, where it won 8% of the vote and 14 seats (out of 150) in parliament. The group not only broke the post-1989 rut that far-right parties had experienced in the country, but it also influenced domestic political discourse.<sup>69</sup> Since then its electoral support has waned.<sup>70</sup>

In May 2017 office of the Attorney General Jaromír Čížnár submitted an official request with the Supreme Court for the dissolution of ĽSNS, noting that the party’s activities violated domestic laws, international agreements as well as the constitution.<sup>71</sup> The case has so far not been resolved and is being considered by the Supreme Court.<sup>72</sup>

In July 2017, the leader of the ĽSNS, Marian Kotleba, was charged with extremism-related offences, relating to the party’s white nationalist and pro-fascist messages.<sup>73</sup> Several other members of the party, including its parliamentary representatives, have also been charged with hate speech against Muslim, Jewish and Roma minorities.<sup>74</sup> Investigations surrounding Kotleba are still continuing. The charges are based on several donations made by Kotleba to families from socially disadvantaged backgrounds in the amount of 1488 Euros, embedding a strong pro-fascist symbolic in the combination of “14” as a reference to the fascist “14 words” slogan, and “88” referencing “HH”, or “Heil Hitler”.<sup>75</sup>

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65 See Elena Gallová Kriglerová and Jana Kadlečíková, *Verejná mienka v oblasti pravicového extrémizmu: Výskumná správa, Nadácia otvorenej spoločnosti (Open Society Foundation)*, February 2012; *Správa o činnosti SIS za rok 2016*, Slovenská informačná služba, June 2017.

66 *Správa o bezpečnosti Slovenskej republiky za rok 2016*, Predseda Vlády a Predseda Bezpečnostnej Rady SR, 28 June 2017.

67 This was an increase from 30 in 2015. More recent statistics are not currently available. *Trestná činnosť v Slovenskej republike v roku 2016*, Ministerstvo vnútra SR, Prezídium Policajného zboru, February 2017.

68 “Extrémizmus na Slovensku prudko narástol”, *aktuality.sk*, 8 October 2017.

69 Grigorij Mesežnikov and Olga Gyárfášová, *Súčasný pravicový extrémizmus a ultranacionalizmus na Slovensku: Stav, trendy, podpora*, Inštitút pre verejné otázky – Nadácia Hannsa Seidela, 2016.

70 “Far-right party crushed in Slovakia elections”, *The Independent*, 5 November 2017.

71 “Generálny prokurátor podal návrh na rozpustenie Kotlebovej ĽSNS”, *aktuality.sk*, 25 May 2017.

72 “Rozpustenie kotlebovcov stojí na súde”, *spravy.pravda.sk*, 22 February 2018.

73 “Police charge leader of Slovak far-right party with extremism”, *Reuters*, 28 July 2017.

74 “Slovenský poslanec čelí obžalobě kvůli výrokům o Romech”, *novinky.cz*, 4 December 2017.

75 “Policajti obvinili Kotlebu za šeky so sumou 1488 eur, vraj odkazovali na nacistickú symboliku”, *dennikn.sk*, 28 July 2017.

## Far-Left Extremists

In the Czech Republic, there is a small anarchist scene,<sup>76</sup> with the most high-profile case concerning the *Revolutionary Cell Network*.<sup>77</sup> This group carried out multiple incendiary attacks on parked police cars,<sup>78</sup> as well as a restaurant in Prague.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, in April 2015 its members were charged with planning an attack on a military transport train, in what became the country's first ever terrorist trial.<sup>80</sup> It later emerged that the operation was the idea of two undercover police officers who had infiltrated the group, and had encouraged the anarchists to participate. As a result, its members were eventually found not guilty.<sup>81</sup> The Revolutionary Cell Network's website, which remains accessible online, calls for violent acts of sabotage against the state. It also includes instructions on how to create a timed improvised explosive device, alongside instruments of group organisation.

Far-left groups have been much less present in Slovakia than the far-right in recent years. The SIS notes that far-left activities have been noted particularly within the context of online activities aiming at discrediting far-right groups and their narratives.<sup>82</sup> Public protests or demonstrations organised by the far-left are noted to be mostly non-violent in nature, while there have been instances of violent clashes between members of far-left and far-right groups.<sup>83</sup>

76 The increasing radicalisation of the anarchist scene has been noted: *Extremismus Souhrnná situační zpráva 4. čtvrtletí roku 2017*, Odbor bezpečnostní politiky Ministerstva vnitra České republiky, January 2018, pp.3-4.

77 "Zásah proti extremistům: anarchisté připravovali teroristický útok na vlak", *Lidovky.cz*, 1 May 2015.

78 *Extremismus Souhrnná situační zpráva 2. čtvrtletí roku 2017*, Odbor bezpečnostní politiky Ministerstva vnitra České republiky, January 2018, p.5.

79 *Extremismus Souhrnná situační zpráva 1. čtvrtletí roku 2017*, Odbor bezpečnostní politiky Ministerstva vnitra České republiky, January 2018, p.5.

80 "Stát odškodnil anarchistu Ignačáka za nezákonnou vazbu. Částku obě strany tají", *Lidovky.cz*, 14 December 2017.

81 "Soud zprostil viny pět obžalovaných z terorismu. Šlo o policejní provokaci, bránila se obhajoba", *iRozhlas*, 22 September 2017.

82 *Správa o činnosti SIS za rok 2017*, Slovenská informačná služba, May 2018.

83 Ladislav Šimon, *Extremizmus ako prejav sociálneho konfliktu*, Akadémie Policajného zboru v Bratislave, 2014, p.15.

## 4 Weapons Nexus

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In the Czech Republic and Slovakia there are no direct, overt overlaps behind criminals and terrorists. The only field where the crime-terror nexus appears – albeit in an indirect way – is the issue of firearms.<sup>84</sup>

Prior to its dissolution into the Czech Republic and Slovakia on 1 January 1993, Czechoslovakia was home to a major armaments industry, producing a variety of weapons – especially automatic rifles – and ammunition. In the years that followed, many weapons from former Czechoslovak police and military stockpiles were decommissioned into blank firing weapons – by companies such as KolArms – and were available for sale with minimal restrictions.<sup>85</sup> Yet as Project SAFTE has noted, the decommissioning was often done poorly – even on military grade assault weapons – making their reactivation relatively straightforward.<sup>86</sup>

The resulting surplus has led to a proliferation of military grade assault weapons throughout Europe. In many EU states, reactivating firearms is a common means by which firearms become available on the illicit market.<sup>87</sup> Presently, Slovak weapons have been found in the hands of criminals in countries such as Britain, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, Romania and France.<sup>88</sup> Czech nationals have also been arrested throughout Western Europe smuggling large amounts of weapons to sell on the black market.<sup>89</sup>

This abundance of accessible and easy-to-reactive weapons can make its way – via the criminal market – into the hands of terrorists. This is exactly what happened in the January 2015 attacks in Paris, when Chérif and Saïd Kouachi killed twelve people during a firearms attack at the offices of Charlie Hebdo, a satirical newspaper. Their attack was coordinated with Amedy Coulibaly, who killed five people in a series of shootings over three days, culminating in a hostage situation at a kosher supermarket in Paris. Coulibaly used two VZ. 58 assault rifles and two Tokarev TT33 pistols in the attack, and several other pistols were later found in his apartment.

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84 For more, see Naina Bajekal and Vivienne Walt, "How Europe's Terrorists Get Illegal Guns", *Time*, 7 December 2015; Stefan Canda, Jürgen Dahlkamp, Jörg Schmitt, Andreas Ulrich and Wolf Wiedmann-Schmidt, "How EU Failures Helped Paris Terrorists Obtain Weapons", *Spiegel*, 24 March 2016; and Nils Duquet (ed.), *Triggering Terror: Illicit Gun Markets and Firearms Acquisitions of Terrorist Networks in Europe*, Project SAFTE, Flemish Peace Institute, 2018; "Slovakia was a gun shop for terrorists, crooks", *The Slovak Spectator*, 3 August 2016.

85 *Triggering Terror*, Flemish Peace Institute, 2018, p.208.

86 For more on this issue, see Nils Duquet and Kevin Goris, *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Project SAFTE, Flemish Peace Institute, 2018.

87 *Triggering Terror*, Flemish Peace Institute, 2018, p.356.

88 See, Lina Grip, "Illegal weapons, gangs and violent extremism in Denmark" in *Triggering Terror*, p.141; Nicolas Florquin and André Desmarais, "Lethal legacies: Illicit firearms and terrorism in France" in *Triggering Terror*, p.197; and Roxana Albisteanu, Alexandru Dena and Matthew Lewis, "Romania: firearms and security at the EU eastern border" in *Triggering Terror*, p.361.

89 "Arsenal of 79 hand guns seized at Channel Tunnel from van preparing to enter Britain", *The Telegraph*, 3 July 2017; "Czech Businessman Arrested in Brussels on Arms Trafficking Charges", *Radio Prague*, 6 January 2006.

Coulibaly's weapons originated from "AFG Security", which runs both a gun shop in the Slovak town of Partizánske in addition to an online shop that legally sells deactivated weapons to customers in other EU countries.<sup>90</sup> The company sold as many as 14,000 weapons, mostly over its website,<sup>91</sup> often to criminal networks throughout Europe, including far-right extremists in Germany, using local intermediaries which re-activate the firearms and facilitate their sales.<sup>92</sup>

Yet AFG had sold those weapons to individuals who, in turn, resold them on the illicit firearms market, meaning there was an *indirect* link between the Slovak retailer and the jihadists. It is unknown whether anyone in the supply chain knew of Coulibaly's intentions.

Slovak weapons have also been used in mass shootings. In July 2016, 18-year-old Ali Sonboly killed nine people in a firearms attacks by the Olympia shopping mall in Munich. The motives behind his attack remain unclear, though Sonboly strongly identified with the far-right terrorist Anders Breivik from Norway. (Sonboly died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound in the immediate aftermath of the attack.) German authorities stated his weapon had been acquired via the dark web, and it reportedly had a Slovak registration number.<sup>93</sup>

Deactivated firearms are still available online, as demonstrated by the investigative journalism project, "Mapping the Weapons of Terror", carried out under the umbrella of the European Investigative Collaborations (EIC). Deactivated assault weapons, pistols, and ammunition are still sold online and in person, and with the correct technical knowledge, can be easily reactivated.<sup>94</sup>

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90 *Triggering Terror*, Flemish Peace Institute, 2018; "Strelec z Mnichova si zbraň kúpil na Slovensku", *aktuality.sk*, 24 June 2015.

91 Stefan Candea, Jürgen Dahlkamp, Jörg Schmitt, Andreas Ulrich and Wolf Wiedmann-Schmidt, "How EU Failures Helped Paris Terrorists Obtain Weapons", *Spiegel*, 24 March 2016.

92 "Strelec z Mnichova si zbraň kúpil na Slovensku", *aktuality.sk*, 24 June 2015.

93 Ruth Bender and Christopher Alessi, "Munich Shooter Likely Bought Reactivated Pistol on Dark Net", *The Wall Street Journal*, 24 July 2016.

94 "Route of weapons used in Paris terror attacks leads to Slovak online gun shop", *EIC*, 18 March 2016. For more, see the EIC website: <https://eic.network/projects/arms>.

## 5 Recommendations

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This paper has examined potential links between crime and terrorism in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Although organised crime groups are active in the two countries, there is barely any terrorist activity, which means that direct links between crime and terrorism do not exist. However, there is an indirect link between crime and terrorism, which results from the abundance of accessible and easy-to-reactive weapons from Slovakia.

We recommend the following actions and/or good practices:

### 1. Effective monitoring

We recommend that authorities continue to periodically review their statistics on organised crime and terrorism, and consciously monitor them for emerging linkages between the two phenomena.

### 2. Re-thinking radicalisation

Given the partial merging of terrorist and extremist milieus, core assumptions about radicalisation need to be reconsidered. The behaviour of jihadists with criminal pasts often contradicts the notion that extremism correlates with religious behaviour. Where needed, we recommend that authorities update their checklists, indicators, and training materials in order to reflect changing patterns and profiles.

### 3. Countering all streams of terrorist financing

Efforts to countering terrorist finance have excessively focused on the international financial system – with meagre results. We recommend that authorities broaden their efforts at countering terrorist finance to include small-scale and petty crime, such as drug dealing, theft, robberies, and the trafficking in goods.

### 4. Monitoring illicit trafficking

Authorities in both countries should review and strengthen their efforts to monitor the illicit trafficking of humans and goods, including locally-produced firearms.

## **5. Information sharing**

As the lines between terrorism and “ordinary” crime have become increasingly blurred, relevant agencies need to become more effective at sharing relevant information across departments and “disciplines”, as well as forming new “coalition” of individuals and institutions that may not be used to working with each other.

We recommend that governments continue to review existing channels and systems of information exchange, explore creating new partnerships (such as with local authorities, civil society, and the private sector), and make appropriate changes reflecting the new – and multi-dimensional – nature of the threat.







# Crime Terror Nexus

## **THE CRIME TERROR NEXUS**

The Crime Terror Nexus is a project that investigates links between crime and terrorism, and identifies better ways to counter them.

Over the course of 18 months, we are documenting links between crime and terrorism across the European Union. Our findings are disseminated through reports, events, and workshops.

We are partnering with officials and local stakeholders to create new and innovative approaches that contribute to countering crime and making our countries safer.

The Crime Terror Nexus is a project of Panta Rhei Research Ltd. It is funded by PMI IMPACT, a global grant initiative of Philip Morris International that supports projects against illegal trade.

Panta Rhei Research Ltd. is fully independent in implementing the project and has editorial responsibility for all views and opinions expressed herein.

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## **CONTACT DETAILS**

For questions, queries and additional copies of this report, please contact Katie Rothman: [katie@crimeterrornexus.com](mailto:katie@crimeterrornexus.com)

Registered address: Panta Rhei Research Ltd.,  
37a Great Percy Street, London WC1X 9RD, United Kingdom

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