

Presentation title:

Drug-related gun violence in the European Union

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Firearms trafficking in the European Union is driven by criminal demand and a key enabler for other criminal activities such as illegal drug distribution. Drugs and guns are often smuggled together by the same (poly-) criminal groups and via the same smuggling routes. Firearms are used for instrumental purposes; facilitating criminal activities by threatening, intimidating or assaulting others (criminals and non-criminals). The increased availability of firearms has also resulted in an increase in drug-related gun violence in various European countries. Drug-related violence tends to be more lethal and more injurious compared to other types of crime. The level of violence is generally dependent on the level of the distribution chain. By using examples from across the EU, this paper demonstrates that gun violence is strategically used at the wholesale level. At this level, it is the cocaine market that accounts for most of the violence. Competition is a key element generating gun violence as more and smaller, loosely structured networks take to the cocaine market. Singular events such as loss or theft of drugs, or law enforcement interventions might also lead to an eruption of violence. The local consumer market accounts for the most visible drug-related violence in Europe. Following the increased availability of firearms even low-level drug criminals can acquire a gun. Many of these lower-level drug dealers are young and appear to be eager to pull the trigger as this gun violence helps them to build a reputation. As a result, a vicious cycle of gun trafficking and gun violence can develop, with important societal implications.