



# The Crime-Terror Nexus in Croatia and Slovenia

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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 Croatia and Slovenia, 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.
  - It remains important for both countries to be alert to the possible use of existing illicit criminal networks by terrorist groups as a means of trafficking arms and people into western and central Europe.
  - 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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Croatia and Slovenia have undergone a series of profound transformations in recent decades. Not only have the two countries transitioned from socialism to capitalism, and from authoritarian rule to democracy, they have also become newly independent states and entered the European Union. While those transformations are widely seen as successful, the speed and extent of the change that has occurred 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 Croatia and Slovenia. 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 April and June 2018, and was carried out by a team of Macedonian, Serbian, 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 are potential links, as terrorist networks may seek to take advantage of the illicit trafficking routes that cross both countries on the way from the Balkans and the Middle East into the central and western Europe. As a consequence, it remains important for both countries to be alert to the potential use of existing illicit criminal networks by terrorist groups, especially as a means of trafficking arms and people.

Our recommendations include actions on monitoring, 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 Croatia and Slovenia, 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 Ognjan Denkovski and Millie Radovic 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.

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<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 Croatia and Slovenia have experienced in recent decades, together with the countries' strategic location between the Balkans and central and western Europe, have created opportunities for organised crime groups to take root and establish themselves.<sup>5</sup> This section provides an overview of the organised crime scene in both countries, covering the groups involved, their activities, and the locations in which they operate.

### Groups

The birth of organised crime in Croatia and Slovenia can be traced to the 1990s, following the collapse of Yugoslavia. While there were long-standing examples of the phenomenon in both countries, the transition to democracy afforded opportunities for criminal groups to emerge and take advantage of new markets. This was frequently abetted by corruption, with its facilitating role in Croatian organised crime noted by both the European Commission and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).<sup>6</sup>

In Croatia, two strands of organised crime initially emerged: one operating largely through underworld connections, and in defiance of the state, and another operating in cooperation with – or at least with the passive acceptance of – the authorities.<sup>7</sup> In neighbouring Slovenia, however, organised crime never became as dominant,<sup>8</sup> though there is nevertheless the presence of white-collar criminals, often from the upper echelons of Slovenian society,<sup>9</sup> and small-scale networks revolving around kinship or friendship ties.<sup>10</sup>

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5 In Croatia, organised crime is defined as "systematically planned, prepared, share-of-work committed criminal acts, performed by the members associated in a criminal organization with permanent actions with the use of intimidation, violence or corruption regardless of state borders, with the view to obtain financial gain or social power", as per Marijan Kos, "Pojavni oblici međunarodnoga gospodarskoga kriminaliteta kao čimbenik nacionalne ekonomije", *Međunarodne studije: časopis za međunarodne odnose, vanjsku politiku i diplomaciju*, Vol 12, No 3, 2013, p.158. In Slovenia, it is defined as "a group of three or more persons existing over a period of time acting in concert with the aim of committing crimes for financial or material benefit", as per the 2000 *United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*.

6 European Commission, *Croatia to the EU Anti-Corruption Report*, European Commission, 2014; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Corruption in Croatia: Bribery as experienced by the population*, UNODC, 2011, p.3.

7 Vera Stojarova, "Organized Crime in the Western Balkans", *HUMSEC Journal*, Vol 1, No 1, 2007, p.94; Ognian Shentov, *Partners in crime: The risks of symbiosis between the security sector and organized crime in Southeast Europe*, Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD), 2004, p.70; *Croatia to the EU Anti-Corruption Report*, European Commission, 2014, p.3.

8 For more on this, see Anja Logonder, "Who is 'Yugo' in 'Yugo-mafia'? A comparative analysis of Serbian and Slovene offenders", in P.C. van Duyne (ed.), *European crime-markets at cross-roads: extended and extending criminal Europe* (Prague: Wolf Legal Publishers, 2007), pp.63-97.

9 Bostjan Slak, Maja Modic, Katja Eman and Branko Azman, "The sex market, bars and nightclubs. Criminal infiltration in Slovenia" in Ernesto U. Savona, Michele Riccardi, and Giulia Berlusconi (eds.), *Organised Crime in European Businesses* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp.51- 64; Savona Ernesto U. and Berlusconi Giulia (eds.), *Organized Crime Infiltration of Legitimate Businesses in Europe: A Pilot Project in Five European Countries*, Project ARIEL, Università degli Studi di Trento, 2015, pp.50-56.

10 Bostjan Slak et al, "The sex market, bars and nightclubs. Criminal infiltration in Slovenia", pp.51-64.

The limited extent of Slovenian organised crime is often said to be the result of the country's small size,<sup>11</sup> though similarly sized locations, such as Corsica and Sicily, have seen significant activities by organised crime groups.

There are no definitive numbers of active organised crime groups in either country. In Croatia, media reports estimate some 50 groups operating in the country, though there is no confirmation of this in official reports.<sup>12</sup> Estimates in Slovenia are similar, with between 40 and 70 groups active there, each with between 3 and 30 members.<sup>13</sup> In general, however, there is a paucity of data about the current number and structure of groups in either country.

Groups can be composed of a variety of ethnicities and nationalities. There exist ethnically and nationally homogenous groups, formed of native Slovenian and Croatian nationals, alongside Serbian, Croatian and Albanian groups.<sup>14</sup> There are also criminal groups which are ethnically diverse, having members from throughout the region.<sup>15</sup>

This is reflected in the scope of their activity, which is national and transnational in nature. Central to this is cooperation with groups from neighbouring countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, Macedonia, Austria, Hungary, and Italy.

Rather than having a fixed hierarchy, criminal activity often centres on networks that collaborate for specific projects and operations.<sup>16</sup> This can be seen in Slovenia, where different phases of criminal activity – such as logistical tasks – are the responsibility of specific “cells” that are typically unaware of the entire criminal scheme.<sup>17</sup> Croatian groups tend to be involved in a multitude of criminal activities, whereas Slovenian groups are characterised by their specialisation for certain crimes.<sup>18</sup>

## Activities and Locations

Groups are involved in a variety of crime, much of it transitory in nature.<sup>19</sup> Activities include the trafficking of drugs, people, and weapons, alongside vehicle theft and money laundering.<sup>20</sup>

Croatia is a key point on the strategic “Balkan route” of illicit trade and trafficking, and the country sits at the crossroads of western, central, and south-eastern Europe. Its geography can be readily exploited by traffickers, with a coastline of 1,778 km and over 1,200 islands.

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11 Ibid.

12 “Strane mafije u Hrvatskoj: imaju i tajne zatvore”, *Express*, 17 June 2017.

13 Laura Kokot, “Organizirani kriminal in njegova razširjenost v Sloveniji: diplomsko delo visokošolskega strokovnega študija Varnost in policijsko delo”, Doctoral thesis, Univerza v Mariboru, 2012, p.29.; “V Sloveniji ni kriminalnih združb mafijskega tipa”, *Dnevnik*, 26 May 2007.

14 Transcrime, *The contribution of data exchange systems to the fight against organized crime in the SEE countries*, Università degli Studi di Trento, 2004, p.309.

15 Ibid, p.132; Laura Kokot, “Organizirani kriminal in njegova razširjenost v Sloveniji: diplomsko delo visokošolskega strokovnega študija Varnost in policijsko delo”, p.29.

16 Davor Derecinovic, “Kratak pregled pravnog okvira za suzbijanje organiziranog kriminala u prostoru sigurnosti, slobode i pravde Europske unije”, *Godišnjak Akademije pravnih znanosti Hrvatske*, Vol 5, No 1, 2014, pp.40-53.

17 Ibid.

18 Transcrime, 2004, p.308.

19 Vera Stojarova, “Organized Crime in the Western Balkans”, *HUMSEC Journal*, Vol 1, No 1, 2007, pp.91-114.

20 Davor Derecinovic, 2014, pp.40-53.

Difficulties in policing this border have been long noted: a 2001 inspection by the country's customs agency noted 400 unofficial points of entry used by smugglers, in addition to the 200 official border crossings.<sup>21</sup> (50 of the official crossings had no customs officer whatsoever). This has not improved in recent years, as the border with Bosnia remains problematic, despite Croatia's ascension to the European Union.

## Drugs

Drug trafficking networks use Croatia – and to a lesser extent Slovenia – as a transit point for shipments from Asia and the Middle East heading towards the lucrative western European market. This includes heroin from Afghanistan, cocaine from Latin America, and cannabis grown in neighbouring Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>22</sup>

The Balkan route is predominantly used for *heroin trafficking*. This appears to be restricted to land routes, as Italian authorities have not reported maritime seizures of the product in the Adriatic Sea. Seizures of heroin originating from South-Eastern Europe and travelling through the Balkan route accounted for 97% of all land seizures into Western and Central Europe. With the annual value of the Balkan Route heroin trade estimated at \$28bn, the profits involved can be substantial.<sup>23</sup> Albanian groups have a dominant role in the trade in both countries.<sup>24</sup>

*Cocaine trafficking* also exists in the region, and recent arrests show the international nature of the cocaine trade and the multinational response to it. Operation NANA, which culminated in March 2018, led to the arrest of nine individuals in Croatia, Germany, the Netherlands, and Slovenia as part of a cocaine and cannabis smuggling ring. The network was importing 100kg of cocaine and 150kg of cannabis to Rijeka in Croatia, via a container ship from Panama. Operation NANA was led by the Croatian Police and jointly conducted by Colombia, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Panama, Slovenia, Spain, the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and Europol.<sup>25</sup>

This is in contrast to earlier UNODC statements that there was no evidence of large-scale cocaine trafficking via Croatian ports – or, indeed, any other ports along the Adriatic coast – suggesting that the trade is flexible and evolving.<sup>26</sup>

Smugglers can be creative in their means, and utilise land, sea, and air to achieve their aims. Examples have included the use of funeral hearses as well as mock ambulances to hide drugs.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, in recent years,

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21 Ognian Shentov, *Partners in crime: The risks of symbiosis between the security sector and organized crime in Southeast Europe*, Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD), 2004, p.73.

22 Roberto Forte (ed.), *Organized Crime and the Fight against Crime in the Western Balkans: a Comparison with the Italian Models and Practices*, Sharing Alternative Practices for the Utilization of Confiscated Criminal Assets (SAPUCCA), 2013, p.16; Prezelj Iztok and Marija Gaber, *Smuggling as a Threat to National and International Security: Slovenia and the Balkan Route*, Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes (PFPC), Athena Papers Series No 5, 2005, p.10; and European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) 2018 country reports on Croatia and Slovenia, available at: [http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/countries/drug-reports/2018/croatia\\_en](http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/countries/drug-reports/2018/croatia_en) and [http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/countries/drug-reports/2018/slovenia\\_en](http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/countries/drug-reports/2018/slovenia_en).

23 *Drug Money: The Illicit proceeds of opiates trafficked on the Balkan Route*, UNODC, 2015, p.1.

24 *The Illicit Drug Trade through South-Eastern Europe*, UNODC, 2014, p.37.

25 "100kg of cocaine and 150kg of marijuana seized in major international operation dismantling Balkan cartel", *Europol*, 8 March 2018.

26 *The Illicit Drug Trade through South-Eastern Europe*, UNODC, 2014, p.93.

27 Prezelj Iztok and Marija Gaber, 2005, p.54.

a growing number of investigations have revealed evidence of criminal groups establishing transport businesses in Slovenia, registering heavy good vehicles and recruiting drivers for smuggling large quantities of a variety of illicit drugs.<sup>28</sup>

Albanian *cannabis* is also trafficked through Croatia and Slovenia, en route towards western Europe. Most of this trafficking is assumed to target Italy, though there have also been attempts to supply cannabis to the Dutch market.<sup>29</sup> Slovenian police recently uncovered a network of Albanian and Slovenian criminals throughout the country, based in Ljubljana, Koper, and Celje. The network grew cannabis in Albania, stored it in Slovenia, and then smuggled it onwards via Austria to Germany. Many of the Albanian nationals involved in the operation had Slovenian nationality, and the group was also involved in counterfeit money printing houses in Bulgaria.<sup>30</sup>

Neither country is a major drug producer. There is evidence of the production of cannabis and synthetic drugs in the region, which are either consumed in the domestic markets, or trafficked on to western Europe.<sup>31</sup> Recent data indicates increased indoor cultivation, which supplies neighbouring markets in Croatia, Austria, and Italy.<sup>32</sup> The quantities involved, however, are small.

Illicit trade can also flow in the reverse direction – that is, from the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and Italy – usually in smaller quantities and for niche markets like amphetamines or ecstasy.<sup>33</sup>

### *Human Trafficking*

Beyond drugs, there is a substantial issue of *human trafficking*, whether for sexual or economic exploitation. Croatia and Slovenia are destination, transit and – to a lesser extent – source countries for this crime, with the Roma population particularly vulnerable to trafficking.<sup>34</sup> The extent of the problem is difficult to gauge. A recent report by the Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) concluded that the extent of human trafficking in Croatia could be considerably higher than that identified by the government.<sup>35</sup> In Slovenia, crime groups have sought to use taxis to traffic people between locations, showing how organised crime can often take advantage of other business sectors.<sup>36</sup> Human trafficking often involves the supplementary criminal activity of forging identity documents.<sup>37</sup>

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28 *Slovenia Country Drug Report 2018*, EMCDDA, 2018, available at: [http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/countries/drug-reports/2018/slovenia\\_en](http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/countries/drug-reports/2018/slovenia_en).

29 *The Illicit Drug Trade through South-Eastern Europe*, UNODC, 2014, p.103.

30 "Organizirani kriminal: Glavni ljubljanski osumljenec preprodajal tudi v najetem lokalu v Šiški", *Dnevnik*, 9 October 2016.

31 Zlate Dimovski, Kire Babanoski, and Ice Ilijevski, "Republic of Macedonia as a Transit Country for the Illegal Trafficking in the 'Balkan Route'", *Varstvoslovje*, Vol 15, No 2, 2013, p.203; *The Illicit Drug Trade through South-Eastern Europe*, UNODC, 2014, p.70.

32 *Slovenia Country Drug Report 2017*, EMCDDA, 2017, p.16.

33 Prezelj Iztok and Marija Gaber, 2005, p.39.

34 *Trafficking in Humans Reports*, US Department of State, 2017, p.360; Laura Kokot, 2012, p.28.

35 *Organized Crime and the Fight against Crime in the Western Balkans*, SAPUCCA, 2013, p.16.

36 *Ibid.*

37 *Transcrime*, 2004, p.135.

## Firearms

Like in many post-conflict countries, *arms trafficking* is an issue in Croatia, with there existing a large cache of legacy military grade firearms from the Croatian Independence war (1991-1995). Nearly one million weapons are estimated to be in the hands of Croatian civilians – 350,000 of those legal and registered,<sup>38</sup> though these estimates are difficult to confirm. Despite the presence of large numbers of illegal firearms, it appears that the marketplace for them is comparatively small.<sup>39</sup> In recent years, Slovenian arms traffickers have begun operating with shipments on the dark web.<sup>40</sup>

An investigation by Project SAFTE on the Croatian illicit firearms market concluded that the trade is not a “highly profitable business”, with activities mostly existing on an ad hoc basis.<sup>41</sup> When arms trafficking does take place, it is primarily oriented towards criminal groups in the Netherlands, Sweden, Germany, and the UK. These can often involve the exchange of drugs, as seen in two historical cases of trafficking from Croatia in 2003 and 2010.<sup>42</sup> There are no confirmed reports tying Croatian firearms to recent terrorist attacks in Europe, though there were historical links to the IRA and ETA in the late 1990s.<sup>43</sup>

The concentration of organised criminal groups in Slovenia is reported in the biggest cities of Maribor, Ljubljana, as well as the port of Koper, and the smaller towns of Kranj and Novo Mesto.<sup>44</sup> The distribution of Albanian, Serbian, Croatian and Montenegrin groups is found in Ljubljana and other large cities. Slovene groups are dispersed across the country.<sup>45</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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38 Suzette R. Grillot “Guns in the Balkans: controlling small arms and light weapons in seven Western Balkan countries.” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol 10, No 2, p.154.

39 Filip Dragović, Paul James, Krešimir Mamić and Robert Mikac, *Availability of illegal weapons: connecting the dots – Case study of the Republic of Croatia*, in Nils Duquet (ed.), *Triggering Terror: Illicit Gun Markets and Firearms Acquisitions of Terrorist Networks in Europe*, Project SAFTE, Flemish Peace Institute, 2018, p.112.

40 “Darknet Arms Vendor Arrested in Slovenia with support of Europol”, Europol, 20 December 2016.

41 Filip Dragović, Paul James, Krešimir Mamić and Robert Mikac, 2018, p.115.

42 Ibid, p.109.

43 Ibid, p.114. A Croatian submachine gun was, however, found in a 2016 cache of weapons amassed by French jihadist Reda Kriket.

44 “V Sloveniji ni kriminalnih združb mafjskega tipa”, *Dnevnik*, 26 May 2007.

45 Laura Kokot, 2012, p.29.

## 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>46</sup> In contrast to their experiences with organised crime, neither Croatia nor Slovenia have had much exposure to terrorism.

### Jihadism

The only jihadist-inspired terrorist attack in either country was on October 20th, 1995. The Egyptian Islamic Group (*Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiyya*) exploded a car bomb at the police headquarters in Rijeka, Croatia. The attack was in response to the arrest in Croatia of an Islamic Group leader, Talaat Fouad Qasim, who was in transit to the conflict zone in Bosnia. The explosion resulted in 29 injuries (none fatal) and the suicide of the attacker.<sup>47</sup>

The countries have only experienced isolated cases of radicalisation. The most high-profile instance was of Irene Hodak from Bjelovar, Croatia, who converted to Islam and married the Al-Qaeda ideologue and propagandist Anwar Al-Awlaki.<sup>48</sup> Beyond this instance, most cases of radicalised individuals or small cells are typically connected – in one way or another – to the countries' neighbours in the Balkans, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, where there exist jihadist networks.

Croatia and Slovenia have virtually non-existent jihadist scenes. While thousands of European “foreign fighters” have joined jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq, both countries have only been minimally affected. At least three Slovenian nationals travelled,<sup>49</sup> while the Croatian Security and Intelligence Agency (*Sigurnosno-obavještajna agencija*, or SOA) has stated at least seven Croatian nationals travelled to Islamic State territory.<sup>50</sup> Six of the Croatians had dual citizenship and never resided permanently in the country; the seventh had exclusively Croatian citizenship, though seemingly radicalised in London.<sup>51</sup>

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46 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.

47 Nikola Bradic, Drazen Cuculic, and Ervin Jancic, “Terrorism in Croatia”, *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine*, Vol 18, Issue 2, pp.88-91; “Islamic Group Hits Croatia”, *The New York Times*, 22 October 1995.

48 Her story is detailed in Morten Storm (with Tim Lister and Paul Cruickshank), *Agent Storm: A Spy Inside Al Qaeda* (London: Penguin, 2015).

49 Bibi van Ginkel and Eva Entenmann (eds.), *The Foreign Fighters Phenomenon in the European Union: Profiles, Threats & Policies*, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT), 2016, p.48.

50 “Zagrepcanka iz ugledne obitelji jedina je hrvatska dzihadistica.” *Zagreb Info*, 16 Sep 2017.

51 “Hrvatica u Dzihadu Dora Bilic iz Zagreba radikalnim se islamizmom zarazila u Londonu” *Jutarnji Vijesti*, 30 Sep 2014; “Zagrepcanka iz ugledne obitelji jedina je hrvatska dzihadistica.” *Zagreb Info*, 16 Sep 2017.

Terrorism-related arrests and court proceedings are very rare. In 2015, an individual was acquitted of terrorism offences in Slovenia; their ideological affiliation was not specified.<sup>52</sup> The following year, Slovenian authorities made one arrest for jihadist-related activities.<sup>53</sup> In Croatia, meanwhile, there was one convicted for terrorism offences in 2014, though their ideological or group affiliation was not reported.<sup>54</sup>

Both countries have, nevertheless, noted the terrorist threat. The Croatian Intelligence Agency's 2017 report on national security does not see it as a primary risk, but states the risk of a "spill over" effect from terrorism elsewhere in Europe. The Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has similarly noted the threat of terrorism as an area of concern.<sup>55</sup>

## Far-Right and Far-Left Extremism

While far-left extremists have only a minimal presence in Croatia and Slovenia, the countries' far-right extremist movements have undergone a revival in recent years.<sup>56</sup> This is particularly acute in Croatia – where thousands of people have mobilised in support of far-right causes in street protests<sup>57</sup> – though there is a more scattered far-right scene in Slovenia.<sup>58</sup> Since 2015, the migrant and refugee crisis has compounded this nationalist sentiment,<sup>59</sup> though there has yet to be any terrorist attacks by far-right or far-left extremists in either country.

## A Potential Nexus

In both Croatia and Slovenia there are no direct, overt overlaps behind criminals and terrorists. Given the minimal presence of terrorist groups, networks, and individuals in either country, there is no crime-terror nexus to speak of.

However, this does not mean that a nexus may not emerge. Organised crime in both countries is transitory in nature, dominated by the trafficking of drugs, firearms, and people. These established trafficking routes and networks may be exploited by terrorists looking to enter – or indeed, leave – the European Union or move supplies across borders. As a result, the potential for criminals and terrorists to collaborate – whether on a discreet, tactical operation or on a more long-standing, strategic level – should not be ruled out. Both groups could take advantage of established illicit networks, porous borders, as well as pockets of weak law enforcement and corruption.<sup>60</sup>

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52 *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TESAT) 2016*, Europol, 2016, p.47.

53 *TESAT 2017*, Europol, 2017, p.50.

54 *TESAT 2015*, Europol, 2015, p.45.

55 *International Security*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, available at: [http://www.mzz.gov.si/en/foreign\\_policy\\_and\\_international\\_law/international\\_security/](http://www.mzz.gov.si/en/foreign_policy_and_international_law/international_security/)

56 Paul Hockenos, "Croatia's Far Right Weaponizes the Past", *Foreign Policy*, 6 May 2016; Joki Sakurai, "Make Croatia great again: how fascism emerged in the EU's youngest state", *New Statesman*, 21 May 2016.

57 Paul Hockenos, "Croatia's Far Right Weaponizes the Past", *Foreign Policy*, 6 May 2016.

58 This is contrast to the 1990s, when numerous far-right and nationalist groups – such as Black Panther (Črni panter), the Slovenian Home-Guard Union (*Slovenska domobranska zveza*), the National Renewal Front (*Fronta narodne obnove*), and Eagles of Slovenia (*Orli Slovenije*) – were active in the country.

59 Joki Sakurai, "Make Croatia great again: how fascism emerged in the EU's youngest state", *New Statesman*, 21 May 2016.

60 Tamara Makarenko and Michael Mesquita, "Categorising the crime-terror nexus in the European Union", *Global Crime*, Vol 15, Issue 3-4, 2014, p.261.

This potential is closely tied to the situation in the Balkans, where several countries in the immediate “neighbourhood” – especially Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Albania, and Macedonia – have seen active jihadist movements. As of August 2017, over 900 individuals had travelled as foreign fighters from the Western Balkans to Syria and Iraq, and approximately 250 have returned.<sup>61</sup> The threat from returnees, who could reinvigorate the jihadist movements in the region, may have a spillover effect for Croatia and Slovenia. In this way, the future may repeat the past, as the Bosnian War involved the transit of personnel, funds, and firearms throughout the region, including Croatia.<sup>62</sup>

Future political shifts – which are frequent and often major – could therefore see existing criminal networks, routes, and tactics come into contact, and potentially collaborate with, terrorists.

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61 Richard Barrett, *Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees*, The Soufan Center, 2017, p.12.

62 Peter Andreas, “The Clandestine Political Economy of War and Peace in Bosnia”, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol 48, Issue 1, 2004, pp.29-51.

## 4 Recommendations

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This paper has examined potential links between crime and terrorism in Croatia and Slovenia. 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 are potential links, as terrorist networks may seek to take advantage of the illicit trafficking routes that cross both countries on the way from the Balkans and the Middle East into central and western Europe. As a consequence, it remains important for both countries to be alert to the possible use of existing illicit criminal networks by terrorist groups, especially as a means of trafficking arms and people.

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 “coalitions” 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.

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

For more information, visit [www.crimeterrornexus.com](http://www.crimeterrornexus.com).

## 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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