



The Crime-Terror Nexus in Greece and Cyprus

- The objective of this working paper is to present an overview of links between crime and terrorism (the crime-terror nexus) in Greece and Cyprus, 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, systematic and 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 Europe. Given Greece's position along various transit routes for illegal goods and people, it is vitally important that Greece also effectively collaborates with European institutions.
 - 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

Few countries have been more in the European spotlight in recent years than Greece. The lingering aftermath of the financial crisis of 2007 – known simply in the country as The Crisis – coupled with the unprecedented migrant and refugee in Europe, have put great stresses on the country. “Bad actors” have sought to take advantage of the opportunities created by these conditions; it the activities of these bad actors – criminal and terrorist – that are subject of this working paper.

The objective of this working paper is to present an overview of crime and terrorism, as well as potential links between the two, in Greece and Cyprus. 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 September and November 2018, and was carried out by a team of Greek, Cypriot, and British researchers.¹

Although organised crime groups are active in the two countries, there is minimal terrorist activity, and 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 Turkey and the Middle East into 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 Greece and Cyprus, before exploring potential links between the two. It concludes with a series of recommendations for policymakers and practitioners.

¹ The authors of this report are Peter R. Neumann and Rajan Basra. We wish to thank Iphigenia Fisentzou and Maria Peteinoudi 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.² 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:³

- 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.⁴ 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.

⁴ 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

The recent stresses and changes within Greece have been seized upon by organised crime.⁵ The country's strategic location in the Mediterranean and along well-established trafficking routes, as well as the ongoing refugee and migrant crisis, have afforded new opportunities for crime groups to take advantage of. These groups have shown themselves willing and able to adapt to the situation by applying their tried and tested criminal knowledge, networks, and skills. This section provides an overview of the organised crime scene in both Greece and Cyprus, covering the groups involved, their activities, and the locations in which they operate.

Groups

While organised crime has existed for over a century in Greece, the modern discussion on the phenomenon only emerged in the last three decades.⁶ In Cyprus, an awareness of organised crime similarly emerged in the 1990s, with police noticing a proliferation of crime groups involved in illegal gambling, prostitution – involving trafficked women from former-Soviet states⁷ – and drug trafficking.

Foreign groups have historically used Cyprus for operations, given its location in the Mediterranean. Following the closure of the free port of Tangier in the 1960s, the Italian mafia began to use the “Adriatic route” to smuggle goods from Albania and Yugoslavia towards Turkey and Cyprus.⁸ And in recent years – especially in the post-socialist era⁹ – the island has become attractive to Russian groups that are alleged to launder money through the tourism and real estate sectors.¹⁰

According to the most recent Hellenic Police estimate, there were 358 organised crime groups operating in Greece in 2016, involving 3,652 members. Most of these groups (59%) had less than seven members,

5 In Greece, organised crime is defined by Hellenic Police (Ελληνική Αστυνομία) as “the organisation of individuals whose purpose is to conduct criminal activity on a continuing basis in order to obtain economic benefits and to control national and international situations”. See “Organised Crime”, *Hellenic Police*, available at: http://www.astynomia.gr/index.php?option=ozo_content&perform=view&id=2481&Itemid=400&lang. In Cyprus there is no formal definition, though in June 2017 the Chief of Cypriot Police stated that “organised crime is classified as a serious form of crime which is planned, coordinated and committed by persons who collaborate on a constant basis and whose main motive is financial gain”, see address by Chief of Cyprus Police, Mr Zacharias Chrysostomou, at the *Conference on Major Policies in Dealing with Organised Crime and Corruption: European and International Dimensions*, 22 June 2017, available at: <http://www.police.gov.cy/police/police.nsf/All/C1E145046071D89BC22581470044CDC7?OpenDocument&print>.

6 Sappho Xenakis, “International Norm Diffusion and Organised Crime Policy: The Case of Greece”, *Global Crime*, Vol 6, Issue 3-4, 2004, pp.345-373.

7 “The civil war in the Cypriot cosa nostra” *Zougla.gr*, 3 July 2012.

8 Paolo Pinotti, “The Economic Consequences of Organised Crime: Evidence from Southern Italy”, *The Economic Journal*, Vol 125, No 586, 2015, p.210.

9 Dina Siegel, Henk van de Bunt, Damián Zaitch, *Global Organized Crime: Trends and Developments* (Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), p.60.

10 Georgios A Antonopoulos and Georgios Papanicolaou, *Organized Crime: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp.27-28.

while a sizeable minority (18%) were networks of more than 12 members. The majority of groups were involved in the trafficking of drugs and humans.¹¹ The number in Cyprus is much lower, with an estimated 15 such groups – which vary in size¹² – operating on the island (excluding Northern Cyprus).¹³ This is a notable increase from the turn of the millennium, when only two organisations were said to operate in the country.¹⁴

Crime groups tend to be “homegrown”. Hellenic Police classify most Greek groups (68%) as indigenous, with a sizeable minority (30%) considered foreign.¹⁵ The majority of foreign groups operating in Greece are predominantly Albanian.¹⁶ In Cyprus, the majority are also considered to be domestic in origin,¹⁷ though Russian, Chinese, and groups from across the European continent are also said to operate there.¹⁸

The scope of their activities varies from local to transnational. Most Greek crime groups (60%) operate on a regional or national level, while 25% are transnationally active (with 55% of those involved in drug trafficking and migrant smuggling).¹⁹ Cypriot groups, meanwhile, are predominantly region-specific, with groups having control over certain locations of the island.²⁰ Collaboration or conflict with other groups can, however, see a regional group expand their operations nationally.²¹

Organisational structure is often activity-dependent. The majority (68%) of migrant smuggling groups in Greece, for example, have top-down hierarchies with clear roles, such as recruitment, transportation, and those coordinating the entire process.²²

Those groups containing over 12 members, meanwhile, are generally characterised by loose, networked structures, regardless of their criminal activity. In turn, these networks contain “sub-groups”, whose leaders have greater autonomy, and often cooperate with other networked criminals.²³

Cypriot groups are exclusively structured across two levels: one where decisions are made, and another where those decisions are executed.²⁴ They are characterised by intense in-group solidarity, with all members recognising and respecting the singular group leader. Group leaders

11 *Report on Serious and Organised Crime in Greece*, Hellenic Police, 2017, p.6.

12 “Operation Al Capone against Criminals – Interview with Ionas Nicolaou, Minister of Justice”, *Politis*, 3 June 2018.

13 Interview with Cypriot police officer, 24 October 2018.

14 The two crime groups from this 1998 estimate are the Fanieros family and another linked to the Aeroporou family. Committee of experts on criminal law and criminological aspects of organised crime (PC-CO), *Report on the Organised Crime Situation in Council of Europe Member States*, Council of Europe, 1999, p.66.

15 *Report on Serious and Organised Crime in Greece*, Hellenic Police, 2017, p.6.

16 *Ibid.*

17 Committee of experts on criminal law and criminological aspects of organised crime (PC-CO), *Report on the Organised Crime Situation in Council of Europe Member States*, Council of Europe, 1999, p.9.

18 Dina Siegel, Henk van de Bunt, Damián Zaitch, *Global Organized Crime: Trends and Developments* (Kluwer Academic Publishers, The Netherlands: 2003) 60.; Europol, “Joint Action to Tackle Chinese Human Trafficking Networks” (20 March 2015) <<https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/joint-action-to-tackle-chinese-human-trafficking-networks>>; In March 2015, a coordinated operation supported by Europol was undertaken in Cyprus. The law enforcement authorities searched Larnaca International Airport as well as restaurants and places of prostitution in the capital, Nicosia, in an attempt to combat the trafficking of people from China. The objective of the operation was to paint a better image of the Chinese organised crime groups involved and the extent of their influence.

19 *Report on Serious and Organised Crime in Greece*, Hellenic Police, 2017, p.7.

20 Interview with Cypriot police officer, 24 October 2018.

21 Piotr Bakwoski, *Organised Crime in the European Union*, Library of the European Parliament, September 2013.

22 *Annual Report for Drug Substances in Greece*, Hellenic Police, 2017, pp.70-73.

23 *Report on Serious and Organised Crime in Greece*, Hellenic Police, 2017, p.28.

24 Committee of experts on criminal law and criminological aspects of organised crime (PC-CO), *Report on the Organised Crime Situation in Council of Europe Member States*, Council of Europe, 1999, p.8.

try to maintain a respectable public image, thus allowing a network of legal contacts. Family ties are very important and, when needed, group leadership is passed down to younger family members.²⁵

Groups can be engaged in more than one criminal activity. Greek police estimate that a fifth of all groups (22%) are “polycriminals”, while half (51%) are involved in drug trafficking.²⁶ Some activities are polycriminal by their very nature; migrant smugglers are almost always also involved in document fraud, for example, and their expertise in routes and methods also naturally lends itself to the drug trade.²⁷ Cypriot groups are considered “generalists”, and while their main source of income is from drugs,²⁸ they are involved in the whole gamut of activities, from the operation of makeshift illegal casinos through to kidnapping.²⁹

Activities and Locations

Groups are involved in a variety of crime, much of it transitory in nature. Activities include property crimes – such as organised burglaries – firearms trafficking, counterfeiting, extortion, and fraud.³⁰ Above all, the trafficking of humans and of drugs are central activities for crime groups in Greece and Cyprus.³¹

In both Greece and Cyprus, *drug trafficking* is considered the most lucrative criminal enterprise. Sitting on a major drug trafficking route – and located at the so-called “Balkan Axis” – Greece is an important entry point for drugs that are then smuggled further into Europe. According to Hellenic Police, the principle drugs that entered Greece in 2016 were cannabis, heroin, cocaine, and synthetic drugs.³² Cyprus’ drug scene, meanwhile, primarily serves locals in Nicosia, as well as tourists in Famagusta, Paphos, and Limassol.³³

The “Balkan Route” – which stretches from Bulgaria and Greece through to Croatia and Slovenia – is predominantly used for *heroin trafficking*. Heroin and opium is smuggled from Afghanistan, Myanmar, Laos, and Pakistan, passing through Turkey and Greece on its way to the European market.³⁴ An estimated 70-80% of Europe’s heroin is trafficked through the Balkan Route.³⁵

Heroin is trafficked using vehicles (either hidden in luggage or concealed within vehicle parts), ships from Turkey (mainly to Lesvos island), individual couriers travelling by bus (from Istanbul to Thessaloniki as well as Sofia to Athens), by post (such as packages from India to Greece), and air (airline passengers who swallow or conceal drugs in their luggage).³⁶

25 Ibid, pp. 6-7; Interview with Cypriot police officer, 24 October 2018.

26 *Report on the Organised Crime Situation in Council of Europe Member States*, Council of Europe, 1999, p.6.

27 *Report on Serious and Organised Crime in Greece*, Hellenic Police, 2017, p.29.

28 “The main source of organised crime revenue is drugs”, *Reporter*, 30 May 2018.

29 Ioannis-Sotirios Ioannou, “The External Security of Cyprus: Challenges and Potential Threats” *Diplomatic Academy University of Nicosia Cyprus*, The Europe Levant Observatory – Policy Brief, April 2015.

30 *Report on Serious and Organised Crime in Greece*, Hellenic Police, 2017, p.6.

31 *Report on Serious and Organised Crime in Greece*, Hellenic Police, 2017, p.6.

32 Ibid, p.32.

33 “New heads control organised crime in Cyprus”, *Sigma Live*, 11 May 2018; “The main source of organised crime revenue is drugs”, *Reporter*, 30 May 2018.

34 *Annual Report for Drug Substances in Greece*, Hellenic Police, 2017, p.72.

35 Ibid, p.84.

36 *Report on Serious and Organised Crime in Greece*, Hellenic Police, 2017, p.41.

Cocaine trafficking also exists in the region: Greece is one of the main entry points of the drug into Europe, alongside Spain, Portugal, Italy, and France.³⁷ The country's geography and high volume of maritime traffic make it an ideal transit country – either directly from source countries in Latin America, or via intermediary ports in Spain and Italy – for trafficking via shipping containers and cargo ships. Cyprus is also affected: in 2016 the authorities seized a record 156kg of cocaine from a warehouse in Limassol, which had arrived in two shipments from South America.³⁸

Cannabis is considered the most popular drug in Cyprus, with cocaine, amphetamines and MDMA used in lower rates.³⁹ Beyond local consumption, Greece is a transit country for cannabis – cultivated in neighbouring Albania⁴⁰ – which passes through the ports of Igoumenitsa and Patras to foreign markets.⁴¹

As seen elsewhere in Europe, the “rip-on/rip-off” method is frequently used, whereby traffickers place their contraband in legitimate container shipments – with the owners unaware they are being exploited by criminals – and collect them at their destination by bribing officials and/or forcing entry into the containers.⁴² Crime groups often establish shell companies to facilitate their trafficking and launder their profits.⁴³

Neither country is a major *drug producer*. The only drug that is domestically produced is cannabis, which serves – but does not satisfy – the domestic market.⁴⁴ Cannabis is thus imported from mainland Europe as well as Lebanon.⁴⁵ In Cyprus cannabis is typically grown on the outskirts of Limassol and Famagusta, in the mountainous areas of Cyprus, and close to foreign military bases where the national police have a limited presence.⁴⁶

Beyond drugs, there is the important issue of *human trafficking*, whether for sexual or economic exploitation. Greece and Cyprus are both destination and transit countries for this crime. The extent of the problem is difficult to gauge, though in Greece the main form of human trafficking is for sexual exploitation.⁴⁷ The majority of victims – whether adults or children – are women from Romania and Greece itself.⁴⁸

37 *Annual Report for Drug Substances in Greece*, Hellenic Police, 2017, p.84.

38 “Largest-ever cocaine haul found in Limassol, 156kg seized” *Cyprus Mail Online*, 4 August 2016.

39 “Infographic: The drug map in Cyprus and the deaths”, *Reporter*, 7 September 2018; Cyprus Police General Statistics on Drugs – Drug Assumptions and Subjects per Year, “Cases and People on Drugs”, 23 March 2016.

40 *Annual Report for Drug Substances in Greece*, Hellenic Police, 2017, pp.32-33.

41 *Ibid.*

42 *Cocaine trafficking*, European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), 2016, available at: http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/system/files/attachments/2641/Cocaine%20trafficking_POD2016.pdf. For other smuggling methods, see *Annual Report for Drug Substances in Greece*, Hellenic Police, 2017, p.101.

43 *Annual Report for Drug Substances in Greece*, Hellenic Police, 2017, p.48.

44 See, for example, “Cannabis arrest”, *Cyprus Mail Online*, 27 August 2018; Cyprus Police General Statistics on Drugs – Drug Assumptions and Subjects per Year, “Cases and People on Drugs”, 23 March 2016.

45 “Infographic: The drug map in Cyprus and the deaths”, *Reporter*, 7 September 2018.

46 Ioannis-Sotirios Ioannou, “The External Security of Cyprus: Challenges and Potential Threats” *Diplomatic Academy University of Nicosia Cyprus*, The Europe Levant Observatory – Policy Brief, April 2015.

47 *Statistics as to the Human Trafficking (first half of 2018)*, Hellenic Police, 2018, p.70, available at: http://www.astynomia.gr/index.php?option=ozo_content&perform=view&id=82074&Itemid=73&lang

48 *Ibid.*, pp.70-71.

Crime groups can adapt to new market opportunities, as seen with the 2015 *migrant and refugee crisis*. In 2016 migrant smuggling became the largest illicit market in Greece,⁴⁹ as the country saw millions of people entering the country via Turkey. Smuggling networks “helped” migrants and refugees by providing transportation, accommodation, and forged documents. Crime groups can charge between €1,000–8,000 per person for this service, while forged documents can be bought for as little as €100.⁵⁰

Cyprus is mainly considered a destination country for *human trafficking*,⁵¹ whether for sexual or labour exploitation.⁵² Much of the sexual exploitation on the island is seasonal, peaking with the high tourism season between April and October.⁵³ Victims are typically employed in bars, pubs, and massage parlours, where their employers coerce them into sexual contact with customers.⁵⁴ Forced labour, meanwhile, usually involves domestic workers and migrants in the agricultural and construction sectors.⁵⁵

Corruption is an intrinsic part of organised crime, especially in Cyprus,⁵⁶ where it is well entrenched in government institutions, proving a debilitating factor for authorities tackling crime groups.⁵⁷ It can also abet human trafficking: recent cases of airport passport control officers allowing undocumented women to enter Cyprus, in exchange for bribes, have been noted.⁵⁸

Greece is both a destination and transit country for *firearms trafficking*. A popular method of entry involves the legal importation of specific guns, such as deactivated firearms, which are then illegally reactivated.⁵⁹ Criminals have also been known to buy and sell firearms on the darknet.⁶⁰ Most trafficked firearms are shotguns or Flobert guns, often originating from the Balkans.⁶¹ Guns travel onward in all directions – such as North Africa, the Levant, and other EU countries – by land (with vehicles), sea (in shipping containers) and air (concealed in passenger luggage).⁶²

The Cypriot market is small, where organised criminals have acquired guns by way of theft from army camps or the houses of army reservists.⁶³ And while such thefts are uncommon – with law enforcement believing that they are relatively insignificant⁶⁴ – there are still an estimated 130,673 illegally held firearms in Cyprus.⁶⁵ The number in Greece is unknown.

49 *Report on Serious and Organised Crime in Greece*, Hellenic Police, 2017, p.6.

50 *Ibid*, p.31; *Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment 2018*, Europol, 2017, p.21.

51 Georgia Tsagklagkanou, “International Human Trafficking”, *Research Centre on Equality Issues (KEΘI)*, 2001, p.8.

52 Bureau of Diplomatic Security (OSAC), *Cyprus 2016 Crime & Safety Report*, US Department of State, January 2016.

53 Interview with Cypriot police officer, 24 October 2018.

54 Evie Andreou, “Woman suspected of pimping remanded in Limassol”, *Cyprus Mail Online*, 13 September 2018.

55 Bureau of Diplomatic Security (OSAC), *Cyprus 2016 Crime & Safety Report*, US Department of State, January 2016.

56 “Measures needed to stamp out corruption across civil service” *Cyprus Mail Online*, 11 September 2018; “Organised crime and corruption are inseparable” *Cyprus Mail Online*, 22 June 2017.

57 “Interview with Chief of Cyprus Police Zacharias Chrysostomou”, *Police Years Magazine*, August 2014.

58 “People trafficking suspects to be released pending investigation” *Cyprus Mail Online*, 19 September 2018.

59 For more on illicit firearms, see Nils Duquet (ed.), *Triggering Terror: Illicit Gun Markets and Firearms Acquisitions of Terrorist Networks in Europe*, Project SAFTE, Flemish Peace Institute, 2018; *Report on Serious and Organised Crime in Greece*, Hellenic Police, 2017, pp.88-89.

60 *Ibid*; “International Strike Against Vendor and Buyers of Firearms via the Darknet”, *Europol*, 6 October 2017.

61 *Report on Serious and Organised Crime in Greece*, Hellenic Police, 2017, p.86.

62 *Ibid*; see, for example, Europol’s Operation Bosphorus, “Operation Bosphorus against Firearms Trafficking Results in nearly 250 Arrests in 2016”, *Europol*, 23 January 2017.

63 “Soldier charged with illegal arms possession”, *Cyprus Mail Online*, 28 August 2018; “Police investigations on organised crime continue”, *Reporter*, 19 May 2018; “Arms uncovered as part of underworld crackdown”, *Cyprus Mail Online*, 21 June 2018.

64 Interview with Cypriot police officer, 24 October 2018.

65 Karp Aaron, *Civilian Firearms Holdings, 2017: Estimating Global Civilian-Held Firearms Numbers*, Small Arms Survey, 2018.

Cyprus has a unique situation, as the island is home to a UN controlled buffer zone (the “green line”) that spans 180km across the island.⁶⁶ Law enforcement agencies are unable to oversee this area, therefore affording gaps to smugglers who move goods and people between the north and south.⁶⁷

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.

66 “About the Buffer Zone”, UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus, available at: <https://unficyp.unmissions.org/about-buffer-zone>

67 “Smugglers use drone to fly drugs over militarised Cyprus frontier”, *Reuters*, 29 August 2018.

3 Terrorism

Both Greece and Cyprus have experience of terrorist attacks, cells, and movements going back half a century. Presently, in Greece, there is an active threat from far-left extremists in Greece, as well as a residual threat from the far-right.⁶⁸ The jihadist scene, meanwhile, is muted: both countries have largely escaped the recent wave of jihadist terrorist attacks in Europe that have left hundreds killed and many more injured.⁶⁹

Jihadism

Greece and Cyprus have virtually non-existent jihadist scenes.⁷⁰ There have neither been jihadist attacks, nor any reported cases of “homegrown” jihadist radicalisation in either country,⁷¹ though individuals with Cypriot or Greek backgrounds have been radicalised elsewhere in Europe.⁷² Nevertheless, both countries have noted the terrorist threat – particularly regarding the presence of British military bases in Cyprus and their involvement in the Syrian conflict.⁷³

While thousands of European “foreign fighters” have joined jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq, both countries have only been minimally affected. Although there are no records of foreign fighters *from* Greece or Cyprus, jihadists have travelled *through* both countries en route to Turkey and Syria.

The most prominent example was the Islamic State militant Abdelhamid Abaaoud, who – whilst based in Athens in January 2015 – had coordinated an attack cell based in Verviers, Belgium. Police intercepted the cell that same month, and found assault rifles, explosives, and police uniforms. Though Abaaoud’s communications had been traced to Greece, he managed to evade the authorities and travel on to Syria.⁷⁴

Following the 2015 migrant and refugee crisis, there was speculation that jihadists could exploit the flow of people to enter Europe. Greek

68 Interview with Greek counterterrorism officer, 25 October 2018.

69 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.

70 Dimitris Skleparis, *Explaining the absence of Islamist Terrorist Attacks and Radicalisation in Greece*, Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy, 2017.

71 Interview with Greek counterterrorism official, 25 October 2018.

72 The most infamous case is Alexandra Kotey, one of the so-called Islamic State “Beatles”, whose mother is Greek Cypriot. See also the case of British foreign fighter Stefan Aristidou, who is of Greek heritage and travelled to Syria via Cyprus in the summer of 2015: “Stefan Aristidou: the ‘missing’ Londoner who resurfaced in Turkey”, *The Guardian*, 26 April 2017.

73 Interview with Greek counterterrorism official, 25 October 2018; “RAF base in Cyprus prepares for potential strike on Syria” *The Guardian*, 13 April 2018; Cypriot Police, *Annual Report 2015*, Cypriot Police, 2016, pp.27-28; *National Risk Assessment for Money Laundering from Criminal Activities and Financing Terrorism*, Greek Government, October 2018, p.230.

74 Guy Van Vlieden, “Profile: Paris Attack Ringleader Abdelhamid Abaaoud”, *CTC Sentinel*, Vol 8, Issue 11, 2015, p.32.

investigations have shown that this was not systematically done, although the potential remains for the future.⁷⁵ It is also possible for individuals, living in overcrowded refugee camps, to radicalise *after* their arrival in Greece. In October 2018 Greek authorities noted the presence of Islamic State sympathisers and supporters within the Moria refugee camp on Lesbos island,⁷⁶ which followed reports of assaults and Islamic State graffiti carried out by a group of 50 apparent IS supporters.⁷⁷

Far-Right Extremism

In contrast to the jihadist picture, both countries have – at various points in time – had issues with far-right extremism. In Greece, the far-right *Popular Association – Golden Dawn* (Λαϊκός Σύνδεσμος – Χρυσή Αυγή) has adopted fascist imagery and an ultranationalist message to become the country's third largest political party. Its members are often accused of acts of violence targeting migrants and the group's opponents.⁷⁸ Golden Dawn's leadership is currently under criminal investigation, and the present-day leader of the group, Nikolaos Michaloliakos, was himself previously imprisoned for possession of weapons and explosives in 1978.⁷⁹

In Cyprus, the *National Popular Front* (Εθνικό Λαϊκό Μέτωπο or ELAM) is the most prominent far-right group, though it has not achieved the same level of success as its sister organisation Golden Dawn.⁸⁰ The group had been involved in several demonstrations near the buffer zone, as well as infrequent attacks on Turkish Cypriots and their vehicles.⁸¹ Since May 2016, when the group gained a seat in the House of Representatives, ELAM has not been associated with any violent activity.⁸²

Several suspected far-right terrorism-related incidents have happened in recent years, though the exact motivations, affiliations, and identities of the perpetrators is often unknown:

- *September 2013*: A member of Golden Dawn murdered left-wing musician Pavlos Fyssas.⁸³
- *November 2013*: The Neo Irakleio office of Golden Dawn is attacked in a drive-by shooting. Two of the group's members, Manolis Kapelonis and Giogos Fountoulis, were shot and killed. A previously unknown group, *The Fighting People's Revolutionary Powers* (Μαχόμενες Λαϊκές Επαναστατικές Δυνάμεις), claimed responsibility though no one has been charged with the murders.⁸⁴

75 *Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TESAT) 2017*, Europol, 2018, p.28; Interview with Greek counterterrorism official, 25 October 2018.

76 "Greece expels ISIS recruiters from refugee camp", *The Times*, 3 October 2018.

77 "Terror at the Moria refugee camp", *DW*, 30 September 2018.

78 "Attacks on migrants 'planned by far-right party' Golden Dawn in Greece", *The Times*, 20 June 2017; "As attacks on migrant homes spike, groups fear Golden Dawn threat", *E-kathimerini*, 5 January 2018; "Greece far-right Golden Dawn leaders to go on trial", *BBC News*, 4 February 2018.

79 Vassilis Petsinis, "The banality of Golden Dawn: return to political normality?", *Global Affairs*, Vol 3, No 1, 2017, pp.33-44.

80 Ioannis-Sotirios Ioannou, "The External Security of Cyprus: Challenges and Potential Threats" *Diplomatic Academy University of Nicosia Cyprus*, The Europe Levant Observatory – Policy Brief, April 2015.

81 Bureau of Diplomatic Security (OSAC), *Cyprus 2017 Crime & Safety Report*, US Department of State, January 2017.

82 Interview with Cypriot police officer, 24 October 2018.

83 "Greece moves to ban far-right Golden Dawn Party", *The Guardian*, 18 September 2013.

84 "An unknown terrorist organization has assumed responsibility for the double murder in Neo Iraklio", *GR Reporters*, 17 November 2013.

- *July 2017*: Assailants armed with iron bars and knives attacked and injured two Pakistani migrant workers in Aspropyrgos, Greece. No group claimed responsibility.⁸⁵
- *December 2017*: an improvised explosive device detonated at Athens office of the *Coalition of the Radical Left* (ΣΥΡΙΖΑ, or Syriza) political party. There were no casualties, and no group claimed responsibility.⁸⁶
- *December 2017 – January 2018*: the houses of Pakistani migrant workers in the Nikaia neighbourhood of Piraeus, Greece, were attacked.⁸⁷ Over 30 houses were damaged, though no casualties were reported. No group claimed responsibility.⁸⁸
- *March 2018*: Greek counterterrorism police arrested 6 people over a series of explosions, arson attacks, and attacks targeting migrants and refugees in Athens.⁸⁹

Arrests and convictions are rare: between 2012 and 2017, there were only five arrests for far-right terrorism-related activity, and they all took place in 2015.⁹⁰ The risk of far-right terrorism is considered to be low by Greek authorities.⁹¹ It is similarly not considered a substantive threat in Cyprus, though the authorities are monitoring ELAM.⁹²

Far-Left Extremism

Greece has been home to a succession of left-wing terrorist groups from the 1970s to the present day. The most infamous was the *Revolutionary Organization 17 November* (Επαναστατική Οργάνωση 17 Νοέμβρη, known as 17N), which caused serious political and security problems. The group carried out assassinations of politicians, targeted industrials, and placed IEDs under diplomatic vehicles.⁹³ Following 17N's collapse in the early 2000s, *Revolutionary Struggle* (Επαναστατικός Αγώνας, or EA) group was active – carrying out a seven-year campaign of bombings, shootings, and rocket attacks⁹⁴ – until the group's leaders were captured in 2010.

Greece is – alongside Italy and Spain – part of the “Mediterranean Anarchist Triangle” and has an active far-left extremist scene. Today there exists a kaleidoscope of anarchist and far-left groups, such as *Conspiracy of Cells of Fire* (Συνωμοσία των Πυρήνων της Φωτιάς, or CCF) and *Revolutionary Self-Defence Organisation* (Οργάνωση Επαναστατικής Αυτοάμυνας or OEA), which seek to violently instigate an anarchist revolution in the country.

85 Entry from National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START)'s Global Terrorism Database, available at: <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>

86 Ibid.

87 Ibid.

88 Ibid.

89 Interview with Greek counterterrorism official, 25 October 2018.

90 Figures from Europol's annual *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Reports (TESAT)*, 2013 to 2019.

91 Interview with Greek counterterrorism officer, 25 October 2018.

92 Ioannis-Sotirios Ioannou, “The External Security of Cyprus: Challenges and Potential Threats” *Diplomatic Academy University of Nicosia Cyprus*, The Europe Levant Observatory – Policy Brief, April 2015.

93 George Kassimeris, “Greece's Terrorism Problem: A reassessment”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol 39, Issue 9, 2016 p.864.

94 George Kassimeris, *Inside Greek Terrorism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.78.

Arrests and convictions for far-left terrorism-related activity are routine. Between 2012 and 2017, there were a total of 61 arrests, and 68 convictions.⁹⁵ Greek authorities consider far-left terrorism to be the gravest terrorist threat, with anarchist groups routinely carrying out low-level attacks – often using petrol bombs – against police targets.⁹⁶ Cypriot authorities consider far-left terrorism to be a low threat. Notable recent events include:

- *February 2012*: an improvised explosive device (IED) failed to detonate aboard a metro train in Athens. No advanced warning was given; a group calling itself the *12 February Movement* claimed the attack.⁹⁷
- *January 2017*: OEA attacked police officers outside the headquarters of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement, otherwise known as PASOK, using an assault rifle. The attack left one police officer injured.
- *April 2017*: an IED exploded outside the offices of a bank in Athens. and on 22 December another device detonated in front of the building of the Athens appeals court. Both explosions were preceded by a warning call to newspapers⁹⁸.
- *May 2017*: a parcel bomb exploded in the car of former Greek Prime Minister, Lucas Papademos. No group claimed responsibility for the attack, which left Papademos and two others injured.⁹⁹ A 29-year-old man was arrested for the attack, and his arrest and hunger strike inside prison led to violent “solidarity” actions in Athens.¹⁰⁰
- *November 2017*: OEA again targeted the PASOK headquarters in a drive-by shooting. No one was injured in the attack.
- *December 2017*: anarchists published threats online to contaminate food products – by introducing hydrochloric acid into soft drinks, milk, and sauces – in Athens and Thessaloniki in Greece.¹⁰¹ Similar threats of food contamination in Greece were published by anarchists in previous years.

Far-left terrorists have also shown a willingness to target those outside of Greek territory. In March 2017 victim-operated improvised explosive devices (VOIEDs) were sent to the headquarters of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in France, and to the German finance minister, Wolfgang Schäuble, in Germany.¹⁰² Both VOIEDs were intercepted, though the one sent to the IMF injured an employee. The Conspiracy of Cells of Fire claimed responsibility for the bomb sent to Germany.

95 The annual breakdowns for arrests are: 1 (2012); 18 (2013); 13 (2014); 16 (2015); 1 (2016); and 12 (2017). The breakdowns for convictions are: 8 (2012); 5 (2013); 10 (2014); 25 (2015); 3 (2016); and 17 (2017). Figures from Europol's *TESAT* reports, 2013 to 2018.

96 Interview with Greek counterterrorism officer, 25 October 2018.

97 *TESAT 2013*, Europol, p. 31.

98 *TESAT 2017*, Europol, 2018, p. 48.

99 *Ibid.*, p.14.

100 “Greek bombing suspect on hunger strike wins prison transfer”, *AP*, 2 March 2018.

101 *Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2017*, Europol, 2018, p. 14.

102 *TESAT 2017*, Europol, 2018, p. 48; “Letter bomb that exploded at Paris IMF office was sent from Greece”, *The Guardian*, 16 March 2017.

A Potential Nexus

In both Greece and Cyprus there are no direct, overt overlaps behind criminals and terrorists, and 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.¹⁰³

This potential is closely tied to the situation in the Middle East, where several nearby countries – especially Syria and Lebanon – have seen active jihadist movements. The threat from returnees, who could reinvigorate the jihadist movements in the region, may have a spillover effect for Greece and Cyprus. 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.

There also exists the potential for criminal groups to engage in terrorist tactics, which has already been seen on Cyprus. Groups on the island have shown a willingness to engage in bombings, shootings, and arson attacks to intimidate and coerce those within and outside of the criminal world.¹⁰⁴ A series of arson attacks in 2017 throughout Nicosia was related to the criminals seeking control over the bars and restaurants of the capital, showcasing how rapidly the criminal environment can deteriorate.¹⁰⁵

103 Tamara Makarenko and Michael Mesquita, "Categorising the crime-terror nexus in the European Union", *Global Crime*, Vol 15, Issue 3-4, 2014, pp.261-264.

104 Bureau of Diplomatic Security (OSAC), *Cyprus 2016 Crime & Safety Report*, US Department of State, January 2016; Committee of experts on criminal law and criminological aspects of organised crime (PC-CO), *Report on the Organised Crime Situation in Council of Europe Member States*, Council of Europe, 1999, p.46.

105 "An explosive form of intimidation", *Cyprus Mail Online*, 5 November 2017.

4 Recommendations

This paper has examined potential links between crime and terrorism in Greece and Cyprus. 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 in Greece connect the Middle East and 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. Given Greece's position along various transit routes for illegal goods and people, it is vitally important that Greece also effectively collaborates with European institutions.

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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