

Smokkel van handvuurwapens vanuit voormalige Oostbloklanden naar Nederland

Summary

Policymakers in the field of crime as well as the Dutch police assume that the illicit trafficking of small arms from former Eastern Bloc countries to the Netherlands has increased from the last decade onwards. For this reason a research project has been commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Justice to investigate how many firearms are annually smuggled into the Netherlands, and how many of those firearms originate from former Eastern bloc countries. Further questions to be answered are in which countries these firearms have been produced and on which scale the illicit trafficking of firearms takes place.

In the first place the information in this report is based upon the registration of the Dutch police of confiscated illegal firearms. Secondly, information gathered during criminal investigation cases, performed by the Dutch police regarding the trafficking of illegal arms from Eastern Bloc countries, was taken into account. Thirdly interviews were held with persons who were convicted for smuggling firearms, as well as interviews with officials from the Dutch police, the Dutch customs, Europol, Interpol as well as other relevant institutions. Finally, international publications dealing with the illicit trafficking of small arms were studied.

This study shows that the most important former Eastern Bloc countries from which firearms are smuggled are Croatia, Yugoslavia (until 1999), the Czech Republic and Hungary. In Croatia firearms are manufactured legally as well as illegally. In the Czech Republic and Hungary, firearms are legally manufactured. An unknown number of these firearms are obtained by criminal groups and smuggled abroad. Arms production in Yugoslavia has been halted since 1999, due

to the bombing of production facilities by NATO. From then on the smuggling of firearms from this country has virtually ceased.

In the Netherlands, 400 – 500 illegal firearms, originating from former Eastern Bloc countries, are confiscated annually. About 20 percent of the total amount of the illegal firearms confiscated has been produced in or smuggled from a former Eastern Bloc country. Machineguns and concealed firearms, seized by the Dutch police, are almost exclusively of Croatian, Czech or Bulgarian produce.

The criminal groups who are responsible for the illegal trafficking of firearms are relatively small. The key figure in these groups is the 'importer'. This person is able to obtain illegal firearms in one of the former Eastern Bloc countries involved, and possesses of a network of middle men in the Netherlands to sell these arms on the criminal market. The actual smuggling is done by couriers. Those are recruited for the occasion in the country from which the firearms are trafficked. They have no knowledge of the structure of the criminal group involved. Batches of 5 – 30 firearms are trafficked by individual couriers.

The profits that are made by means of trafficking firearms are relatively modest, compared to the smuggling or manufacturing of drugs. However, involvement in the illicit trafficking of firearms does increase one's standing in the criminal world. Most of the importers are also involved in other types of criminal activities. It is estimated that 15 – 25 importers are active trafficking illegal firearms from former Eastern Bloc countries to the Netherlands.

The number of illegal firearms that is trafficked annually from former Eastern Bloc countries to the Netherlands can be estimated along two lines.

First the police in the Netherlands (as well as in other Western-European countries) estimate that 10 percent of the total amount of all illegal firearms will ultimately be confiscated. Based on this assumption and the amount of illegal firearms originating from a former Eastern Bloc country that is actually seized, the conclusion can be drawn that annually 3000 – 4000 illegal firearms are imported into the Netherlands.

Secondly, it is estimated that 15 – 25 importers of illegal firearms are active in the Netherlands with regard to former Eastern Bloc countries. The criminal groups that were investigated by the Dutch police have been responsible for the trafficking of batches of 100 – 200 firearms. Based on the structure and scale of the criminal groups involved, and the time it takes them to sell the firearms on the illegal market, it can be argued that this amount also constitutes the limit of their annual capability. Based on these assumptions it is estimated that 2000 – 4000

firearms are smuggled from former Eastern Bloc countries into the Netherlands each year.

The conclusion of this research is that each year 2000 – 4000 illegal firearms are trafficked from former Eastern Bloc countries to the Netherlands. This adds up to an average of 22 percent of the amount of illegal firearms confiscated in the Netherlands concerning the years 1998, 1999 and 2000. The total amount of illegal firearms that are smuggled into the Netherlands is therefore estimated at 9000 – 18.000 each year.