

Project SAFTE

Project SAFTE is an international research project studying the acquisition of firearms by terrorists in Europe. The project was funded by the European Commission and coordinated by the Flemish Peace Institute (FPI), an independent research institute within the Flemish Parliament. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and the Scuola Superiore di Studi Universitari e di Perfezionamento Sant'Anna (SSSA) were the official partners of the study. Together with specialised research teams from Arquebus Solutions, the Small Arms Survey and Bureau Bruinsma, they contributed extensively to the project.

Goal of Project SAFTE

The aims of Project SAFTE are:

- **to enhance the combat** against the trafficking of illicit firearms by providing better and deeper **understanding** of this phenomenon;
- **to inform policymakers**, the judicial sector, law enforcement agencies and other stakeholders about illicit firearms markets in Europe and terrorist access to these markets, and to provide policy **recommendations**.

Project SAFTE analysed:

- the characteristics of illicit **firearms markets** in the EU;
- the main **actors** involved;
- how **terrorists access** these markets.

This led to unique insights into the dynamics of illicit firearms markets in Europe, and to policy recommendations for EU policymakers and relevant authorities in EU member States and third countries.

In recent years, several terrorist attacks with firearms have been carried out in Europe, causing the deaths of hundreds of people and injuring hundreds more. In addition, law enforcement agencies across Europe have foiled several other plots to carry out terrorist attacks using firearms. Most of the recent high-profile terrorist attacks were religiously-inspired. Yet in the recent and more distant past, separatist, right- and left-wing terrorist plots and attacks involving firearms have also occurred throughout Europe.

The recent attacks – both successful and foiled – demonstrate that terrorists are able to access various types of firearms, including military-grade firearms. This observation has led policymakers in the European Union and in EU member states to develop measures to combat terrorist access to illicit firearms. Yet **in-depth, evidence-**

based insight into the firearms acquisition practices of terrorists in the EU is limited. This is part of a larger problem of scarcity of data and in-depth research on Europe's illicit firearms markets.

Project SAFTE: research design and output

Phase 1 – In-depth country studies

In-depth country studies were conducted in **eight EU member states** (*see box*) by research teams from the Flemish Peace Institute, SIPRI, SSSA, Arquebus Solutions, Small Arms Survey and Bureau Bruinsma. These teams boast significant policy-oriented research experience on international firearms trafficking in general, and specific knowledge of the situation in the eight EU member states under study in particular.

Each country study analysed:

- the **basic characteristics of the local illicit gun market** (such as size, the availability of different types of guns, prices, sources and logistics, and actors);
- the ways in which **terrorists access** this market;
- the **regulatory and policy framework** developed to prevent and combat terrorist access to this illicit gun market.

Eight in-depth studies of EU member states were conducted:

- Belgium
- Croatia
- Denmark
- France
- Italy
- The Netherlands
- Romania
- UK.

For the selection of the member states, the criteria included the size of the country, its geographical location and political features, the extent and characteristics of local illicit firearms trade, and the degree of exposure to terrorist activities and recent terrorist attacks with firearms.

Phase 2 – Systematic and comparative analysis

The Flemish Peace Institute conducted a systematic and comparative analysis of the findings of the country studies. The aim was to integrate the insights and to combine them into an EU-wide set of findings. The country studies were complemented with:

- an exploratory mapping of terrorist access to illicit firearms markets in the **other 20 EU member states**;
- an assessment of the illicit possession and proliferation of firearms just outside the **EU region** (the Balkans, Northern Africa and Ukraine).

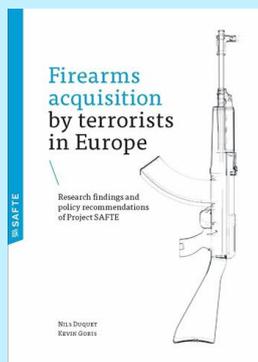
All these findings were then linked to the EU policy context. This was done using an in-depth qualitative research methodology involving desk research and semi-structured interviews with key international actors and stakeholders such as Europol, EMPACT Firearms, Interpol, SEESAC and the Office of the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator.

Synthesis report

Firearms Acquisition by Terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy Recommendations of Project SAFTE.

Authors:
Nils Duquet & Kevin Goris

232 p.



Edited volume

Triggering Terror: Illicit Gun Markets and Firearms Acquisition of Terrorist Networks in Europe.

Editor:
Nils Duquet

480 p.

