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Stealing precious steel: Firearm thefts in the European Union

26 May 2021
Project DIVERT

PROJECT DIVERT: REPORT

STEALING PRECIOUS STEEL:
FIREARMS THEFT
IN THE EUROPEAN UNION



QUITTERIE DE LABBEY
NILS DUQUET &
LORE SMETS

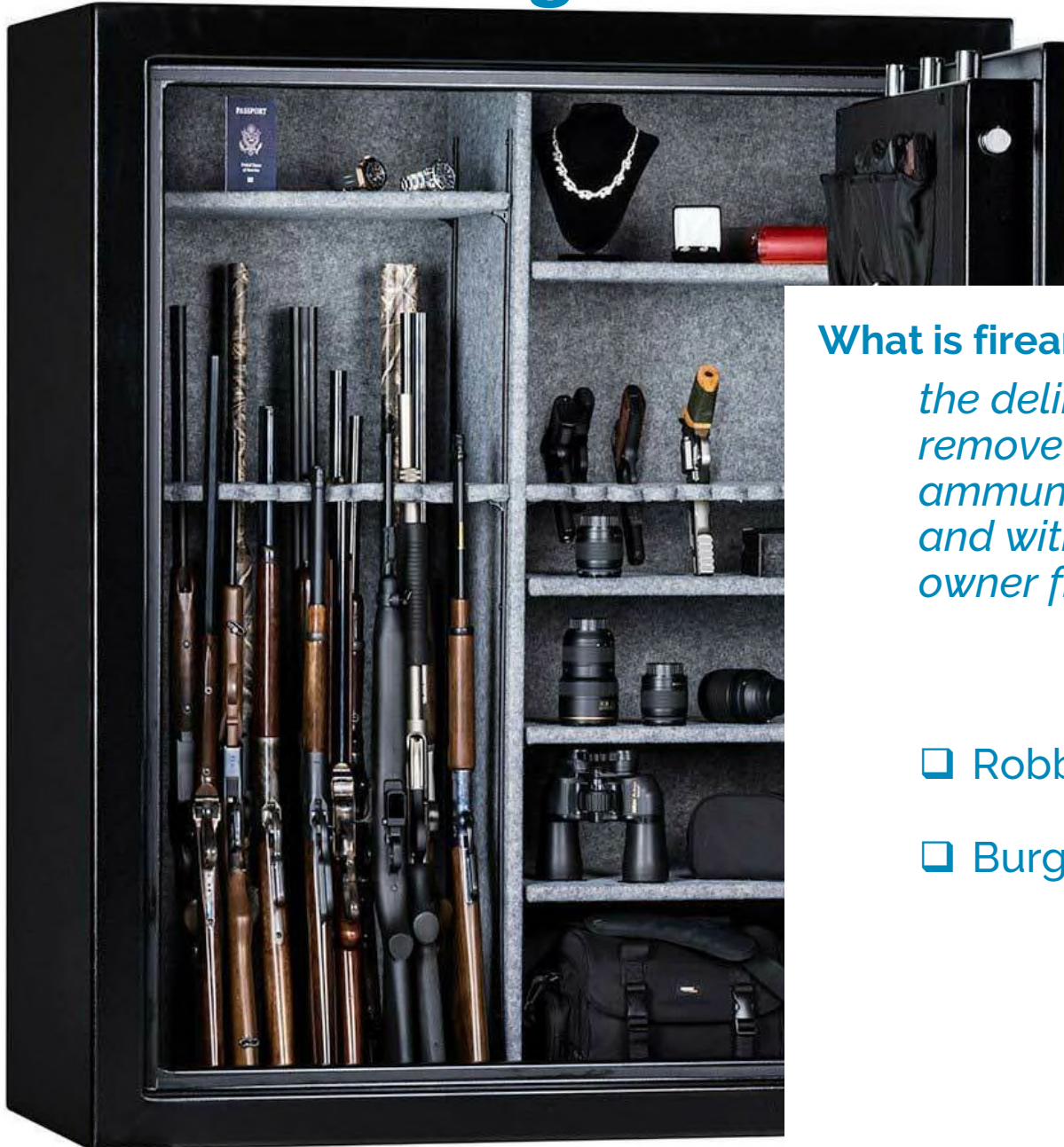
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Structure of the presentation

- 1. Defining firearms theft**
- 2. Scope of firearms theft in the EU**
- 3. Characteristics of firearms theft in the EU**
- 4. Policies to combat firearms theft in the EU**

Defining firearms thefts



What is firearms theft?

the deliberate act to take and remove firearms and/or ammunition of personal property and with intent to deprive the legal owner from it.

- Robberies
- Burglaries

Scope of firearms theft (1)

➤ Previous research

- ❑ Project FIRE (2017): *"thefts from legitimate and illegal civilian owners, as well as from manufacturers, constitute one of the most common supply channels for illicit firearms trafficking"*
- ❑ Project SAFTE (2018): *"firearms thefts are a primary source of firearms that end up on illicit firearms markets in several EU Member States and (...) the majority of such thefts occur in the private homes of legal gun-owners"*

➤ Challenges with available data

- ❑ Different recording methods
- ❑ Unreported thefts
- ❑ Undetected thefts
- ❑ False declarations of thefts

Scope of firearms theft (2)

- Quantitative data from 20 EU MS

| | Registered number of theft declarations | Registered number of firearms stolen |
|-----------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| France (2015) | 10,572 | |
| Greece (2018) | | 4,374 |
| Spain (2019) | | 1,279 |
| United Kingdom (2015) | | 635 |
| Germany (2019) | 633 | |
| Belgium (2018) | | 624 |
| Sweden (2018) | 381 | |
| Ireland (2013) | | 355 |
| Finland (2009) | | 250 |
| Netherlands (2012) | | 230 |
| Bulgaria (2003) | | 237 |
| Denmark (average 2012-2016) | | 200 |
| Portugal (2018) | 188 | |
| Czechia (2018) | | 160 |
| Poland (2018) | 108 | |
| Lithuania (2018) | | 76 |
| Austria (2017) | 61 | |
| Latvia (2018) | | 17 |
| Luxembourg (2018) | 11 | |
| Estonia (2018) | 6 | ca. 110 (lost and stolen) |

At least 20,000 stolen firearms annually in the EU

Scope of firearms thefts (3)

| | Registered number of theft declarations | Registered number of firearms stolen |
|-----------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| High levels of theft | | |
| France (2015) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Large national differences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Number of stolen firearms <input type="checkbox"/> Importance of theft as diversion method <input type="checkbox"/> In most EU MS a decrease in firearms thefts | |
| Greece (2018) | | |
| Spain (2019) | | |
| United Kingdom (2015) | | |
| Germany (2019) | | |
| Low levels of theft | | |
| Lithuania (2018) | | 76 |
| Austria (2017) | 61 | |
| Latvia (2018) | | 17 |
| Luxembourg (2018) | 11 | |
| Estonia (2018) | 6 | ca. 110 (lost and stolen) |

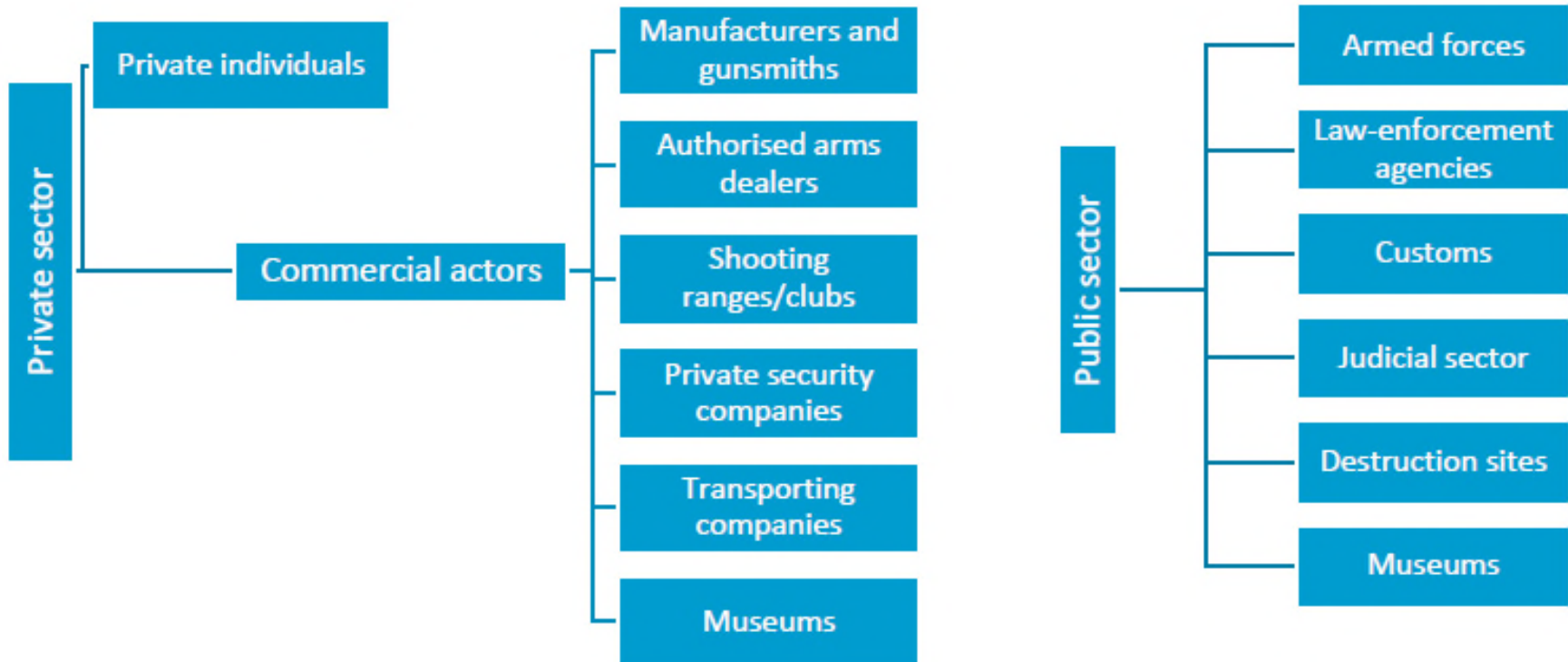
Scope of firearms theft (4)

➤ Contextual factors for firearms thefts

- High (legal) possession rates
- Criminal demand
- Pressure on other sources of (national) illicit firearms market
- Safe storage rules

Characteristics of firearms theft (1)

- Qualitative analysis of 184 identified cases of firearms theft in 26 EU MS
- Wide variety of targets of theft



Characteristics of firearms theft (2)

➤ Targeted versus non-targeted thefts

❑ Differences in:

- ❑ Targets of theft
- ❑ Amount of stolen firearms
- ❑ Types of stolen firearms
- ❑ Modus operandi
- ❑ Perpetrators

➤ Non-targeted thefts

- ❑ Victims are mainly private gun owners
- ❑ Generally 1-5 firearms
- ❑ Perpetrators are both professional and non-professional criminals
- ❑ Firearms are not priority, but by-product
- ❑ Opportunism
- ❑ Negligence

Characteristics of firearms theft (3)

➤ Targeted thefts

- ❑ Especially government and commercial stockpiles
- ❑ Targets usually store large numbers or specific types of firearms
- ❑ More sophisticated organization
- ❑ Often insider knowledge to circumvent more restrictive safe storage measures
 - ❑ Employees
 - ❑ (un)intentional negligence

Law enforcement stockpiles

- **Different types of thefts**
 - Service firearms stolen from:
physical stockpiles;
in action; at home
- **Quantities**
 - Potentially high
- **Type of firearm stolen**
 - Typically handguns



Source of picture: Ostsee-Zeitung

Armed forces stockpiles

- **Different types of thefts**
 - Military bases; military warehouses; military vehicles
- **Quantities**
 - Risk of high quantities
- **Type of firearm**
 - Wide range, including military grade firearms



Source of picture: hoy.es

Commercial actors

➤ Different types of thefts

- Shops outside of opening hours, warehouses, shipping containers

➤ Quantities

- Risk of high quantities

➤ Type of firearm

- Firearms sold legally on national level (various types)



Perpetrators of targeted thefts

- **Criminals, inside jobs or combination**
- **Continuum ranging from highly professional to amateur theft**

Policies to combat firearms thefts

- **EU Firearms Directive (article 5a):**
 - Firearms and ammunition must be stored and transported *separately* from each other
 - The level of scrutiny of storage arrangements shall reflect the *number and categories* of firearms and ammunition
- **Rules on safe storage are not-harmonized at national level**
- **EU Action Plan against illicit firearms trafficking (2020-2025)**
 - National policies**
 - Periodic controls and verification measures
 - Reducing surplus and decommissioned firearms
 - Preventing unauthorized access to firearms
 - Sanction mechanisms
 - Record-keeping