



# The Crime-Terror Nexus in Bulgaria and Romania

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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 Bulgaria and Romania, 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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**B**ulgaria and Romania 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 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 Bulgaria and Romania. 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 August and October 2018, and was carried out by a team of Bulgarian, Romanian, 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 Anatolia 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.

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

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 Bulgaria and Romania, before exploring potential links between terrorism and crime. It concludes with a series of recommendations for policymakers and practitioners.

## 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...*

2 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.

3 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.

<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 Bulgaria and Romania have experienced in recent decades, together with the countries' strategic location on the frontiers of the European Union between Anatolia and Europe, have created opportunities for organised crime groups to take root and establish themselves.<sup>5</sup> In general, however, there is a paucity of data about current crime groups in either country, and of the dynamics and evolution of the criminal markets in recent years. Nevertheless, 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 Bulgaria and Romania can be traced to the 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Bloc. 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.

In Bulgaria, three strands of organised crime emerged:

- *Violent entrepreneurs*, composed of former heavy sports athletes, former officers from the police and special services, and criminals who received amnesty in the early 1990s; these groups used protection rackets to fill the vacuum of state control.<sup>6</sup>
- *Oligarchs* who monopolised the most profitable state sectors through corruption and clientelism. They obtained access to resources not through violence but through influence and penetration of the political elites.<sup>7</sup>
- *"Extreme-risk entrepreneurs"*, who are permanently involved in systematic criminal activity. Their source of income is the creation and control of black and grey channels of import, export, and the

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5 The Romanian penal code defines organised crime as "an organisation of three or more individuals established for a certain period of time acting in a coordinated manner for the purpose of committing one or more grave offences for financial gains". See "Art. 367 Noul Cod Penal Constituirea unui grup infracțional organizat Infracțiuni contra ordinii și liniștii publice", *LegeAz*, 4 May 2018. A new definition proposed in 2018 – and currently awaiting presidential decree – excludes groups formed occasionally, without a delineated structure, for the purpose of committing one or more illicit activities; "Grup infracțional organizat. Comisia lordache, redefinire", *DCnews*, 2 July 2018; "Ședința Camerei Deputaților din 4 iulie 2018 (sesiune extraordinară)", *Chamber of Deputies*, 4 July 2018. Bulgaria has no official definition of organised crime, but in practice uses a similar definition to that used in Romania – see *Организираната Престъпност на Балканите през Погледа на Законодателя*, Фондация РискМонитор, 2008, pp.39-43.

6 *Organized Crime in Bulgaria: Markets and Trends*, Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD), 2007, pp.14-23.

7 *Ibid*, pp. 23-27.

distribution of goods. What differentiates them from the ‘violent entrepreneurs’ and the ‘oligarchs’ is that the latter began their activity by non-market means – selling violence and protection and establishing corruption-based partnerships with the political elites.<sup>8</sup>

In present day Bulgaria – following the political and economic stabilisation of the country – criminal groups are an amalgamation of these three types, which are active in legitimate businesses as well as the black and grey markets.

Romanian groups can also be categorised into three broad groups: local crime groups that developed independently, and operate on a local level; native groups that have become part of transnational criminal networks; and foreign crime groups (such as Vietnamese, Chinese Triads, and groups from western Europe) that have expanded into the country.<sup>9</sup>

There are no definitive numbers of organised crime groups presently active in either country. The Bulgarian Ministry of Interior has stated more than 424 groups were active in 2016.<sup>10</sup> There are no comparable estimates available for Romania, though the Directorate for Countering Organised Crime stated that 179 groups (with 710 members arrested) were dismantled in 2017.<sup>11</sup> Media reports, meanwhile, state that 40 crime groups dominate Romania’s internal market, which in turn have a degree of control over small groups in the country.<sup>12</sup>

It appears that crime groups are mixed in their *composition*. Of the 179 crime groups dismantled in Romania in 2017, 14% were primarily organised by ethnicity, 13% were organised by nationality, and 9% by kinship or family ties.<sup>13</sup> The remainder are – most likely – mixed. No comparable statistics exist for Bulgaria, though consensus there is that groups are ethnically homogenous.<sup>14</sup>

The *organisational structure* of crime groups has changed in recent years. Chief Commissioner Ivaylo Spiridonov, Director of the Bulgarian General Directorate for Combating Organised Crime, has stated that groups have moved away from a centralised model,<sup>15</sup> while the country’s former Minister of Interior, Nikolay Radulov, has said horizontal and cellular structures are more common.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, the larger groups are said to have a more clear hierarchy of control.<sup>17</sup>

8 Ibid, pp.27-29.

9 Damian Miclea, *Combaterea Crimei Organizate – Evoluție, Tipologii, Legislație, Particularități*, Ministerului Administrației și Internelor, 2004, p.27.

10 “Почти 500 престъпни групировки у нас, броят им расте”, *Vesti*, 22 June 2016.

11 “Апроапе 1.500 de acțiuni de amploare, pentru destructurarea rețelelor infracționale de crimă organizată, într-un an”, *Directorate for Countering Organised Crime*, 4 February 2018.

12 “Harta clanurilor interlope din România. Vezi cine este “stăpân” în orașul tău”, *Gandul*, 15 March 2011; “Cele mai periculoase clanuri interlope din țară. Cine se crede mai presus de lege în orașul tău”, *Antena3*, 14 January 2013.

13 DIIICOT, *Raport De Activitate 2017*, January 2018, p.16.

14 Interview with Bulgarian security official, 1st October 2018. There are, however, exceptions – see for example “Служители на ГДБОБ задържаха престъпна група, занимавала се с незаконна продажба на оръжие”, *Главна Дирекция Борба с организираната престъпност*, 20 November 2016.

15 “Според данни на МВР организираната престъпност вече не била централизирана”, *Mediapool*, 10 October 2017.

16 “Проф. Николай Радулов –бивш секретар на МВР: Структурата на престъпността е клетъчна”, *24 часа*, 3 August 2018.

17 Interview with Bulgarian security official, 27 September 2018.

New crime groups in Romania have adopted a networked “enterprise” model, which is “highly flexible and mobile”, according to the country’s National Intelligence Service (SRI). These groups typically have fluid membership that varies from operation to operation.<sup>18</sup> Long-standing crime groups, meanwhile, maintain a rigid hierarchy, from the decision-making level down to operational units.<sup>19</sup> It is unknown how these organisational principles affect a group’s longevity.

The *scope* of these groups varies from local to national and transnational, and depends on the activity a group is involved in. Drug groups, for example, often operate according to “zones” of influence – such as particular neighbourhoods of Sofia – whereas those involved in importation are transnational by their very nature.

*Collaboration* between crime groups similarly varies according to activity; groups may collaborate on a local or transnational level.<sup>20</sup> A scheme involving the theft of luxury cars may thus involve multiple groups, with one responsible for the technical break-ins, and another for disassembly, though neither groups may be aware of the full extent of the criminal enterprise.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, groups based in coastal cities like Bourgas or Varna will work with nationwide groups to traffic contraband.

The need for collaboration is affected by a group’s specialisation, with “generalist” groups requiring greater cooperation, whereas “specialists” tend to act on their own, with minimal need or desire to collaborate with others.<sup>22</sup> There is no significant data showing that Romanian crime groups collaborate with each other, though transnational cooperation has been noted, as seen with the March 2018 arrest of 50 individuals of various nationalities – including members of the Calabrian ‘Ndrangheta – for fraud.<sup>23</sup>

A group’s principle activities can change over time. Romanian authorities have seen criminal groups move away from high-risk and high-reward activities – such as a drug trafficking – into relatively low-risk and high-reward endeavours – such as counterfeiting.

The lines here are not fixed, as polycriminality is another feature of the crime scene. Groups can shift between different activities and commodities when opportunities arise.<sup>24</sup> This was seen during the European migrant and refugee crisis in 2015, when existing organised crime groups involved in illicit trade became simultaneously involved in human smuggling, taking advantage of their existing knowledge of trafficking routes and networks.<sup>25</sup>

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18 Cathy Haenlein; Jonathan Eyal, *Organised Crime and Illicit Trade in Romania: Country Report*, RUSI, 2017, p.6.

19 “Crima organizată și securitatea națională”, *National Intelligence Service*, 30 October 2016; “Criminalitatea organizată, sub lupă”, *National Intelligence Service*, 30 October 2016.

20 Interview with Bulgarian security official, 1 October 2018.

21 See, for example, two groups involved in the production and distribution of synthetic drugs in Bulgaria: “Служители на ТСБОП-София област неутрализираха две паралелно действащи престъпни групи за производство и разпространение на наркотици”, *Главна Дирекция борба с организираната престъпност*, 15 May 2018.

22 “Според данни на МВР организираната престъпност вече не била централизирана”, *Mediapool*, 10 October 2017.

23 “Lider al mafiei italiene, ridicat de mascați în București. Cum storcea rețeaua lui bani din conturile naivilor”, *Digi24*, 28 March 2018.

24 Cathy Haenlein and Jonathan Eyal, *Organised Crime and Illicit Trade in Romania: Country Report*, RUSI, 2017, p.7; see, for example, a group dismantled in July 2018 which was involved in human trafficking, cybercrime, drug trafficking, and money laundering: “IGPR, percheziții de angajare pentru desființarea unei grupări de crimă organizată”, *DCnews*, 8 July 2018.

25 *Cross-Border Organised Crime: Bulgaria and Norway in the Context of the Migrant Crisis*, Center of the Study of Democracy, 2017, p.11.

## Activities and Locations

Groups are involved in a variety of crime, much of it transitory in nature. These include drug trafficking,<sup>26</sup> human trafficking,<sup>27</sup> prostitution,<sup>28</sup> fraud,<sup>29</sup> extortion, illicit firearms,<sup>30</sup> and theft.<sup>31</sup> The trafficking of drugs – particularly of heroin – and of people feature prominently in the Bulgarian crime scene, as the country is a key transit point along the strategic “Balkan route”, and sits at the entry point of Europe for illicit trade coming from Turkey.

Bulgaria is both a transit and destination country for heroin, smuggled via Iran and Turkey from Afghanistan. Once in Bulgaria, it is further trafficked via the Balkan states or Romania into central and western Europe.<sup>32</sup> The quantities involved can be enormous: in September 2018, Bulgarian customs officials seized 712 kilograms of heroin found in two Iranian trucks entering from Turkey.<sup>33</sup> It was the largest quantity ever seized in Bulgaria.

A dominant position in the heroin trade often enables criminal networks to also influence the market for other drugs,<sup>34</sup> affording the security to involve themselves in other activities, such as prostitution, real estate fraud, grey imports, and consumer goods.<sup>35</sup> Traffickers often have a legitimate business providing cover for their trafficking operations,<sup>36</sup> showing how illicit trade affects the licit economy.

A characteristic of the drug trafficking scene is “zoning”, which involves crime groups dividing the country into territories of influence.<sup>37</sup> Groups therefore have priority in their respective areas, whereas dealing in another area is met with punishment. Respective zones can nevertheless be subordinate to a central territory; in Bulgaria heroin traffickers typically seek “permission” from Sofia-based groups to deal the drug, which is granted on the payment of monthly contributions.<sup>38</sup>

Neither country is a major drug producer. There is evidence of small-scale production of cannabis and synthetic drugs such as amphetamines, which supplies the domestic market.<sup>39</sup> Recent data suggests indoor cultivation of cannabis is increasing, supplying regional countries such as Italy, Croatia, and Austria.<sup>40</sup>

26 “Law Enforcement Deals A Serious Blow To International Drugs Trafficking Group: 6 Arrested”, *Europol*, 14 September 2017.

27 “Romanian police smash slavery gang, children rescued”, *Reuters*, 13 July 2016; “Modern slavery risk highlighted in Bulgaria, Romania”, *Balkan Insight*, 17 August 2017; *Human Trafficking Network Engaged In Sexual Exploitation Targeted In Austria*, *Europol*, 12 December 2014; *Migrant Smuggling – Major Irregular Migrant Safe House Busted*, *Europol*, 2 February 2017; “Migrant Smuggling Network Dismantled Near Danubius Bridge Checkpoint”, *Novinite*, 26 April 2017.

28 “Spanish & Romanian Police Break Up Criminal Gang Behind Prostitution Network”, *Europol*, 10 February 2015;

29 “Criminal Gang Behind Trafficking In Human Beings For Sexual Exploitation Dismantled”, *Europol*, 20 May 2015.

30 “International Organised Crime Group Involved In Fraud, Forgery And Money Laundering Dismantled In Spain And Romania”, *Eurojust*, 23 May 2018.

31 “58 Arrests And 48 Firearms Seized In Joint Action Against Arms Trafficking In The Western Balkans”, *Europol*, 6 February 2017.

32 *Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment 2010-2011*, Center for the Study of Democracy, 2012.

33 “Пътят на опиума и хероина от Афганистан за Европа минава през Балканите”, *Darik News*, 24 June 2009.

34 “Заловиха над 712 килограма хероин, скрит зад гипсови плоскости”, *BTV Новините*, 29 September 2018.

35 *Organized Crime in Bulgaria: Markets and Trends*, CSD, 2007, p.41.

36 *Ibid*, p.42.

37 Interview with Bulgarian security official, 27 October 2018.

38 *Organized Crime in Bulgaria: Markets and Trends*, CSD, 2007, p.42.

39 *Ibid*, p.60.

40 *2015 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR)*, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 2015; Zlate Dimovski, Kire Babanoski, and Ice Ilijevski, “Republic of Macedonia as a Transit Country for the Illegal Trafficking in the ‘Balkan Route’”, *Varstvoslojje*, Vol 15, No 2, 2013, p.203; *The Illicit Drug Trade through South-Eastern Europe*, UNODC, 2014, p.70.

41 *Romania Country Drug Report 2017*, European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2018; *Raport Național Privind Situația Drogurilor – 2017*, National Anti-Drug Agency, 2018, p.174.

Drugs are smuggled by land, sea, and air, using a variety of methods.<sup>41</sup> These have ranged from concealing them in secret compartments, to disguising them as legal merchandise (such as ceramic tiles or cans).<sup>42</sup>

Both countries are source and transit countries for *human trafficking*, whether for sexual or economic exploitation.<sup>43</sup> Women of Turkish ethnicity account for much of the sex trafficking victims identified in Bulgaria,<sup>44</sup> while Romani women and girls are acutely vulnerable in both countries.<sup>45</sup> The issue is most prevalent in the capital city, resorts, and border towns, while many are also trafficked across Europe.<sup>46</sup> Recent reports show an increase in the number of Bulgarian and Roma victims in Poland, Spain, and the United Kingdom,<sup>47</sup> and Romanian officials have highlighted western Europe as the destination country for victims.<sup>48</sup>

Sexual exploitation is especially prominent; since the turn of the millennium human trafficking for sexual exploitation has become one of the largest Bulgarian criminal markets.<sup>49</sup> Both countries' per capita rate for victims of exploitation – amongst the highest in Europe – is five times higher than the EU average.<sup>50</sup>

In the 1990s and early 2000s, the market was extensively controlled by organised crime in all large cities and resorts, though the present-day Bulgarian prostitution market is more fragmented and decentralised.<sup>51</sup> A variety of groups are involved in this crime, ranging from “independent” traffickers – often collaborating in loose networks – to large, hierarchically structured organisations.<sup>52</sup>

There is scant information on the *illicit firearms* market in both countries.<sup>53</sup> Weapons smuggling is often a supplementary activity for Bulgarian criminal groups, and there are few specialists operating in this area.<sup>54</sup> When authorities have made seizures of weapons, they have generally found single firearms, often in the cars of private individuals travelling to and from Turkey.<sup>55</sup>

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41 Cocaine, for example, is smuggled via air couriers into Bulgaria, and then on to Turkey overland. See *Българските митници 2017*, National Customs Agency, 2018, p.11.

42 Ibid.

43 *Trafficking In Persons Report 2017*, U.S. Department of State, 2018, p.361; “How Romania Became Europe’s Sex Trafficking Hub”, *Balkan Insight*, 1 August 2018.

44 *Trafficking In Persons Report 2017*, U.S. Department of State, 2018, p.114.

45 *Analiză Succintă Privind Traficul De Persoane În 2017-Perspectivă Victimologică*, National Agency Against Human Trafficking, 2018.

46 *Trafficking in Persons Report 2018*, U.S. Department of State, 2018, p.114; “БАН: Трафикът на хора е вече и семеен бизнес”, *24 часа*, 20 September 2018.

47 *Trafficking in Persons Report 2018*, U.S. Department of State, 2018, p.113.

48 *Analiză Succintă Privind Traficul De Persoane În 2017-Perspectivă Victimologică*, National Agency Against Human Trafficking, 2018.

49 Tihomir Bezlov, Maria Yordanova and Nadya Stoyanova, *Corruption and trafficking in women. The case of Bulgaria*, Center for the Study of Democracy, 2016.

50 *National Strategy for Combating Human Trafficking 2017-2021*, National Commission for Combating traffic in Human Beings, 2016.

51 *Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation in Bulgaria: Criminal Finances and Capacity for Financial Investigation*, Center for the Study of Democracy, 2018.

52 Ibid.

53 For the Romanian situation, see Roxana Albisteanu, Alexandru Dena and Matthew Lewis, *Romania: Firearms and Security at the EU Eastern Border*, in Nils Duquet (ed.), *Triggering Terror: Illicit Gun Markets and Firearms Acquisitions of Terrorist Networks in Europe*, Project SAFTE, Flemish Peace Institute, 2018, p.336.

54 Interview with Bulgarian security official, 3 October 2018.

55 *Българските митници 2017*, National Customs Agency, 2018.

The Romanian illicit firearms market has two primary sources. The first is the legal domestic market, from where firearms can be diverted. The second is illicit trafficking from countries near – such as blank-firing weapons from Bulgaria – or afar – such as long-barrelled rifles from Italy and Spain.<sup>56</sup>

Organised criminal activity has a nationwide reach. While it is concentrated in large cities – such as Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, and Stara Zagora in Bulgaria, as well as București, Cluj, Iași, Constanța, and Timișoara in Romania – it also affects border towns and port cities.<sup>57</sup> Even smaller towns can be affected, albeit the smaller groups operating in those areas have a limited scope.<sup>58</sup> 35 of Romania's 41 counties are – at least in part – affected by crime groups.<sup>59</sup>

In summary, the two countries have experienced a range of organised criminal activities, which are typically cross-border in nature – and centre on trafficking – owing to the countries' position on the frontiers of Europe.<sup>60</sup> As will be shown in the following section, however, the linkages between these activities and terrorism are limited.

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56 *Study on Firearms 2015*, UNODC, 2015, p.38.

57 "Criminalitatea organizată, sub lupă", *National Intelligence Service*, 30 October 2016.

58 *Ibid.*

59 "Cum își împart România clanurile interlope", *Romania libera*, 2 November 2011.

60 *Организираната Престъпност на Балканите през Погледа на Законодателя*, Фондация РискМонитор, 2008.

## 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>61</sup> In contrast to their experiences with organised crime, neither Bulgaria nor Romania have had much exposure to terrorism.

The most high-profile incident in either country took place in July 2012, when a suicide bomber targeted buses carrying Israeli tourists at Sarafovo Airport in the coastal city of Bourgas, Bulgaria.<sup>62</sup> Six people were killed, and 35 more were injured.<sup>63</sup> Bulgarian authorities named Hezbollah as being responsible for the attack. Also involved were two men of Lebanese descent – one Australian and another Canadian – who are being tried in absentia.<sup>64</sup>

### Jihadism

Bulgaria and Romania have virtually non-existent jihadist scenes. There have been only sporadic examples of jihadist cells, networks, or individuals active in either country. Notable recent events include:

- *December 2012*: two Pakistani nationals, Ramzan Muhammad and Adeel Muhammad, were arrested in Romania on suspicions of planning terrorist attacks across the country. Both were affiliated with Al-Qaeda. They were declared *persona non-grata* for 15 years and expelled from the country.<sup>65</sup>
- *November 2014*: twenty-six people were arrested in the Iztok neighbourhood in Pazardzhik, Bulgaria, including the local imam Ahmed Moussa. In July, Moussa and 13 associates (from the cities of Pazardzhik, Plovdiv, Asenovgrad, and Startsevo) were accused of inciting religious hatred through the dissemination of IS materials.<sup>66</sup> Moussa reportedly provided logistical support to at least three foreign fighters (Said Husejinovic, Murat Ayyildiz, and

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61 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.

62 "Атентат в 'Сарафово'! Официално: шестима загинали", *BTV Novinite*, 18 July 2012.

63 "Черна годишнина: 6 години от атентата на летището в "Сарафово", *NOVA*, 18 July 2018.

64 "Делото 'Сарафово' започва по същество", *Dariknews.bg*, 17 January 2018.

65 "Despre intelligence și terorism în România", *National Intelligence Service*, 6 March 2013.

66 "Окръжна прокуратура-Пазарджик внесе отново обвинителния акт срещу Ахмед Муса и останалите 13 обвиняеми", *Окръжна Прокуратура-Пазарджик*, 9 September 2015.

Izudin Crnovrsanin) travelling to Syria;<sup>67</sup> in March 2018 he was sentenced to one year in prison.<sup>68</sup> Of the remaining 13 associates, one has been acquitted, while the remainder have been fined.<sup>69</sup>

- *April 2015*: Six French citizens were expelled from Romania after being accused of propaganda, recruitment, and material support for Islamic State and Al Qaeda. Five individuals were banned for seven years, with the remaining individual banned for three years.<sup>70</sup>
- *April 2015*: A Tunisian studying in Romania is declared persona non grata and expelled from the country for 10 years. He had publicly expressed the desire to become a martyr for IS, and was in contact with jihadists abroad.<sup>71</sup>
- *June 2015*: Jaber Alias and Gharselloui Wassam, two Tunisian students in Romania, were expelled from the country for 10 years, after disseminating propaganda supportive of IS and seeking to form a cell in the country.<sup>72</sup>
- *December 2015*: 17-year-old Luigi Constantin Boice was arrested in Craiova, Romania, on jihadist propaganda charges. After his eventual release he was re-arrested in December 2016 on the same charges, and was convicted in October 2017 to three years and four months in prison.<sup>73</sup>
- *September 2016*: John Zakhariiev was arrested in Bulgaria on terrorism charges.<sup>74</sup> Zakhariiev, born and raised in Australia to a Vietnamese-Australian mother and a Bulgarian-Australian father, trained in Syria in 2013 with the Free Syrian Army. After leaving Syria he moved to Bulgaria to continue weapons training; he obtained a Bulgarian passport and attended shooting ranges and was in possession of "jihadist material". In June 2017 he was sentenced to four years in prison after he was found guilty of training with a Kalashnikov with the intention of carrying out a terrorist attack.<sup>75</sup> His sentence was later reduced to 2.6 years.<sup>76</sup>
- *April 2017*: five German nationals – including one minor – were detained on the border between Bulgaria and Turkey, at Kapitan Adreevo checkpoint, for affiliation with a terrorist organisation. They were travelling by train from Bucharest to Istanbul, allegedly to travel onwards to Syria; four of them were later expelled to Germany.<sup>77</sup>

67 "The Roma and the Radicals: Bulgaria's Alleged ISIS Support Base", *Balkan Insight*, 11 January 2016;

"Ромите и Радикалите: предполагаемата българска подкрепа за ИДИЛ", *Капитал*, 8 January 2016.

68 "1 година лишаване от свобода за Ахмед Муса, но няма да лежи в затвора", *БТВ Новините*, 30 March 2018.

69 "Проповедника на Пазарджик Ахмед Муса беше осъден на година затвор", *Дневник*, 30 March 2018.

70 "Comunicat de presă", *National Security Service*, 1 April 2015, available at: <https://www.sri.ro/articole/comunicat-de-presa-01-04-2015-12-48>; "La Roumanie expulse 6 Français et un Tunisien, accusés de propagande djihadiste", *Euronews*, 9 April 2015.

71 "SRI anunță că 7 străini,afiliați ideilor Al-Qaeda și Statul Islamic, au fost declarați indezirabili", *Mediafax*, 3 April 2015.

72 "SRI: Doi tunisieni, declarați indezirabili în România. Încercau să raclezeze combatanți ISIS", *Realitatea*, 12 June 2015;

"Romania expels two Tunisians for allegedly supporting IS", *Global Times*, 12 June 2015.

73 "Танърът de 17 ani din Craiova acuzat de propagandă jihadistă a fost reținut pentru 24 de ore", *Digi24*, 8 December 2015;

"Young Romanian will spend over three years in prison for jihadist propaganda", *Romania Insider*, 16 October 2017.

74 "Sydney man John Zakhariiev, 21, arrested in Bulgaria on terrorism charges", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 March 2017.

75 "Australian-Bulgarian John Zakhariiev sentenced for terrorism", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 June 2017.

76 "Джон Терориста влезе в затвора", *24 часа*, 16 March 2018.

77 SANS expels four German citizens from Bulgaria for involvement of terrorism, *BNT news*, 20 April 2017.

- *June 2017*: 39-year-old Ionuț Cătălin Bălan was arrested in Argeș County, Romania, accused of scouting military bases and sending details of access points to Islamic State members. Bălan had also shared jihadist propaganda online. He had been monitored since 2015 after French authorities flagged him as a case of prison radicalisation following a robbery offence. In February 2018 he was sentenced to three years in prison, though his appeal is currently ongoing.<sup>78</sup>
- *June 2018*: a 15-year-old was arrested in Bucharest after allegedly contacting jihadists abroad and plotting to carry out an attack in Romania using improvised explosive devices.<sup>79</sup>

More than six thousand Europeans “foreign fighters” have joined jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq. While less than a dozen individuals are estimated to have travelled *from* Bulgaria and Romania,<sup>80</sup> many more have travelled *through* the countries en route to the conflict zone.<sup>81</sup> According to the Bulgarian State Agency for National Security (SANS), at least 332 foreign fighters – travelling from Western Europe – transited the country between 2013 and June 2015.<sup>82</sup> Romania, meanwhile, has been used as a secondary route for foreign fighters.<sup>83</sup>

Terrorism-related arrests and court proceedings are, however, relatively rare: between 2012 and 2017 there were 74 arrests in Bulgaria, and 36 in Romania, which resulted in only one conviction.<sup>84</sup> Bulgarian authorities have also imposed bans “on staying in the country” or “entering the country”, known as Compulsory Administrative Measures (CAMs), which have been imposed on 89 individuals between 2015 and 2017.<sup>85</sup> Yet in that same time period, according to the Bulgarian security service, there have been no plots targeting Bulgaria or using the country as a base to plan attacks elsewhere.<sup>86</sup> It is possible that returning foreign fighters – travelling from the Middle East to Europe – may use Bulgaria as a transit country.<sup>87</sup>

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78 “Romania Detains Suspected Islamic State Militant”, *Balkan Insight*, 29 June 2017; “Ionuț Cătălin Bălan, românul din Argeș acuzat de terorism, arestat pentru 30 de zile. Acesta neagă acuzațiile aduse: Sunt băgat într-o cacialma de către un iordanian”, *Mediafax*, 30 June 2017; “Ce pedeapsă a primit românul judecat pentru apartenență la gruparea teroristă ISIS”, *Adevarul*, 27 February 2018.

79 “Un minor de 15 ani, reținut de DIICOT pentru propagandă teroristă”, *Digi24*, 22 June 2018; “15-years old Romanian held for terrorism”, *Romania Insider*, 25 June 2018.

80 Bulgaria saw an estimated 10 individuals travel, while Romania has only noted one individual. See Joana Cook and Gina Vale, *From Daesh to “Diaspora”: Tracing the Women and Minors of Islamic State*, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR), p.16.

81 *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend report 2017*, Europol, 2018, p.27.

82 “The Roma and the Radicals: Bulgaria’s Alleged ISIS Support Base”, *Balkan Insight*, 11 January 2016.

83 *European Union Terrorism Situation And Trend Report 2018*, Europol, 2018, p.27.

84 The annual breakdown for Bulgaria is: 2012 (1), 2013 (12), 2014 (21), 2015 (21), 2016 (5), and 2017 (14). In Romania, the breakdown is: 2012 (15), 2013 (7), 2014 (0), 2015 (11), 2016 (1), and 2 (2017). Figures from Europol’s annual *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Reports (TESAT)*, 2013 to 2018.

85 The annual breakdown is: 2015 (29), 2016 (22), and 2017 (31). Figures from *Annual Report of the State Agency for National Security for 2015, 2016, and 2017*.

86 *Ibid*; *Радикализацията в България: Заплахи и тенденции*, Център за изследване на демокрацията 2016, p.8.

87 *Кратък Доклад на Тема “Рискове за Националната Сигурност, Произтичащи от Бежанската Криза в Европа*, Център за превенция и противодействие на корупцията и организираната престъпност (БОРКОР), 2017, p.13.

## Far-Right and Far-Left Extremism

Far-left extremists have only a minimal presence in Bulgaria and Romania, lacking either popular support, political momentum, or a sustained, organised presence.<sup>88</sup> Their actions are typically limited to small-scale protests, which usually pass without disturbances.<sup>89</sup> While there are racist attacks in the country – typically aimed at the Roma community and migrants<sup>90</sup> – this has not manifested in a substantial terrorist threat.

The Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement (*Hatvannégy Vármegye Ifjúsági Mozgalom*, HVIM), a far-right Hungarian ethno-nationalist organisation, is present in Romania, with an estimated 300 members.<sup>91</sup> In December 2015, two of its members, István Beke and Zoltán Szócs, were arrested for a plot – involving an improvised explosive device – targeting the December 1st National Day celebrations in Covasna County, Romania.<sup>92</sup> In 2018 they were sentenced to five years each.<sup>93</sup>

## A Potential Nexus

In both Bulgaria and Romania 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>94</sup>

The threat from returnees, who could reinvigorate the jihadist movements in the region, may have a spillover effect for Bulgaria in particular. 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.

88 *Annual Report of the State Agency for National Security for 2016*, State Agency for National Security, 2017.

89 *Annual Report of the State Agency for National Security for 2015*, State Agency for National Security, 2016.

90 *Annual Report of the State Agency for National Security for 2015*, State Agency for National Security, 2016.

91 "Autonomie si petarde", *Rise Project*, 27 September 2016.

92 "Comunicat de presa", *Directorate for Investigating Organised Crime and Terrorism*, 29 December 2015; "Familia extremistilor din Ardeal: liderul artizanilor, arestat", *Rise Project*, 30 December 2015.

93 "Romania hands jail sentences to two Hungarians on terrorism charges", *Business Review*, 4 July 2018.

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

## 4 Recommendations

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**T**his paper has examined potential links between crime and terrorism in Bulgaria and Romania. 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 eastern, 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 “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.

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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.

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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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