

# SECURITY SPECTRUM:

Journal of Advanced Security Research

## CHALLENGES FOR CRIMINOLOGY IN TURBULENT TIMES

### **Foreword**

*Raul Savimaa, Triin Rätsepp*

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*Jüri Saar*

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## **CHALLENGES FOR CRIMINOLOGY IN TURBULENT TIMES**

**SISEKAITSEAKADEEMIA**  
Estonian Academy of Security Sciences

Tallinn 2024

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## **Submission Contact**

<i>Postal address:</i>	<i>Estonian Academy of Security Sciences Kase 61, 12012 Tallinn Estonia</i>
<i>E-mail:</i>	<i>teadusinfo@sisekaitse.ee</i>

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# FOREWORD

**Raul Savimaa**, Editor-in-chief

**Triin Rätsepp**, Executive editor

The security situation in Europe continues to be more turbulent than in previous years. The Russian Federation's full-scale aggression and war in Ukraine and its anti-Western rhetoric have once again brought to the field of security and safety the need to be prepared for a range of threats and scenarios.

At the same time, it is no longer a matter of surprise and unexpectedness. The lessons learned from overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic have made everyone in all spheres of society stronger. Modern global and regional security and geopolitical threats have led to the need for systemic crisis preparedness in the case of polycrises and multimodal crises. At least for a while, Europe must be ready to cope with several simultaneous crises, whether caused by natural or man-made influences. As a result, crisis management has adapted, and the resolution of such events is handled in a more considered manner.

Classical security and safety issues have again become a daily focus. One such issue is the permanent basis of crime analysis and profiling – criminology. The issues of violence, corruption, and illegal arms trade are also in the spotlight again. These are classical topics in the fight against international crime. In the current era of polycrises, however, the skills and effectiveness to process and prevent these types of crime also determine the ability to ensure an expected, legitimate living environment daily.

It is no secret that globalization in international cooperation and trade has led to the globalization of crime. All types of crime can potentially be used as hybrid attacks to sow anxiety in society and disrupt the continuity of vital services. Therefore, this issue of the journal focuses on the introduction of new scientific research, especially in the fight against crime.

The current 23rd volume of **Security Spectrum: Journal of Advanced Security Research** contains a wide range of articles on various topics. The issue begins with an article about Professor Eduard Raska, who would have turned 80 this autumn. Although his life was regrettably short, the scale of what he accomplished in various fields is nothing short of incredible. In this article, **Feliks Angelstok** and **Jüri Saar** remember their dear colleague from the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, who made great professional achievements in establishing an independent Estonian law enforcement system.

The second article concerns **illicit firearms trafficking**. **Piotr Chlebowicz** and **Szymon Buczyński** describe several dimensions of the illicit firearms market and note that the problem of illicit firearms trafficking is interdisciplinary, with the criminological perspective reflecting the essence of illicit trafficking only to some extent. The article addresses the basic concepts related to illicit firearms trafficking and their use in the context of the Polish black market for weapons. The availability, possession, and use of illicit firearms should be considered a factor that significantly destabilises society. As such, this phenomenon has broader social and economic consequences than typically perceived. In addition, the observed turbulent geopolitical changes in the region provide a compelling case for continuing international studies of the phenomenon carried out by national research teams.

The third publication of this issue is written by **Roberto Narciso Andrade Fernandes**, who **explores the transformation of international security dynamics considering the rising challenges posed by globalised crime and modern crises**. A pivotal element in this discourse is the phenomenon of Russian irredentism, illuminating the territorial and geopolitical ambitions of a nation challenging established international norms. Within this evolving landscape, the concept of Police Diplomacy has taken on a new meaning, marking a paradigmatic shift in which representatives of law enforcement agencies take on diplomatic functions previously reserved for politicians and career diplomats. Portugal's Universalist orientation provides a compelling framework within which to contextualise this transition, reflecting the Nation's commitment to universalist ideals and its active engagement in global collaborative efforts. Utilising Portugal as a focal point, this study offers an in-depth analysis of the police diplomat role, delineating its complexities,

challenges, and implications within contemporary international relations. Throughout, emphasis is maintained on the overarching goal of peace diplomacy, centred on Human Security and the safeguarding of vulnerable populations.

In their article, **Kristjan Kask** and **Valeri Murnikov** explore **the relationship of resilience with symptoms of depression and anxiety, perceived stress, and post-traumatic stress in Estonia a month after the start of the war in Ukraine**. Resilience was negatively correlated with perceived stress, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety. Perceived stress and post-traumatic stress symptoms were both positively correlated with depression and anxiety. Based on the results of a path analysis, resilience was the best predictor of perceived stress, depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress. In addition, depression and anxiety scores predicted higher scores in perceived stress and post-traumatic stress. The authors conclude that resilience plays an important role in predicting psychological distress, perceived stress, and post-traumatic stress. The authors wish to thank **Karel Kulbin** from Tallinn University for helping to prepare the survey.

The fifth article of this issue is written by **Kristjan Kask** about the **investigative interviewing of child witnesses in Estonia**. In 2004, the first unit specialising in investigating crimes against children was formed in the Estonian Police and Board Guard. To celebrate 20 years since this event, the article reflects on how the investigative interviewing of child victims and witnesses in Estonia has developed over the years from a psychological perspective. It covers relevant literature and research concerning the topic in Estonia along with changes in legislation regulating the area. It also focuses on interview training and the opening of the Children's House (Barnahus) service and finally brings out several important issues to keep in mind in this field for the future.

Lastly, in the sixth article, **Jüri Saar** analyses **how data on homicide in Estonia and the other Baltic states changes from 1990 to 2021 and conceptualizes these changes**. The level and dynamics of intentional homicides committed in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania during the last three decades were assessed to highlight their similarities and differences. The situation in the field of homicides in the Baltic states was

put next to that of the three Nordic countries: Finland, Sweden, and Norway.

The editorial team of the **Security Spectrum: Journal of Advanced Security Research** hopes that our readers find a wealth of new insights in the 23rd issue of the journal and can draw parallels with their everyday lives.





# **PROFESSOR EDUARD RASKA AS AN OUTSTANDING SCIENTIST AND STATESMAN**

**Jüri Saar, PhD**

*Estonian Academy of Security Sciences  
Institute of Internal Security  
Researcher  
Estonia*

**Feliks Angelstok, PhD**

*Estonian Academy of Security Sciences  
Professor Emeritus  
Estonia*

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## ABSTRACT

Security Spectrum's special issue on criminology is dedicated to Professor Eduard Raska (1944–2008), who would have turned 80 this autumn. Although his life was regrettably short, the scale of what he accomplished in various fields is nothing short of incredible. In this article, we remember our good colleague Professor E. Raska, an outstanding scientist, criminologist, and legal philosopher who made great professional achievements in establishing an independent Estonian law enforcement system.

### **1. WORK IN THE LABORATORY OF THE SOCIOLOGY OF DEVIANT BEHAVIOUR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TARTU AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE TRADITION OF THE BALTIC CRIMINOLOGY SEMINARS**

Eduard Raska was born in the small town of Mõisaküla during the Second World War. He graduated from secondary school there in 1962 and then from the Faculty of Law of the University of Tartu in 1970. The topic of his diploma thesis testified to his keen interest in criminology as a novel scientific discipline (Raska, 1970). After graduating from university, he started working as a researcher in a laboratory of criminology. E. Raska defended his candidate's degree (Paksa, 1974) in law in 1974, then worked for many years as a senior researcher at the Institute for History of the Academy of Sciences of the ESSR.

An important turning point in his professional career took place in 1983 when he became the director of the Laboratory of Sociology of Deviant Behaviour (formerly the Laboratory of Criminology) at the University of Tartu. At that time, the University of Tartu took the direction of becoming a research centre, where the abovementioned laboratory became part of the Department of Science. This meant that the previous focus on teaching activities had to be broadened, giving a greater role to research. The University of Tartu did not put the obligation to teach students on the scientific staff as it did on the teaching staff. Scientific units soon achieved relative independence as the research contracts concluded with various partners provided the laboratories with a strong material base.

By that time, a certain upheaval had taken place in the Soviet Union in regard to the attitude towards sociology as an empirical science, which was hoped to provide support for more effective governance by the Communist Party. One of the areas in which major change was underway was crime control, which, in the future, was supposed to rely on science to a much greater extent and thereby become more effective. As early as 1964, a regulation of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (ZK KPSS, 1964) enacted the inclusion of courses of criminology and legal psychology in the curricula of all universities providing higher legal education.

In 1967, thanks to this regulation, the Laboratory of Criminology was established in the Faculty of Law of the University of Tartu. As we know today, the so-called Thaw era was soon followed by deep stagnation, which lasted until 1985 when a new attempt at a comprehensive reform of state life began in the Soviet Union. Thus, in the second half of the 1980s, the 'perestroika' initiated by the General Secretary of the CPSU, M. Gorbachev was in full swing in the Soviet Union. The main goal was the rational transformation of all societal life and the economy to the extent that the empire's potential would find significantly better application than before.

Such was the general socio-political situation in the Soviet Union when Eduard Raska became the director of the newly established Laboratory of Sociology of Deviant Behaviour at the University of Tartu. He defended his doctoral thesis at the Institute of State and Law of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR in Moscow in 1988 and was awarded the degree of Doctor of Law in Criminology (Paska, 1988). Professor Raska's great idea proposed in his doctoral thesis was how to study the spatial distribution of crime and the factors causing differences in crime for more effective crime prevention and control at the local and national levels.

Under the tutelage of Professor Raska, the University of Tartu and the law enforcement agencies of the Estonian SSR signed in 1985 a multilateral cooperation agreement. However, no practical or tangible results in the field of crime control were reached at that time. Changes to crime control remained mostly superficial; strict ideological control over this area was maintained as before by the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Law enforcement agencies continued to conceal empirical data on

crime, which in turn placed strict limits on scientific research conducted by the University of Tartu. The same trouble afflicted the entire totalitarian state because the Red Empire was not reformable and the quest for fundamental reforms led to the collapse of the entire system and the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

In the laboratory directed by Professor Raska, the foundation was laid for an event that later became a tradition: the Baltic Criminology Seminar, which began in 1987 with an informal meeting of criminologists in Tartu County. Back then, around twenty leading scientists in the field of criminological research from the Soviet Union participated in the event. They were united by a new, i.e. social-scientific, view of crime and its prevention as a phenomenon. Such an approach replaced the earlier theoretical-dogmatic understanding of crime as a 'heavy legacy of capitalism' that would soon disappear by itself.

Estonia was a suitable place for specialists prone to innovation to gather. Prof Raska and his associates saw crime as a social phenomenon – the result of destructive processes occurring in the social organism. At the first meeting, it was decided to create a network of criminologists with the participation of colleagues from four countries: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Russia (Saint Petersburg). Each country was to organize a seminar once every four years (Raska, 1988). The Baltic Criminology Seminars quickly gained wide national and subsequently international recognition.

The regularly published collections of scientific papers with articles based on conference presentations gained great popularity among professionals. The Laboratory of Sociology of Deviant Behaviour was able to keep its publishing active, and from 1991, more and more articles appeared in English (with Russian summaries) (Saar, 1991). The tradition is alive to this day, and last year (2023), the 35th Baltic Criminology Seminar was held in Tallinn as a joint event of the Academy of Security Sciences and the University of Tartu.

## 2. FOUNDING OF THE ESTONIAN ACADEMY OF SECURITY SCIENCES

In 1989, another fundamental change took place in Eduard Raska's professional career because he was invited to the position of Legal Adviser to the Office of the Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Estonian SSR. Therefore, immediately before the restoration of Estonia's statehood and during the initial period of national independence, he was engaged in a highly responsible position where he dealt with problems of national security.

At the end of the 1980s, the Red Empire, a colossus on clay feet, became increasingly impoverished and its leadership more ineffective. Shortly before and immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, it was necessary to create law enforcement structures suitable for Estonia as the small independent country. This had to be done during the political whirlwinds of the time when it was not quite clear to anyone what the independent Estonian state would be like. A good example was the foundation of the Estonian police to replace the previous 'Soviet militia'. Eduard Raska chaired the committee of experts that prepared the first draft of the Police Act, which was approved by the Estonian parliament (the Supreme Council) on 20 September 1990. The police began to replace the previous militia. Instead of the authorities that in the past had protected the communist party's power monopoly, the police now had to ensure public order primarily in the interests of the citizens.

However, the most important milestone in Professor Raska's professional life was his leading role in the founding of the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences. He likely received the task of establishing the Academy from politicians even before the formal restoration of Estonian independence. It is known that together with Mr Arnold Rüütel, the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Council, Professor Raska travelled to the United States of America twice, where he visited local police schools and correctional institutions. He presented the concept of the Academy to the government in May 1991. In July of the same year, the government approved Raska's proposal, and on 17 December, by order of the Estonian Government, Eduard Raska was appointed acting rector of the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences.

In January 1992, the founding committee began its work and was first tasked with drafting the statutes. The temporary statutes prepared under Raska's leadership were registered, and the Academy was established by the decree of the Government of the Republic of 15 April 1992 under the administration of the Ministry of Education. During the discussion of the statutes, Rector E. Raska came up with the idea of creating a complex of colleges in the field of public security (e.g. police, corrections), the umbrella organization of which could be the established Academy.

As we know, before the restoration of Estonia's national independence, these fields of training to be covered by the Academy were exclusively under the strict and central control of the Soviet authorities. Now, under the conditions of national independence, and especially in securing this independence, it was necessary to create a training system for law enforcement staff. The Academy was to become the scientific-pedagogical centre of this training system. Here, it must be emphasized that there were no direct examples that the Republic of Estonia, which had just regained its independence, would have been able to copy.

The Academy acquired the territory and buildings of the Military Academy of the Soviet Army in Maarjamäe, a subdistrict in Tallinn, where the Academy is still located today. The primary practical task for the Academy was to speed up the takeover and acceptance agreement to avoid further material damage caused by the departing Russian military. The task was completed, and the agreement was signed on 23 July 1992. From that date onwards, the Academy was the full-fledged owner of this territory. The training process began on 12 October, with the first 185 cadets admitted to the various specialities of internal security.

Finding a suitable place for the Academy in the Estonian educational and criminal justice systems was not an easy task, which is shown, among other things, by the fact that as early as 1993, the Academy was renamed the Estonian National Defence Academy. This was because the simultaneous creation of two higher education institutions – one for public service and the other for the defence forces – was too complicated and costly for the young country. This is how the decision to create a joint educational institution for training officers of the police, customs, pre-trial investigation agencies, corrections, the border guard, rescue services, and defence forces emerged.

This lasted until the Estonian National Defence Academy was renamed the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences by the decree of the Government of the Republic of 4 June 1998. Since this time, the Academy has been a university of applied sciences under the Ministry of the Interior. In the same year, the Estonian National Defence College was established in Tartu, and in 1999, the Government of the Republic decided to cease military training at the Academy's buildings and territory.

A serious issue was the Academy's relations with other Estonian institutions of higher education and the Academy's position in the Estonian education system in general. From the perspective of its profile and the organization of the training process, the Academy was not a competitor to other institutions of higher education in Estonia. The Academy was a completely new phenomenon in the field of higher education. It was an educational and research institution that was called for and set to fill a very important gap in the state structure.

At the same time, due to the logic of the state budget, the new and expensive education centre was a serious competitor to other higher education institutions. Since the Academy was under the administration of the Ministry of Education until 16 May 1995, big problems emerged in understanding what an institution of higher education operating in the field of internal security should be. In particular, the material needs of such an institution of higher education were not understood – why does this education have to be so costly? The realization that learning and training in the security field is much more expensive than studying in a regular institution of higher education arrived only years later. This major change in attitude occurred when the Academy was transferred to the area of administration of the Ministry of the Interior.

In 1993, the Council of the Academy elected Raska as rector for five years, i.e. until 1998. At the same time, he was Chair Professor of Criminology and the Sociology of Deviant Behaviour and gave classes in criminology to cadets. Research and development activities were quickly initiated at the Academy under his leadership, and a publishing department was even founded. The inaugural issue under the name 'Proceedings of the Estonian National Defence and Public Service Academy' was published as early as 1993 (Pihlak, 1993). The collection of articles on criminology compiled by Eduard Raska (Raska, 1994) laid the foundation for the



series on criminology in the Proceedings of the Academy. A total of 21 issues were published in the Proceedings of the Academy of Security Sciences over the years. In 2023, the series was renamed as the English-language magazine 'Security Spectrum: Journal of Advanced Security Research'.

In 1998, Professor Eduard Raska left the Academy and was later active as a lecturer in various Estonian universities. He continued working on the topics of legal philosophy and criminology and publishing scientific papers. He submitted the manuscript of his last book for publication just days before his death. In this book, he succinctly developed his ideas about 'living law', at the centre of which he placed the problem of 'just law'. At the end of his study, he concluded that law and justice is one of the self-regulation mechanisms of the social system that ensures the development of the whole society (Raska, 2010).

## CONCLUSIONS

In the spring of 2008, the heart of Professor Eduard Raska stopped beating, and he passed away in the prime of his creative life. The Academy was the last major undertaking for Professor Raska. The difficulties and misunderstandings that had to be overcome when introducing new ideas and concepts at the local and national levels had an impact on his health. It was not easy to find for the Academy a suitable niche as a teaching, training, and research centre. In the early 1990s, security problems were viewed quite differently compared to our current understanding. Today, it seems to us self-evident that dealing with internal security issues requires specific knowledge and skills. The main task of the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences is now to provide such competencies to the next generation of law enforcement professionals.

Today, it can be said that Professor Raska did a great job in his various fields. The number of Professor Raska's achievements is awe-inspiring: the Laboratory of Sociology of Deviant Behaviour of the University of Tartu he established gave rise to Estonian criminology as the scientific discipline we know now; as a legal advisor to the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Estonia, he took

a leading position in shaping the trends in legal policy and developing the criminal justice system of the Republic of Estonia; and at the most important stage of his professional life, he was the founding Rector of the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences.

The development of the Academy since its establishment has been enormous; a modern environment for the training of personnel in the field of internal security of Estonia has now been created. Raska's idea to build an academy as an umbrella organization for different colleges has come true. Today, we can clearly see how good an innovation it was to train all Estonian internal security specialists in one educational institution, where the personal relationships and social capital gained will be useful throughout their professional careers.

If you look at the new building of the Academy, you can see many strong young people – future law enforcement officials and specialists and feel the energy emanating from them. This is a sure sign of the undeniable vitality of Estonia as a country. It is not difficult to imagine our colleague Eduard watching this unfold somewhere and having a little chuckle, as he was wont to do when receiving good news.

**Contacts:**

**Jüri Saar, PhD**

E-mail: [jyri.saar@sisekaitse.ee](mailto:jyri.saar@sisekaitse.ee)

Estonian Academy of Security Sciences

**Feliks Angelstok, PhD**

E-mail: [feliks.angelstok@sisekaitse.ee](mailto:feliks.angelstok@sisekaitse.ee)

Estonian Academy of Security Sciences

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# **BEYOND FIREARMS: THE EUROPEAN ILLEGAL ARMS MARKET THROUGH A CRIMINOLOGICAL LENS**

**Piotr Chlebowicz, Doctor Habilitated**

*University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn  
Professor  
Poland*

**Szymon Buczyński, MA**

*University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn  
Assistant  
Poland*

**Keywords:** illicit markets, illicit firearms trafficking, organised crime

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## ABSTRACT

Each year, approximately 600–700 homicides are committed with firearms in the EU. Despite this, the subject of the illicit arms market in Europe has only recently become the focus of in-depth criminological study. Moreover, so far, only a limited number of studies have been undertaken to thoroughly analyse the impact of illicit firearms trafficking on gun-related violence in Europe. The authors of this paper describe several dimensions of the illicit firearms market and note that the problem of illicit firearms trafficking is interdisciplinary, with the criminological perspective reflecting the essence of illicit trafficking only to some extent. The paper addresses the issue of basic concepts related to illicit firearms trafficking and their use in the context of the Polish black market for weapons. The Analytical Research Team for Illicit Markets was established at the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn in 2012. The theoretical considerations presented correspond directly with the research activities conducted within its framework. The availability, possession, and use of illicit firearms should be considered a factor significantly destabilising society. As such, this phenomenon has broader social and economic consequences than typically perceived. In addition, the observed turbulent geopolitical changes in the region provide a compelling case for continuing international studies of the phenomenon carried out by national research teams.

## INTRODUCTION

The illicit firearms trade, viewed through a criminological lens, presents a critical area of study with profound implications for public safety and criminal justice systems worldwide. The illegal trafficking of firearms poses a significant threat to societal well-being, contributing to violent crimes, homicides, and acts of terrorism. Despite its detrimental impact, the subject of illicit arms dealing remains a complex and underexplored phenomenon within criminological research.

This article aims to delve into the illicit firearms trade from a criminological perspective, examining its various dimensions, dynamics, and consequences. With an estimated 600–700 homicides committed annually with firearms in the European Union alone, there is a pressing need for an in-depth analysis of the interplay between illegal arms trafficking and gun-related violence.

By elucidating the key concepts associated with illegal arms trafficking and their implications for crime prevention and law enforcement efforts, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding the underground firearms market. Through a criminological framework, this study aims to uncover the root causes of illicit arms trade, assess its societal impacts, and explore strategies for effective intervention and regulation. Rooted in the activities of the Analytical Research Team for Illicit Markets, established at the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn in 2012, this article aligns theoretical insights with empirical investigations conducted by dedicated research teams.

This article aligns with the broader academic literature on theoretical and empirical considerations of the illicit arms market, reflecting a growing scholarly interest in understanding the complexities of illegal firearms trafficking. By actively participating in this scholarly dialogue, the authors aspire to foster a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of illicit arms trafficking and promote effective strategies for combating this pervasive criminal activity.

Furthermore, in light of the transnational nature of illicit firearms trafficking and its implications for global security, this research underscores the importance of international cooperation and evidence-based



policy-making in addressing the challenges posed by illegal arms dealing. Recognising the illicit possession and use of firearms as more than criminal acts, it becomes imperative to sustain international research efforts, drawing on the collaborative work of national research teams. Against the backdrop of tumultuous geopolitical shifts in the region, there is a compelling argument for sustaining international research on this phenomenon, drawing on the insights derived from national research teams.

## 1. ARMS PROLIFERATION PARADOX

It is beyond doubt that illicit firearms trafficking is a dangerous practice producing multiple negative effects not only at the level of individual states but also regionally and globally. From a criminological point of view, the issue is complex; there are considerable difficulties in obtaining empirical data and there are no theoretical elaborations that deal specifically with the issue of illicit firearms trafficking in European Union states. This paper seeks to identify some of the most important theoretical issues related to this problem using data collected during studies conducted in the Department of Criminology and Forensic Science of the Faculty of Law and Administration of the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn by the authors (including, among other things, in connection with work in an international research project co-financed by the European Commission and coordinated by the Flemish Peace Institute and Institute of Security and Global Affairs of Leiden University nt. Illicit firearms trafficking and gun-related violence in Europe, Project TARGET) (Chlebowicz et al., 2022)<sup>1</sup> as well as using data from studies on the criminal careers of perpetrators operating in

<sup>1</sup> The aim of Project TARGET was to bridge the gap identified in the scientific literature concerning the impact of illicit firearms trafficking on gun-related violence in Europe. In the three-phase research plan, scientific teams from Belgium, Estonia, the Netherlands, Poland, Serbia, Spain, and Sweden were tasked with conducting the research activities. Associate partners in this project included Europol, the Dutch National Police, UNDP-SEESAC, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA). The results of the comparative analysis of all the data collected during the various phases of Project TARGET were published in the report "Targeting Gun Violence and Trafficking in Europe." The report, titled "Pulling the Trigger: Gun Violence in Europe," includes the seven country studies carried out as part of the second phase of the project. More information about Project TARGET and its findings can be accessed on the website: <https://vlaamsvredesinstituut.eu/en/target/>. The research focus of the project also aligns closely with the work conducted by the Analytical and Research Team on Illicit Markets, established in 2012 at the Faculty of Law and Administration of UWM in Olsztyn.

organised crime groups carried out by M. Kotowska, a researcher at the Department of Criminology and Forensic Science at the Faculty of Law and Administration of the UWM in Olsztyn. Accordingly, the data presented refer to the Polish black market for weapons. The analyses suggest that there is no unified market for illicit firearms in Europe and that there are significant differences in the way firearms are distributed to organised crime, extremist, and terrorist groups. In this context, attempts to traffic firearms rarely used by organised crime groups but sought by extremist and terrorist organisations into the Schengen area should be regarded as particularly alarming (Buczynski, 2021; Buczynski, 2022). The availability, possession, and use of illicit weapons need to be recognised as a factor significantly destabilising society. Accordingly, this phenomenon entails wider social and economic consequences than is generally acknowledged.

The phenomenon of illicit firearms trafficking constitutes a substantial research domain that can be examined and elucidated across various levels, two of which are presented below. The first level is a perspective that considers weapon transfers in terms of arms control and disarmament. This issue is analysed under the framework of political science and international relations. It should be noted that after 1990, there was a sharp increase in illicit transfers, with small arms and light weapons as the primary focus of illicit firearms trafficking. This marked a tremendous change as illicit weapons transfers began to be perceived as a significant source of threats to the newly designed international security. The motivations of actors in the global market also changed. Political ideology became less relevant as a driving force behind transfers during this period. Instead, economics came to the fore with the overriding motive of profit-making. This is illustrated by the example of the international arms dealer W. Bout, who supplied firearms to anyone who offered to pay<sup>2</sup> (Chlebowicz, 2012). The relevant literature emphasises

<sup>2</sup> The study concludes that it should be emphasized that the loss of control over governmental or military arms depots following the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc was less widespread in Poland compared to most other countries in the region (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Ukraine). What is even more important for institutional control over the arms market is that it occurred for a much shorter time since Poland was not stuck in the limbo of transition between the socialist and democratic systems. This problem in the European dimension is being tackled by a number of international, governmental, and non-governmental initiatives, such as the Regional Approach to Stockpile Reduction (RASR) funded by the US Government in 2009. In the Polish perspective, the greatest hopes were pinned on EU and NATO-backed programmes involving Ukraine (2004–2006). Their positive, although still insufficient, results have since been almost entirely nullified by the present armed conflict.

that the rise of the illicit small arms and light weapons market is linked to structural changes in the nature of the armed conflict. Wars have moved from clashes between regular armies to civil wars becoming the dominant form of conflict (Klare, 1999). Due to the warring parties' low quality of training and equipment, the characteristics of SALW made light weapons the principal means of warfare. It needs to be mentioned that the players in conflicts frequently include irregular troops, militias, and guerrillas of various provenience and the main objective is often the extermination of the civilian population. According to M. Zachara, the main recipients of this type of weaponry have been countries in unstable regions involved in long-term armed conflicts with highly militarised political and social relations (Zachara, 2010). However, this way of looking at illicit firearms trafficking seems to exclude a criminological understanding of the problem.

Hence, it is possible to determine the other research areas where illicit arms transfers are viewed from the perspective of combating and preventing crime (Davis, 2000). However, crime is not a homogeneous phenomenon, so various forms of crime are distinguished based on different criteria for academic and practical purposes.

## **2. GUNS AND CRIME: THE COMPLEX WEB OF ILLICIT ACTIVITIES**

Illicit firearms trafficking is an internally diverse category. It reveals links with crime types such as violent crime, economic crime, and, last but not least, organised crime. Therefore, it seems appropriate to attempt to map the connections between illicit firearms trafficking and the various crime categories.

Additionally, the illicit firearms trafficking phenomenon has an inherently international dimension since Europe is primarily a source of weapons that are trafficked to conflict zones in Africa, South America, and Asia (The Globalization of Crime. A Transnational Organised Crime Threat Assessment, 2010). The cross-border nature of transactions is explicitly emphasised in international law. The United Nations Firearms Protocol defines illicit trafficking in firearms as follows:

‘Illicit trafficking’ shall mean the import, export, acquisition, sale, delivery, movement or transfer of firearms, their parts and components and ammunition from or across the territory of one State Party to that of another State Party if any one of the States Parties concerned does not authorize it in accordance with the terms of this Protocol or if the firearms are not marked in accordance with article 8 of this Protocol.

From a global perspective, illicit firearms trafficking represents just a fragment of the so-called lethal transfers (Mandel, 1999) circulating between the rich North sending arms and toxic waste and the poor South ‘exporting’ drugs and waves of illegal immigrants. This state of affairs clarifies the role of crime that ‘manages’ the trafficking channels. From this point of view, organised crime is an important factor that either creates or at least significantly facilitates arms trafficking (Chlebowicz, 2015, p. 49).

However, this brings up the issue of black markets for firearms to meet the demand for weapons generated by criminal environments within individual EU states (Buczynski, 2021). According to Europol’s assessment, “the market for firearms in the EU remains modest in size” (Europol). Hence, the volume of demand is not large and motorbike gangs are a significant player in this market. Therefore, the opinion presented by D. Sagramoso that “criminal groups need weapons, but they do not need arsenals” (Sagramoso, 2001, p. 6) remains valid.

The problem of violence is one of the key areas in criminological science. The literature points out that violent crimes include both robbery, during which the perpetrator wounds the victim with a gunshot, and an act during which the perpetrator only threatens to use a firearm (Błachut, Gaberle, Krajewski, 2001). From a criminological perspective, violence is the actual use of physical force against a human being or the threat of its use if the perpetrator’s intention includes causing physical harm in the form of death or bodily harm, regardless of whether the perpetrator’s action constituted an end in itself or was instrumental (Błachut, Gaberle, Krajewski, 2001). In this context, homicide, offences of violence (robbery, aggravated theft, extortion), bodily harm, and kidnapping for ransom using firearms are most frequently cited. However, arms trafficking, understood as a series of activities related to the sale, purchase, storage, and transportation of firearms, does not contain an element of violence.

It is an activity of a strictly economic nature, except the products traded are subject to strict rationing (Chlebowicz, 2015). This, in turn, means that violent crimes committed with firearms cannot be equated with firearms trafficking.

At the same time, studies conducted as part of the TARGET project indicate that the long-term downward trend associated with gun violence in the EU may have been halted or even reversed. In light of the quantitative data collected, this general trend slowed down around 2012. This may suggest, among other things, the availability of weapons on the black market and the renewal of old and the formation of new trafficking channels. It also provides a self-evident rationale for continued analysis in this area. Further thorough monitoring of this phenomenon is required.<sup>3</sup> In some countries, such as the Netherlands and Sweden, there is already a significant increase in gun-related violence. This phenomenon is also reported by The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå), among others. This change can be linked to the illicit market for psychoactive substances and rivalry between criminal groups. Brå links this increase primarily to the number of killings with the use of firearms, especially in a criminal environment. In the Netherlands, an important factor influencing the level of homicides and other forms of gun-related violence is the activity of the so-called Moco mafia (Moroccan drug mafia). Studies suggest that we may even discuss an arms race within the criminal underworld. The situation in these countries, revealed by the source material collected, can be viewed as a deviation from the general trend or a signal of impending change, which will involve other actors.

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<sup>3</sup> Data collected during the Project TARGET relating to the number of gun-related homicides in Europe (EU Member States, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and the United Kingdom) after 2000 show that in the case of Luxembourg, Portugal, Austria, the Netherlands, Serbia, Sweden, Croatia, Bosnia, and Italy, it was reported that there is a medium to high percentage of the use of firearms (21% ≥ 40%) to commit homicide (the limitations of the analysis due to availability, quality, completeness, or complexity of the data are further reported in the post-project paper cited above). The following five actors showed high rates (41% ≥ 100%): North Macedonia, Cyprus, Montenegro, Albania, and Malta. It is worth noting that European micro-states form a special group. In their case, a few incidents per year can change the statistics of the phenomenon. The problem of gun-related homicides in Europe should be considered relevant socially and research-wise (this was also the conclusion of the evaluation of the project undertaken by the EC), but, at the same time, it is worth emphasising that the global average use of firearms in homicides is 40%, and countries with high firearms use only rank above the global average in light of this study. With the exception of the five countries with a high use of firearms in homicides indicated above, all other actors included in the study fall below the global average. One of the modifications introduced by the Polish team into the assumptions of the Project TARGET was the indication of the Ukrainian direction in the context of research on the quantitative and qualitative change in the availability of weapons on the European black market.

According to the analyses carried out in these two European countries, the perceived increase in the number of homicides can be attributed to an increase in gun-related homicides (Buczyński, 2022).

Based on the data gathered from the gunpolicy.org project, hosted by the Sydney School of Public Health at the University of Sydney, it can be posited that the level of firearm and ammunition smuggling in Poland can be considered moderate. This estimation similarly applies to Poland's neighbouring countries within the European Union, i.e. the Federal Republic of Germany, the Republic of Lithuania, and the Slovak Republic. However, the report suggests the issue is less severe in the Czech Republic. It should be noted that the reliability of such estimations is called into question by the fact that, between the 2014 and 2017 reports, the total number of firearms (both legal and illegal) possessed by civilians in Poland increased by 68.34% (from 575,000 to 968,000) due to newly available data. Importantly, no regulatory changes were identified that could account for this significant increase during the specified period. The report's authors outline various factors in the introduction that may have influenced the actual situation. Furthermore, Poland falls within the intermediate category in classifying global firearm manufacturers according to size.

The 2014 'Study to Support an Impact Assessment on Options for Combating Illicit Firearms Trafficking in the EU' highlights the grave issue of illicit firearms trafficking in Europe. This problem not only poses a direct threat but also serves as a significant contributing factor to other criminal activities, including drug smuggling, human trafficking, and acts of terrorism, which jeopardize the security of EU Member States and their citizens. The study estimates that between 2004 and 2014, at least 10,000 deaths in EU Member States can be attributed to illicit firearms trafficking. According to the study, the primary sources of illegal weapons within the EU include the reactivation of neutralised firearms, burglaries and thefts, the misappropriation of legal firearms, the diversion of legal firearms to the illicit market, decommissioned firearms from military or police forces, and the conversion of gas pistols.

Furthermore, data collected for the UNODC Study on Firearms in 2015 reveals that Polish law enforcement confiscated 90,810 units of ammunition in 2013 and 136,131 in the preceding year. During the same period,

they also seized 1,567 and 1,850 firearms and 367 and 1,001 firearm parts and components, respectively. Between 2010 and 2013, the annual rate of firearms reported as seized by the police reached 4.7 per 100,000 residents.<sup>4</sup> Poland has been categorised as a country with a seizure rate of crafted or rudimentary firearms exceeding 5%. The research conducted for the FIRE project (Savona, Mancuso 2017), which aimed to analyse the illicit firearms market in all 28 EU member states, revealed that Poland had the highest number of firearm seizure cases (36.11%) in Eastern Europe between 2010 and 2015.

Additionally, Poland accounted for the largest proportion of firearms seized (16%) in the region. The report also mentioned literature indicating the infiltration of Polish black market firearms by Italian, Russian, and Georgian organised crime groups. The illicit firearms market in Poland is further connected to other criminal activities, as funds acquired from various illicit sources are reinvested in this market, including the illicit art market.

It is worth noting that the report entitled 'The Illicit Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts, Components and Ammunition to, from and across the European Union' (UNODC, 2020) provided less detailed data on firearms seizures in Poland compared to the information gathered through our research.<sup>5</sup> It is important to emphasize that many EU Member States did not report seizure data and that the types of seizure data reported varied among the member states.<sup>6</sup> This means it was impossible to adequately compare the available national numbers on seized firearms across the EU. At the same time, the authors indicated that Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania reported shares of 7–10 per cent of seized machine guns from 2010–2013. According to the report, all EU Member States granted

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<sup>4</sup> According to data gathered for the project, the rate of illegally owned firearms per 100,000 inhabitants in the years 2014–2016 was, respectively, 3.23, 3.49, and 4.34.

<sup>5</sup> The results of these studies will be disseminated in the journal 'Archiwum Kryminologii' (Archives of Criminology) in an article entitled 'Tracing the shadows. Inside Europe illegal arms market, the case of Poland'. This journal is the oldest and one of the most prestigious Polish criminological publications, issued since 1960 by the Institute of Law Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences. The journal serves as the spiritual successor to the first Polish criminological journal entitled 'Criminological Archives', which published its inaugural issue in 1933.

<sup>6</sup> The aim of the report was to analyse illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime from a specific geographical angle, namely the European Union region, and to deepen the understanding of the illicit firearms trafficking situation in the region and its interconnection with the rest of the world.

firearms export licences in 2018. Poland was among the most important exporting countries in terms of value (EUR 102 million). The report's authors also indicated that Poland was among the countries reporting significant amounts of seized parts and components, especially in 2012.

The question arises as to whether illicit firearms trafficking falls into one of the categories of economic crime. In the Polish literature on the subject, this view is represented by H. KołECKI, who correctly states that the illegal trade in firearms and explosives falls within the scope of prohibited economic activity, which is one type of economic crime (KołECKI, 2004). Participants in illicit trafficking, especially traffickers and intermediaries, usually align with the characteristics of white collar criminals. The negative effects of this crime are high; arms transactions are discreet and concealed, violence is avoided, and the motives of the perpetrators are primarily financial (Chlebowicz, 2015). In this regard, it is worth pointing out that in British criminology, there is a distinction between predatory crimes – a broad catalogue of violent acts against property, commercial crimes, and market-based crimes. The latter involves the production and distribution of illicit goods and products, the consensual nature of the transfers, the clandestine nature of the transactions, and the 'moral ambiguity' that accompanies these transfers (Levi, 2002; Buczynski, 2014). It can therefore be concluded that illicit firearms trafficking falls within the scope of economic crime. Indeed, the characteristics listed herein create the specificity of illicit firearms trafficking.

In the literature on the subject, there is a well-established view that illicit firearms trafficking should be discussed together with the problem of organised crime. When attempting to apply this division to the problem of illicit firearms trafficking in the context of organised crime, it can be assumed that in the first case, illicit firearms trafficking will play an auxiliary, subsidiary role to the main areas of activity of groups committing violent crimes (murder, robbery, extortion, kidnapping for ransom). The firearms' role is reflected in the fact that they constitute an important element of the modus operandi of such groups.

Regarding criminal terror, firearms serve important purposes related to expanding organised crime and widening its spheres of influence. It can therefore be assumed that internal rivalry within organised crime may provide an additional factor stimulating demand for weapons and



explosives. Such a situation occurred in Poland in the 1990s, where criminological studies identified a new form of crime: vendetta-driven.

The second type of organised crime, commercial crimes, refers to groups that provide illegal goods and services. In this case, illicit firearms trafficking is viewed through the prism of criminal groups whose activities involve obtaining firearms and selling them to customers. Therefore, illicit firearms trafficking needs to be viewed as a source of funding for these groups and, at the same time, their primary area of operation.

Depending on changing trends in illicit markets, illicit firearms trafficking may constitute the dominant aspect of a given criminal organisation's activities at a particular time. From this perspective, we can speak of multi-criminal activity.

The above observations correspond with the opinions of police experts from Italy, Colombia, Brazil, and the United States, as well as Interpol, who participated in the work of the UNODC on the 10th anniversary of the Palermo Convention (UNODC, 2012). They reviewed individual criminal cases in which organised crime themes were present. The individual cases of organised crime groups active in the black market for weapons can be placed into three categories.

The first category exemplifies large, organisationally elaborate structures that carry out large-scale trafficking operations. They are usually formed based on ethnicity. The objects of trafficking are drugs and other illegal products. However, if a buyer is found, firearms are also sometimes trafficked. This attests to the high degree of flexibility and changeable profile of the 'criminal enterprise'.<sup>7</sup>

The second category comprises groups whose activity is aimed predominantly at smuggling weapons for the black market. The recipients include other criminal groups that use weapons for self-defence, power struggle, and as a means of intimidation. The volume of trafficked firearms and ammunition is not particularly large compared to grey market

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<sup>7</sup> The case studies cited in the aforementioned UNODC report from 2012, while not providing detailed information on the firearms component of criminal conduct, illustrated how well-established criminal groups can adjust their illicit trafficking operations by utilizing their robust organizational framework and power structures, along with established partnerships with trustworthy collaborators. *Ibidem*, p. 102.

transactions. One case involved a Serbian group supplying weapons (Kalashnikovs) to the French black market for weapons.

The other identified criminal groups trade in weapons only occasionally. Weapons are used mainly to pursue the group's objectives; they are not regarded as a good to be exchanged or traded and constitute an attribute of the world of organised crime.

As far as Polish organised crime groups are concerned, based on the data collected by M. Kotowska (Kotowska, 2019), who surveyed 157 convicted members of various organised crime structures, information on firearms trade within organised crime groups appeared sporadically. Excerpts from the statements and information taken from the justifications of the sentences, which addressed the illegal weapons present in three criminal groups, are presented below. It should be stressed again that data on firearms was scarce.

Interviewee X was sentenced to life imprisonment. He led an organised armed criminal group in central Poland, which was dismantled in 2006. The criminal group he led concentrated on extortion, controlling prostitution, and drug trafficking. Weapons were used to murder rival criminal group members and intimidate victims. X testified as follows regarding the origin and unlawful use of weapons and ammunition held by the criminal organization:

We got weapons from ex-military men who had got them from military units, and they were also charged, and one was remanded in custody, one of us was in charge of weapons for the group, and he worked with his colleagues in this regard. When they arrested him, he informed on his colleagues who worked with him, we only bought weapons from him, he would ask his colleagues for them. Our group's weapons included 2 Kalashnikovs, 3 CZ 75, one rifle with a scope, one Scorpion submachine gun, one sachra, a colt, two grenades, a hexogen mining explosive, and an infinite amount of ammunition – that's what they wrote because they didn't want to count it all.

Also, we sold weapons to other groups we were on good terms with – mainly the CZ 75, they were fairly cheap and reliable, they didn't jam; Kalashnikovs if anyone wanted them. Kalashnikovs were used for

assassinations, and so were CZs, you won't get up after a round from Kalashnikov, it's the most reliable weapon, even bullet-proof vests don't help, 'cause gangsters often wear them, I wore them too, sometimes I had a feeling that maybe my life was in danger, I was shot once, the ambush was prepared a couple of times at meetings, but without success, e.g. I had my car shot at, once we went to beat up some bodyguards and a gunfight ensued, my friend got shot. After that shooting, I became more careful, I might as well have been dead, I had a lot of enemies, my ex-boss who argued with me about money and we split up, he also got a life sentence, his brother – dead, I also had enemies in other groups, a lot of people wished me dead. We used to go shooting a lot, we had a few shooting ranges in this fortress of ours, I liked shooting, it's a cool feeling, it makes you excited, I shoot well and I used all kinds of guns because I practiced a lot, every gun shoots the same, it's just that it's hard to move with a Kalash. Wholesale trade in weapons is profitable, while retail is not; because how much can you get? 1-2 thousand for a piece, groups would buy from us only a few pieces at a time, so it wasn't a big deal. After the shooting, when I got hit in the leg, I would always carry a gun because I was afraid they would kill me. And I always wore a vest to meetings.

A criminal group operating in the region of Gdańsk, Gdynia, and Sopot concentrating on operating gambling machines, distributing drugs and protection rackets, covering other persons committing crimes in the Tricity area (source: criminal case file of the Regional Court in Gdańsk, file ref. No. IV K 183/07):

Expecting the potential conflict with other criminal groups, defendant Y also began purchasing weapons, ammunition and explosives. Back when he was still cooperating with XX, he bought three 'CZ75'-type pistols, a 'Makarov'-type pistol and an explosive device in the form of a TNT charge with an electric detonator from unidentified persons. After taking up independent leadership of the group, he continued to expand its arsenal. In 1999, he acquired three hand-held anti-tank grenade launchers 'RPG 76', training models with warheads elaborated with inert material, from unidentified persons, and with the help of YY (an ex-police counter-terrorist officer), he bought a rifle and a sniper scope. The weapons were stored by the charged individual CC and then on the

premises of the Indoor tanning xxxxx. After the shooting near the club 'Relax' in 2000, Y purchased a vial of nitro-glycerine from RR.

An organised armed criminal group was operating in central Poland; the main area of activity was drug trafficking and extortion. The group achieved a monopoly on drug trafficking in a town near Warsaw. In the course of its activity, weapons were used to coerce the obedience of dealers and to ensure exclusive rights to drug trafficking (source: criminal case file of the Regional Court in Warsaw, file ref. No. XVIII K 77/15):

The group owned about 40 firearms stored in a warehouse in Konstancin. Arsenal: 7.62 mm calibre machine guns, 'Scorpion' submachine guns, TT pistol, CZ and others. The weapons were available to the leaders of the group: XX, YY. Moreover, those people had their own weapons, i.e. small-calibre 6.35 mm weapons.

The above descriptions illustrate the problem of arms dealing among organised crime groups. Usually, the arsenals of groups consisting of a dozen to several dozen people were not extensive. They usually ranged from a dozen to a few dozen firearms at most.

Profits from the sale of a single weapon to a friendly group were small compared to the income obtained from drug trafficking and extortion or sums obtained from ransoms for kidnapped individuals.

Arms transactions were not regular, as even within organised crime groups, the demand for illicit firearms was low.

Based on the available data on the phenomenology of individual criminal groups and networks, it can be assumed that most of the known criminal structures are, or at least sometimes are, active in the black market for firearms for their own purposes and as a source of income. In this context, the Japanese yakuza, the Chinese triads, biker gangs, Italian mafia variations, Russian gangs, and other groups are all mentioned.

From this perspective, on the one hand, organised crime arranges illegal arms transfers; on the other, it is a beneficiary of the arms trade. There are, of course, other issues, such as gun violence and illegal possession of firearms, but the links between illicit firearms trafficking and organised

crime seem to be at the forefront. Hence, according to the UNODC's position, it is possible to analyse the criminal structures that generate crime – broadly defined organisational forms, including both classical mafia organisations and criminal networks or the black markets operated by these structures. It is believed that “There are two ways of looking at transnational organized crime (TOC): some focus on multi-crime groups of professional criminals, while others focus on illicit markets” (UNODC, 2010, p. v).

### **3. GUNS FOR SALE: A CLOSER LOOK AT THE ECONOMICS OF ILLEGAL WEAPONS**

It seems that in the case of illicit firearms trafficking, it would be useful to use the category of the illicit market as the basic unit for analysis. This also implies taking into account the divisions of the market into so-called white, black, and grey markets. It is worth mentioning that this criterion is also used concerning money laundering.

The market concept is linked to the economic model of crime, which is based on the central assumption that the primary function of criminal syndicates is to provide illegal products and services to society. In this context, the concept of an illicit market forms the basis of criminological analyses inspired by economic science. It should be mentioned here that economic science defines the market in various ways. For the purposes of further consideration, it can be assumed that it refers both to “the set of conditions that make it possible to carry out transactions for the purchase and sale of goods and services” (Kamersche et al., 1991, p. 4) and also to “the process by which buyers and sellers determine what they want to buy or sell and under what conditions” (Ibid, p. 4). The adjective ‘illegal’ shifts further considerations into the criminal legal and criminological sphere.

In the case of illicit firearms trafficking, it is emphasised that there are three types of markets (Stohl, Schroeder, Smith, 2012).

The first of these, the legal (white) market, is characterised not only by the legality of the transaction but also by its size. Indeed, it is estimated

that in the case of the small arms and light weapons trade, for example, legal transactions account for 80–90% of all transactions made (Small Arms Survey, 2001). White market transactions constitute legitimate business and political activity, although the ethical aspect of the business and arms industry may be called into question.

Furthermore, it should also be considered that even the legal arms market is characterised by high criminogenic potential. This mainly concerns the actual functioning of the mechanisms underlying the decision-making processes and tenders for weapons systems and military technologies. Practical experience proves the existence of political and economic corruption phenomena in this area.

The second type of market (grey market) perfectly reflects the *signum specificium* of the arms trade. Although it is possible to find primarily non-state actors (e.g. guerrilla groups) among the recipients of transfers, transactions are frequently concluded with the active participation of the state agent. This is the classic example of a recipient being the government of an embargoed country. A different situation arises when arms supplies are treated as part of foreign policy. In this case, the secret services play an important role in enabling such transfers.

The third type of market is the black market. It is the quintessential illicit market. The UN defines the black market as “international trade in conventional arms, contrary to the laws of States and or/international law”(Report of the Disarmament Commission, United Nations A 51/42, 1996, p.10). A similar definition is formulated by the Small Arms Survey, which states that “Black arms transfer occurs in clear violation of national and/or international law without official government consent or control; these transfers may involve corrupt government officials acting on their own for personal gain” (Stohl, Schroeder, Smith, 2012, p. 13). Given the context of the three types of markets indicated above, it seems that the most prominent element of this definition is to emphasise that the operation of the black market takes place outside state structures. Thus, it can be assumed that the black market in arms includes transactions contrary to national and international law, and these transactions are carried out outside the knowledge and control of state agents.

The conceptual framework of the market presupposes the functioning of supply and demand mechanisms. The extent of the diversity of beneficiaries of the black market can be evidenced by the fact that the recipients range from so-called failed states, criminal groups, and terrorist organisations to private individuals. In the latter case, the motives for acquiring weapons are also highly diverse. For personal protection reasons, collecting passions and various psychopathological motives may come into play (Chlebowicz, 2015).

Another issue relates to the product and the weapons being illegally traded. In the case of the Polish black market, we can observe trends reflected in the changes in both the offer and demand.

The 1990s were dominated by self-made weapons (e.g. shooting pens), gas and alarm weapons, and converted gas and alarm weapons (most often to work with the Browning 6.35 mm calibre pistol cartridge).

At the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, weapons trafficked from the Czech Republic and Slovakia predominated, e.g. SCORPION submachine guns and CZ pistol models 1975 and 1985. These were the years when criminal groups from, inter alia, Pruszków and Wołomin were active.

In the following years, weapons imported from the countries of the former Soviet Union appeared in growing numbers.

Since 2011, many Turkish-made 9 mm P.A. calibre gas-operated pistols have appeared on the Polish market, which, following an erroneous opinion, were sold as firearms of up to 6 mm calibre, for which no permit is required. Several thousand of these weapons were distributed across the Polish market.

There was also an increase in the number of black powder guns in the survey (particularly suicide cases).

Ukraine has long been a hotspot on the global map of illicit arms trafficking, a situation that has only intensified since 2014. Consequently, this area has remained a focal point of research interest for the team. The ongoing armed conflict has compounded the already complex internal

situation related to the lack of adequate control over the availability and procurement of black market weapons. Preventing these pathologies was further complicated by the absence of regional and central registries of civilian firearms. Within the armed forces, which are not immune to societal divisions, cases of misappropriation of armament stocks have been identified. Moreover, the flow of weapons into areas controlled by separatist forces remains beyond any real control by central authorities. Ukraine has been rightfully positioned as a confirmed source of arms for areas that the international community associates with the most serious human rights and humanitarian law violations (Democratic Republic of the Congo, Darfur, South Sudan, or Equatorial Guinea). This is also clearly indicated by the research of criminologists from Olsztyn. Positive, albeit still painfully insufficient, outcomes of international programmes focusing on stockpile reduction in the realm of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) have been completely squandered due to the observed armed conflict. Research conducted by criminologists from Olsztyn suggests that since 2014, there has been a troubling – unequivocally speaking to the need for continued research – upward trend in the seizure of firearms and ammunition by the Polish Border Guard.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, among the confiscated weapons, there have been those sought after by radical extremist and terrorist groups (examples of thwarted smuggling attempts are presented below).

Several significant cases can exemplify the issue of the illicit firearms market in Poland within the context of combating transnational crime. One of the most notorious instances of exploiting the volatile internal situation in Ukraine, establishing and re-establishing transit routes, and infiltrating Ukraine by organisations openly flouting European laws was the apprehension of Grégoire Moutaux at the Polish-Ukrainian border on 21 May 2016. This French national attempted to smuggle five Kalashnikov-type assault rifles, 5,000 rounds of ammunition, two anti-tank grenade launchers, detonators, and 125 kg of TNT into EU territory (Buczyński, 2021; Buczyński, 2022). The subsequent case corroborates the possibility that criminal, extremist, and terrorist groups may endeavour

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<sup>8</sup> In the literature on the subject, there has been a lively debate for years regarding the usefulness of official statistics in determining the actual level of a specific type of crime. It is pointed out that such statistics may better reflect the direction of current police policies and the focus of their actions rather than depict the characteristics of a specific segment of reality. These perceived statistics are more of a social construct than a phenomenological representation of the phenomenon (Black, 1970).



to acquire not only significant quantities of firearms but also heavier armaments from Ukrainian sources. On 31 March 2017, an endeavour to transport components of an AK-630 30-mm artillery system into Poland was intercepted at the Dorohusk border crossing. The cannon, equipped with a breech block and originating in the Soviet Union, was being transported in a van bearing Ukrainian licence plates. The weapon was falsely declared as a hydraulic component. Two Ukrainian nationals were apprehended in connection with this incident. In January 2018, one RPG-22 and six RPG-18 grenade launchers were confiscated at the Hrebenne border crossing. During the night of 3/4 January at the Dorohusk crossing, border guards discovered parts of a 122-mm Howitzer valued at approximately USD 100,000 concealed in wooden crates within the cargo area of a light commercial vehicle. The trafficking attempt into the Schengen zone was perpetrated by a Ukrainian citizen (for the latest research on the European illicit firearms market from the Polish perspective, please see Chlebowicz, Buczyński, 2023). The undeniable significance of this issue for security on a transregional scale, as well as its unquestionable research potential requiring international cooperation, is excellently demonstrated in the 22nd volume of *Security Spectrum* entitled 'New Challenges for Internal Security due to the War on Ukraine'.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the examination of the illicit firearms trade from a criminological perspective reveals the intricate web of factors contributing to the proliferation of illegal arms trafficking and its detrimental consequences for society. This research has shed light on the complex dynamics of the underground firearms market, highlighting the need for comprehensive understanding and targeted interventions to address this pressing issue.

Furthermore, the findings presented in this article contribute to the broader academic discourse on the theoretical and empirical considerations of the illicit arms market, adding valuable insights to the existing body of knowledge. By actively participating in this scholarly dialogue, the authors aim to stimulate further research and policy discussions

aimed at mitigating the impact of illegal arms trafficking on public safety and security. It is crucial for policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and researchers to collaborate in developing evidence-based strategies to disrupt illicit firearms networks and prevent the devastating consequences of gun-related violence.

Like their legal counterparts, illegal markets are subject to change and transformation. Accordingly, the multidimensional nature of criminal reality requires criminological science to be under constant review. In this state of affairs, it must be acknowledged that the results of criminological research are of limited use and therefore need to be regularly updated. Unfortunately, it must be acknowledged that outdated knowledge becomes a dead weight. The methodology of the research outlined above remains a separate issue. The interdisciplinarity of criminology and the increasing complexity of the research subject also require significant modifications to the research instrumentation. Concerning the study of illicit firearms trafficking, international scientific cooperation is a key issue, as it does seem ineffective to study only domestic illicit markets without taking into account the cross-border context. The further process of intra-EU standardisation and simultaneous significant expansion of the pool of extracted phenomenon variables within the framework of the Schengen acquis seems necessary. Undoubtedly, a factor that is already changing the geography of illicit firearms trafficking in Central and Eastern Europe is the war in Ukraine, which, by generating armament flows, creates favourable conditions for the development of new sources of weapons to feed the black markets. Consequently, it seems expedient to concentrate research efforts in this area, also in the format of the Baltic Criminological Seminars.

Moving forward, continued research and cooperation at both national and international levels is essential to effectively combat the illicit firearms trade and safeguard communities from the threats posed by illegal weapons. By remaining vigilant, informed, and proactive in addressing the root causes of illegal arms trafficking, stakeholders can work towards creating a safer and more secure environment for all individuals within Europe and beyond. Ultimately, through sustained efforts and collaborative initiatives, it is possible to stem the tide of illicit firearms trade and promote a culture of peace, security, and justice in our societies.

**Contacts:**

**Piotr Chlebowicz, Doctor Habilitated**

E-mail: [piotr.chlebowicz@uwm.edu.pl](mailto:piotr.chlebowicz@uwm.edu.pl)

University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn

**Szymon Buczyński, MA**

E-mail: [szymon.buczynski@uwm.edu.pl](mailto:szymon.buczynski@uwm.edu.pl)

University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn

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# **THE POLICE DIPLOMAT NETWORK AS A RESPONSE TO MODERN CHALLENGES: A PORTUGUESE PERSPECTIVE**

**Roberto Narciso Andrade Fernandes, PhD**

*Police Research Center (ICPOL – R&D&I Unit)  
Researcher*

*Higher Institute of Police Sciences and Internal Security (ISCPSI)  
Senior Police Officer, Public Security Police  
Portugal*

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research explores the transformation of international security dynamics amid the rising challenges posed by globalised crime and modern crises. A pivotal element in this discourse is the phenomenon of Russian irredentism, illuminating the territorial and geopolitical ambitions of a nation challenging established international norms. Within this evolving landscape, the concept of Police Diplomacy has taken on a new expression, marking a paradigmatic shift in which representatives of law enforcement agencies take on diplomatic functions previously reserved for politicians and career diplomats. Portugal's Universalist orientation provides a compelling framework to contextualise this transition, reflecting the Nation's commitment to universalist ideals and its active engagement in global collaborative efforts. Utilising Portugal as a focal point, this study offers an in-depth analysis of the police diplomat role, delineating its complexities, challenges, and implications within contemporary international relations. Throughout, emphasis is maintained on the overarching goal of peace diplomacy, centred on Human Security and the safeguarding of vulnerable populations.

## INTRODUCTION

Some contemporaneous trends seem to be pushing humanity towards the ultimate end. The military invasion of Ukraine – the worst security crisis on the old continent since the Second World War (1939–1945) now entering its third year – and the growing threat of the use of nuclear power amplify the risk of an escalation of tensions, reconfiguring the international order as we understand it (Cohen et al., 2023). The People’s Republic of China, the Russian Federation, and the US are investing in the expansion and modernisation of their nuclear arsenals, outside of the agreements made, increasing the imminence of a nuclear war, whether intentional or by mistake. “Geopolitical divides are preventing us from coming together around global solutions for global challenges” (Guterres, 2024, p. 4). In 2023, the hottest temperatures on record were recorded, while floods, forest fires, and other climate-related disasters affected millions of people and communities across the globe, compelling the “people on the move” (IOM, 2022)<sup>1</sup>. Meanwhile, stirring developments in the life sciences and other disruptive technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, particularly artificial intelligence, have reached unprecedented heights, transforming human interaction in multiple areas (Schwab, 2018).

In the third decade of the 21st century, humanity is facing an unusual level of danger because of the unbridled arms race (including nuclear), extreme climatic events, advances in life sciences and digital disruptive technologies, and the acceleration of the generalised corruption of the global information ecosystem. Compressed by critical and almost unsustainable tensions, international security needs urgent, concerted intervention on a global scale as if 2024 were the decisive moment for the survival of civilisation and the entire modern geopolitical construct<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The urgent need to deal with climate change and human mobility is evidenced by an extensive network of international agreements and structures. Climate change, environmental degradation, and disasters are reconfiguring modern patterns of human mobility. Now is the crucial time to concretise these agreements and drive forward the implementation of human mobility in climate change scenarios (IOM, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Originally created by Rudolf Kjellén, geopolitics is first and foremost a way of thinking about and perceiving the world (Kjellén, 1924; Dodds, 2007). A contested and ever-evolving concept, geopolitics can be defined as the method of analysis or perspective that refers to politics and power dynamics – that is, the discourses and practices associated with the acquisition and use of power, the exercise of power, power relations, and the structure of power for certain purposes – as a function of a given space, whether locally or on a broader scale, such as a region or the world (Correia, 2012; Tomé, 2014, p. 190).

(World Economic Forum, 2024a; Mecklin, 2024). It is therefore clear that the scientific and applied concertation of such criticalities on the international geopolitical chessboard is of great importance to security studies. In light of the combined prisms of international relations and police science, this exercise in ‘plasticity’ in social science research selects the components of interest in a timely manner in order to mould them to the object of study (Fernandes, 2022a).

Portugal, as a global actor with a universalist slant, geographically and politically inscribed in the projects of the EU, UN, and NATO, has benefited from the interdependent, cooperative, and collective security disposition that emerged in the last quarter of the 20th century. Committed to the defence of European values and centred on human security and the development of an area of freedom, security, and justice stripped of borders, the Portuguese state promotes foreign policies – domestic and European – that cover multiple dimensions not exclusively military in scope (Mota, 2020).

With this in mind, this essay is dedicated to analysing the main existential dangers highlighted for contemporary times, specifically for 2024, in view of the consequences that reverberate for Portuguese internal security. In doing so, Portugal’s position is duly taken into account in the context of the European geopolitical complex, to which it is related and dependent. Europe’s security seems less and less secure. “Europe was in danger and today it is increasingly in danger” (Borrell, 2024, p. 2). Russia’s transgression and the US’s indecision and lack of focus on the Atlantic Alliance show just how ill-prepared Europe is to face these threats (Beddoes, 2024).

In terms of the critical path pursued in the development of the current research, the search for a bibliography and the subsequent literature review played an essential role in building knowledge. In fact, the appropriate positioning of this essay in the relevant context allowed us to identify gaps, grasp doctrines, integrate new events, and evaluate the results of previous research (Quivy & Campenhoudt, [1995] 1998). “The reading of all good books is like a conversation with the most honourable people of past ages, who were their authors, indeed, even like a set conversation in which they reveal to us only the best of their thoughts” (Descartes, 1998, p. 6). Equally pertinent to the logical, organised, and

opportunistic construction of this study, interdisciplinarity enabled the scientific basis of the research, giving it rigour and validity according to the rules of academia. On the other hand, the triangulation of concepts made it possible to analyse the object of study from multiple perspectives and possibilities. By assimilating and combining the theses of several authors, a more holistic and refined understanding of the subject was uncovered (Plattan, *apud* Machado, 2008).

## **1. THE RISE OF THE INTERNATIONAL SECURITY PATTERN**

Throughout recorded history, the intertwined themes of security, conflict, and power dynamics have pervaded human societies and diverse civilisations, irrespective of their political orientation, territorial expanse – be it local, regional, or global – or geographic domain. The mechanics and discourses relating to the acquisition of power, its exercise and its structured configurations for specific purposes have received significant academic attention in various scientific disciplines (Tomé, 2014).

In the contemporary milieu, international relations navigate a complex tapestry of perceptions, paradigms, and evolving patterns, significantly influencing disciplines such as public international law, international political economy, political and diplomatic sciences, military and police sciences, sociology, anthropology, and psychology, thereby elevating security studies into an established scientific domain.

As the 20th century transitioned into the 21st, successive historical junctures, accentuated by the forces of globalisation, reshaped power dynamics and the hegemonic structures of the international order (Tomé, 2019). The paradigms of statehood, international security, and diplomacy have undergone transformative shifts, ushering in a new epoch of inter-nation correspondence in the networked age (Carpenter & McLuhan, 1960; Kissinger, 2002; L'Heuillet, 2004; Al-Rodhan & Stoudmann, 2006; Elias, 2013).

Consequently, novel geopolitical, defence, and security frameworks have emerged, encompassing facets such as internal, external, human,

multilevel, global, and societal dimensions, thereby influencing perspectives on security concepts (Fernandes, 2005; Elias, 2013).

It becomes discernible that the construct of security is rife with intricacies, controversies, and divergent interpretations, contingent upon the analytical lens employed.

Delving into the contemporary paradigm of international law and security, we observe intricate regulations governing the prevention and limitation of force deployment in inter-state relations. Rooted in Article 2.4 of the UN Charter, the *jus ad bellum* doctrine ('right to war') encapsulates the evolution from an erstwhile unbridled logic to a universally proscribed framework regarding the use of force (Kowalski, 2014).

After the devastations of the First World War, The Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907 championed philanthropic ideals as imperative requisites for peace. Subsequently, the revolutionary concept of *jus in bello* emerged, contesting Hugo de Groot's predominant model and establishing the rules that govern and circumscribe behaviour during a war.

The Treaty of Versailles of 1919 and the nascent League of Nations further entrenched these constraints on belligerent actions. However, the unequivocal endorsement of prohibiting force deployment in international relations materialised only in 1928 with the Briand-Kellogg Pact. This landmark treaty, although pioneering, was fraught with limitations, which were only addressed post-Second World War, and characterised by the Holocaust and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Following the culmination of the global conflict spanning 1939 to 1945, efforts pivoted towards crafting global peace and security and eschewing militarism. In alignment with Chapter VII and Article 51 of the UN Charter, provisions were established for two exceptions to the use of force: the prerogative of the UN Security Council to enact military measures, and the invocation of the right to self-defence.

Pursuant to Article 24 (1) of the Charter, the UN wields exclusive authority over international public belligerent capabilities. Indeed, the Security Council is endowed with considerable discretion to uphold its mandate of preserving international security, with resolutions such as S/RES/678

of 1990, S/RES/687 of 1991, S/RES/1441 of 2002 pertaining to the Gulf War intervention, and S/RES/1973 of 2011 concerning the Libyan civil conflict, exemplifying this mandate (Platiau & Vieira, 2006).

In the realm of international law, Article 51 of the Charter delineates the conditions for individual or collective self-defence against military incursions, predicated upon actual armed hostilities rather than threats or the use of force. Such legitimate defence necessitates a meticulous evaluation of the nature, magnitude, extent, and repercussions of the aggression, adhering to principles of proportionality and necessity. Foundational to collective self-defence are reciprocal protection treaties and conventions (Kowalski, 2014).

Reflecting upon the evolution of security paradigms, which transitioned from state-centric orientations to a focus on individual human beings, it becomes imperative to underscore the concepts of Human Security and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) – constructs promulgated within the international jurisprudence at the onset of the 21st century.

Human Security, albeit encompassing multifaceted dimensions (economic, nutritional, health-related, environmental, political, individual, etc.), strives to ensure the safeguarding, security, and holistic development of individuals, emancipating them from fear, destitution, and indignity. This concept is underpinned by principles of universality, interdependence, humanism, solidarity, and prevention (Kowalski, 2023).

Endorsed unanimously at the 2005 UN World Summit, the global political commitment of R2P aspires to avert egregious transgressions such as genocide, war crimes, ethnic purges, and generalised crimes against humanity, postulating that sovereignty encompasses the obligation to shield populations from Human Rights infringements and mass atrocities. R2P is predicated on adherence to international legal tenets, particularly emphasising legitimacy, peace, and the safeguarding of Fundamental Rights (Vilmer, 2013; Kowalski, 2023).

However, transformations within this domain remain contentious, particularly concerning determinations of the legitimacy and legality of defensive measures against aggression. The assessment of such

intricacies is frequently exacerbated by temporal disparities and subjectivity in information dissemination (Fernandes, 2022b). A salient contention emerges between pre-emptive self-defence (reactive measures after an armed assault) and preventive self-defence (pre-emptive measures to forestall anticipated or presumed armed hostilities), with the latter potentially contravening Article 51 of the Charter by advocating the resurgence of force within international interactions.

These concepts are fundamental to understanding the essentiality of protecting civilians, even in war scenarios. The gradual introduction of humanist principles has opened space for the subsidiary intervention of non-exclusively military actors, namely police forces, dedicated to maintaining order and with the responsibility to safeguard Human Rights. There are still international rules to follow, even in conflict times.

## **2. THE RUSSIAN IRREDENTISM: A GEOPOLITICAL WORLD MENACE**

In this warring scenario, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict warrants scrutiny. Initiated in 2014 with the contentious annexation of Crimea and subsequent military engagements in eastern Ukraine, this conflict escalated in 2022 under the pretext of a purported special military operation by the Russian Federation. However, this operation is nothing but a blatant violation of international law and the foundational principles of the UN Charter. Moscow's actions imperil global security and European stability.

The Kremlin's unanticipated military incursion into Ukrainian territories starkly contrasts with prevailing trends of diminishing interstate and internationalised conflicts. Within a multipolar environment marked by intricate interdependencies, such aggressive manoeuvres rekindle considerations of preventive measures against armed conflicts (Kowalski, 2023).

The geopolitical implications of Moscow's actions are profound, challenging established norms and eroding trust in international cooperation

frameworks<sup>3</sup>. In fact, after the *Mauerfall* of Berlin in 1989, the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon in 2001, Russia's military invasion of Ukrainian territory was the international event that most undermined the Westphalian notion of sovereignty and the international security arrangements established since 1945.

We can define irredentism "as the policies of a government to reconquer territories lost in previous conflicts or those territories that are connected by cultural and linguistic ties" (Rua, 2018, p. 144). This concept was at the heart of Vladimir Putin's annexation of Crimea in 2014, masking the real geostrategic interests of access to the Black Sea. In fact, Russian irredentism is a political aspiration of nationalists to take back some or all the territories of the other republics of the former Soviet Union and the territory of the former Russian Empire, aggregating them into a single state (Stent, 2019).

Recent studies underline Moscow's desire to manage the escalation of the war while maintaining dominance. However, this effort has been hindered by the collapse of Russian diplomatic access in target countries due to the expulsion of numerous secret service agents (spies) and other Russian-speaking agents involved in unconventional operations. Currently, the Kremlin is attempting to rebuild its capacity to engage in acts of sabotage, disinformation, and other means to disrupt Western supplies to Ukraine. Information operations and subversion have long been developed to create political destabilisation and capture the elite of target countries. The 29155 and 54654 units of the Russian Federation are specialised in intelligence and unconventional warfare capabilities. Strategic provocation of disinformation, escalation of violence, disruption of markets and economies, political confusion, social anarchy, and governmental vacuums in target countries are frequently used as strategies for gaining power, defending strategic interests, and supporting pro-Russian allies (Watling, Danylyuk, & Reynolds, 2024).

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<sup>3</sup> "Russia views the post-Cold War liberal rules-based international world order to be the creation of the United States and its European allies and a means for the United States to maintain its global political, economic, and even cultural dominance" (Radin & Reach, 2017, p. 22). The Kremlin thus wants to form a post-West order, i.e. an alternative world and international order, with an illiberal scope and a Russian-speaking focus (Boyle, 2016; Kanet, 2018; Stent, 2019).



Cyberattacks have also been used by Putin's forces to cause instability and disorder under a strategy of proxy warfare<sup>4</sup>. In 2007, Estonia, a Baltic nation that shares a border with Russia, was one of the first to be targeted by this modern form of hybrid warfare. Since then, Estonia has built its cyber-defence infrastructure and is ranked third best in the world, behind only the US and Saudi Arabia (International Telecommunication Union, 2021, p. 30). In 2016, Montenegro experienced the infiltration of its political elite and communication networks by Russian Federation agents. Moldova was also targeted by these unconventional warfare actions twice, first in May 2022 and again in February 2023. In June 2022, Lithuania was hit by DDoS attacks perpetrated by pro-Russian hackers *Killnet*. The exacerbation of internal divisions, dissension, and polarisation in the target countries was a common factor in these incidents.

The evolution of Russian unconventional warfare theory includes, among other models, the recruitment of agents within a faction of a state's political elite, interference in electoral processes (as happened with the 2016 and 2020 US elections), and the creation of a network of friendly states. Moscow's strategy poses a serious threat to international security. It is essential that countries and international organisations remain vigilant and adopt preventive and defensive strategies against this insidious penetration of Kremlin influence and its special (intelligence) services (Watling, Danylyuk, & Reynolds, 2024).

This resurgence of geopolitical tensions underscores the fragility of contemporary international relations, with potential ramifications extending to areas such as disarmament, climate change, and information integrity. The ramifications of such geopolitical manoeuvres, accentuated by the re-emergence of nuclear weapons and biological and chemical threats and exacerbated by information warfare, underscore the

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<sup>4</sup> A cyber-attack involves the use of unconventional or illicit methods to gain unauthorised access to a digital device, computer system, or network. In the Baltic region, Estonia serves as a notable example of how a country can defend itself against cyber-attacks. The narrative dates to 2007 when Estonia experienced a cyber-attack that targeted its digital infrastructure, resulting in the defacement of a statue and the dissemination of false news. The statue in question was the Bronze Soldier, originally erected by Soviet authorities in 1947. While Russian-speaking Estonians view the statue as a symbol of the USSR's victory over Nazism, many ethnic Estonians consider Soviet soldiers as occupiers rather than liberators, and the statue serves as a painful reminder of this history. On 20 January 2024, the defence ministers of the three Baltic states signed an agreement whereby Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania agreed to build defensive anti-mobility installations in the coming years with the aim of deterring and, if necessary, defending against military threats, especially along the borders with Russia and Belarus (Meireles, 2024).

imperative for multilateral collaboration, transparency, and adherence to established international norms and protocols. By tearing up the globally agreed model on climate change, Putin's position jeopardises the stability of the world order. Let us not forget Dmitri Medvedev's words: "Russia has the right to use atomic weapons if necessary" (Diário de Notícias/AFP, 2022). More recently, on 24 February 2024, in his annual State of the Nation address, the Russian president himself again threatened to use nuclear weapons against NATO countries if the West sent troops to reinforce Volodymyr Zelensky's ranks. In Putin's words: "No matter who tries to stand in our way or all the more so create threats for our country and our people, they must know that Russia will respond immediately, and the consequences will be such as you have never seen in your entire history" (D'Agostino & Diaz-Maurin, 2024, p. 1).

In this complex context of state security and survival, challenges are escalating, propelled by surging inflation rates and elevated prices of essential commodities such as energy, oil, gas, and food. The augmented prevalence of zoonotic diseases, coupled with escalating global carbon dioxide emissions and climatic anomalies, manifests prominently across Central Europe, Western Africa, North America, China, Pakistan, and numerous regions within the Northern Hemisphere (Mecklin, 2024). The evolution of disruptive technologies, coupled with the proliferation of digital globalisation and the absence of stringent regulations governing the internet and social media platforms, catalyses widespread cyber polarisation. Concurrently, this environment engenders the proliferation of infodemic phenomena, exacerbating the degradation of the information ecosystem. Such dynamics underscore the perilous ramifications of pervasive surveillance technologies on fundamental Human Rights and civil liberties (Snowden, 2019).

Rather than adopting a reactive stance towards the utilisation of technology by non-state violent entities, policymakers necessitate proactive engagement with emergent technological paradigms. Historically confined within a restricted military domain, contemporary technological advancements are witnessing an open production cycle marked by unparalleled innovations. The escalation in space activities, underpinned by their potential for facilitating open-source, high-precision intelligence, and technological prowess, is harnessed for not only military endeavours but also humanitarian initiatives. Satellites, drones, spy balloons, and

other remote sensing modalities, in conjunction with precision-guided munitions, continually redefine the geopolitical landscape (Liang, 2022; Mecklin, 2023; Ribeiro, 2023).

Amid an international background characterised by discord between both established and emergent geopolitical entities, there arises an imperative for constructive engagement and compromise among nations, including the EU, NATO, and the US. Initiatives centred on collaborative endeavours to bolster surveillance systems (encompassing early detection mechanisms), data interoperability, analytical capabilities, and intelligence-sharing concerning biological anomalies could be instrumental in attenuating potential global threats (Mecklin, 2023). Unquestionably, dialogue and diplomatic negotiations remain paramount in preserving global security.

### **3. THE EMERGENCE OF POLICE DIPLOMACY: AND SO, IT BEGAN**

International relations inherently represent a scholarly domain scrutinising the dynamics between sovereign entities, encompassing states, international organisations, non-governmental bodies, and other global stakeholders. This intricate interplay, defined by quests for power and mutual acknowledgement, underscores the centrality of diplomacy. Diplomacy, in essence, encapsulates the orchestration of international engagements through negotiations, collaborative endeavours, peaceful dialogues, and strategic communications (Kissinger, 2002; Fröhlich, 2007; Quinn & Gibson, 2017).

Amid a globalised landscape characterised by the fluid exchange of ideas, individuals, and commodities, comprehending the international paradigm of interdependent security – emblematic of contemporary nation-states – becomes imperative for a nuanced understanding of national security constructs. The contemporary evaluation of a nation's security posture is intrinsically tethered to its relational dynamics with neighbouring states. Consequently, this interdependence manifests in multifaceted, intricate, and frequently tumultuous forms (Brodeur, 2010). Canonical security doctrine posits that the political-military security of

numerous states is encapsulated within a broader security constellation, irrespective of its classification as a subsystem or regional entity (Haas, 1970; Haftendorn, 1990). A region, in this context, denotes a specialised security subsystem characterised by interlinked state entities bound by geographical proximity (Thompson, 1973; Höll, 1983; Buzan, 1991).

The strategic amalgamation of supranational concerns within regional frameworks has engendered novel avenues for inter-state collaboration, notably in domains encompassing security (police jurisdiction) and defence (military). The global resonance of the US doctrine after the 2001 assaults on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon promulgated a vigilance paradigm in transnational conduits, revitalising international police collaboration against atypical and trans-border threats (Cronin, 2002; Fernandes, 2022b).

The globalisation of multifarious quandaries has seemingly accorded primacy to security concerns, somewhat eclipsing traditional military hegemony. Contrasted with the 1980s' predominant focus on domestic policing, contemporary security paradigms exhibit a pronounced transnational orientation. Present-day security imperatives pivot on the mitigation and suppression of international organised crime, cyber malfeasance, terrorism and its associated offences, environmental threats, health crises, event management, and disaster response, underscoring the pervasive transnationalisation of quotidian experiences. Addressing this globalised criminal landscape mandates unprecedented inter-state and inter-agency cooperation. To counter the internationalisation of criminal enterprises, a corresponding globalisation of policing is imperative (Bowling, Reiner, & Sheptycki, 2019).

Nadelmann's seminal exposition (1993), subsequently echoed by Bigo (1996 and 2000), underscored the pivotal role of liaison officers within the international police cooperation nexus. Contemporary jurisprudential and policing entities widely regard this model as an efficacious instrument within a global policing framework (Nadelmann, 1993; Martin, 1994; Brodeur, 2010; den Boer & Block, 2013).

Perceived as conduits, arbitrators, or facilitators, police liaison officers, irrespective of their nomenclatural designation, interface with a plethora of legal-political roles and functions. Typically endorsed as diplomatic

envoys by their respective administrations, these police officers foster both formal and, significantly, informal liaisons with pertinent justice and domestic affairs entities, transnational police networks, and myriad organisations across nations wherein strategic interests converge (den Boer & Block, 2013; Bowling, Reiner, & Sheptycki, 2019; Fernandes, 2022b).

#### **4. PORTUGAL'S UNIVERSALIST ORIENTATION**

Within the European regional milieu, Portugal's trajectory aligns with the broader context. The governance of its security framework is predicated upon a multcentred and Universalist approach, frequently actualised through the global deployment of national assets in consonance with EU directives (Durão Barroso, 2000). Enshrined within the principles of popular sovereignty, pluralistic expression, democratic governance, and the sanctity of fundamental rights and freedoms, the Portuguese Republic, as delineated by its Constitution, epitomises a democratic entity governed by the rule of law, championing international relations underscored by tenets of national autonomy, Human Rights advocacy, state equality, peaceful dispute resolution, non-interventionist policies, and collaborative endeavours for global emancipation and advancement (Silva, 2020).

In the pursuit of an international framework fostering peace and equity among nations, Portugal champions the eradication of imperialism, colonialism, and all manifestations of aggression, hegemony, and exploitation in inter-state interactions. Furthermore, it advocates for comprehensive, synchronised, and regulated disarmament, the dissolution of political-military alliances, and the institution of a collective security paradigm.

Concurrently nurturing amicable and cooperative relationships with Lusophone nations, Portugal remains steadfast in fortifying European integration and bolstering democratic tenets, tranquillity, economic advancement, and justice in international relations. In alignment with this vision, Portugal actively contributes to sculpting a domain of liberty, security, and justice, underpinned by a unified foreign, security,

and defence policy framework. This policy is predicated on collaboration and synergy, ensuring the upholding of human and peoples' rights (Silva, 2020).

Steered by the guiding principles of Europeanism, Atlanticism, Lusophony, Internationalisation, and Multilateralism, Portuguese foreign policy is orchestrated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This involves a complex inter-ministerial collaboration, strategically marshalling resources from diverse administrative domains to champion national interests. The Ministry, while being a specialist in political diplomacy, adopts a multifaceted approach encompassing peripheral and technical facets, notably in the realms of security and law enforcement (Durão Barroso, 2000; Magalhães, 2001).

The Ministry of Internal Affairs, spearheaded by its General Secretariat and the active participation of its affiliated law enforcement agencies, fervently endeavours to position Portugal as a significant global actor (Silva, 2020).

Pursuant to Law No. 53/2008 dated 29 August, as amended, internal security is delineated as a sovereign state activity encompassing the preservation of public order, crime prevention and suppression, upholding democratic institutions and legal frameworks, and safeguarding individuals, their assets, and inherent rights and freedoms. While predominantly functioning within Portuguese territorial confines, the domestic security apparatus and services are authorised to operate extraterritorially, contingent upon international obligations and prevailing international legal norms. Collaborative endeavours with overseas police entities or pertinent international organisations aim to augment the Union's ambit of freedom, security, and justice.

Consequently, through proactive engagements in international security and foreign policy arenas, the Internal Administration transcends traditional Westphalian boundaries. This is achieved through the deployment of police liaison officers, trainers, advisors, and other cooperative emissaries to international entities and foreign territories, notably within Portuguese embassies, diplomatic missions, and consular establishments (Tomé, 2019; Carrilho, 2022).

From the late 1990s onwards, Portugal has accentuated the external facet of its internal security apparatus, chiefly via the deployment of police liaison officers under the aegis of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Such officers, sourced from the National Republican Guard (*Gendarmerie*) and the Public Security Police (a civilian law enforcement agency), in addition to immigration liaison officers from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, were instrumental until the absorption of the latter security service in October 2023. Endowed with state accreditation and holding a status akin to diplomatic envoys, these liaison officers possess the hallmarks of official dignitaries with legitimate law enforcement authority, thereby availing themselves of the privileges and immunities enshrined in the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 18 April 1961 and its ancillary treaties (Magalhães, 2001; Fernandes, 2022b).

Thus, Portugal has orchestrated an expansive and esteemed police liaison network, seamlessly integrated with its diplomatic infrastructure. Tasked with cross-border collaborations to counteract transnational criminal activities and contemporary hybrid security challenges, this network epitomises diplomacy centred on peace and harmonious international relations (Tomé, 2019).

## 5. THE POLICE DIPLOMAT: A CASE STUDY FROM PORTUGAL

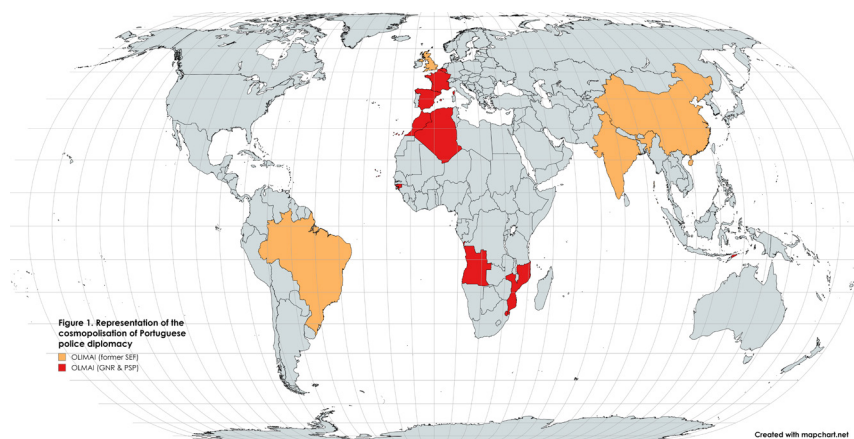
During the latter part of the 1990s, the apparatus of international police cooperation saw its inception with the assignment of police liaison officers (OLMAI) and immigration officers (OLIMAI<sup>5</sup>) to the African diaspora. Principal destinations encompassed nations such as Angola, Cape

<sup>5</sup> Within the realm of international police cooperation, the emancipation of the OLIMAI is prominently highlighted by Decree-Law No. 290-A/2001, dated 17 November. This legislation delineates their mission to encompass the analysis of migratory flows originating in or transiting through the host country, destined for Portugal and Europe. Furthermore, their mandate extends to collaborative efforts with local authorities to mitigate illegal immigration and human trafficking. However, pursuant to Law No. 73/2021, enacted on 12 November, the overhaul of the national border control system and the dissolution of the SEF on 29 October 2023 resulted in the redistribution of its competencies to other forces and entities. Notably, the *Gendarmerie* and the Public Security Police have been endowed with augmented powers concerning foreign affairs and border control. Concurrently, the role of the immigration liaison officer transitioned from the Ministry of Internal Administration to the ambit of the Agency for Integration, Migration, and Asylum, I.P., under the purview of the Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, thus relinquishing its police-oriented dimension.

Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and São Tomé and Príncipe, among others. Subsequently, this network expanded its reach to encompass territories such as Brazil, India, Morocco, the United Kingdom, the People's Republic of China, and East Timor. Concurrently, liaison officers were seconded to international multi-stakeholder entities, as exemplified by the Permanent Representation of Portugal to the EU (REPER) and, post-2021, the EU Agency for Police Cooperation (EUROPOL).

Synthesising a diverse array of intricate realities, Portugal's international cooperation network has heavily invested in technical-police training, police academic pursuits, and advanced educational programmes tailored for police personnel across Portuguese-speaking territories. This collaboration spans both Portuguese soil and varied international locales, with technical and instructional contributions geared towards enhancing internal security infrastructures. Additionally, there exists a robust exchange of information concerning justice, security, and domestic affairs, among other collaborative endeavours (MAI Press Release, 2022).

In the contemporary scene, equipped with expertise in foreign and border control, the OLMAI functions as diplomatic police operatives, straddling the nexus between foreign policy and international collaboration.



**Figure 1.** Representation of the cosmopolitanization of Portuguese police diplomacy

Source: author's elaboration (using mapchart.net)



They offer strategic and operational support to Portuguese agencies, primarily by facilitating information exchange, particularly intelligence pertaining to security landscapes and imminent threats, and providing specialised technical-police counsel.

The convergence of both linear and non-linear and formal and informal interrelationships among myriad security entities and structures, each varying in magnitude and scope – from intra-state to global security paradigms – augments the capacity to curate precise and pioneering informational outputs. Such outputs are pivotal for informed decision-making at the apex of governance, aligning with the state’s paramount interests and imperatives and fostering synergies across both domestic and international security arenas.

Intrinsic to the OLMAI’s operational framework are intelligence reports, crafted with variable frequency contingent upon deployment contexts. These reports, characterised as strategic and contemporaneous documents, are disseminated to the Heads of Diplomatic Missions, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the integral security and intelligence components of the Portuguese Republic. This dissemination embodies a comprehensive, cross-cutting, and inter-ministerial alignment.

Navigating strategic and discreet domains, hitherto the exclusive purview of seasoned diplomats, the OLMAI bolster a plethora of cooperative endeavours – be they bilateral or multilateral – representing Portugal across missions within the EU, the UN, and other supranational, international, and regional frameworks. Such representation is predicated on facilitating internal security aid and executing technical-police cooperation initiatives and ventures (Tomé, 2019; Carrilho, 2022). Serving as pivotal interfaces between distinct security and civil protection entities and their international counterparts, the OLMAI furnish direct technical-police support to ambassadors on all security-related facets upon requisition.

The extent of the exchange of experiences, techniques, knowledge, and information between police representatives from various sovereign nations; the incorporation of (national) policing in other contexts of action, through articulation with various multinational police forces and services; and the interconnection with local, national, sub-regional/

regional, international, and supranational policing systems provide this network of police liaison officers, highlighted in the international environment, with unique training and experience as police diplomats (Stevanović, Jacimovski, & Kekić, 2012; Bowling, Reiner, & Sheptycki, 2019; Fernandes, 2022b).

## 6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion, we ascertain that the spheres of international relations, foreign policy, diplomacy, and international security are intricately intertwined, each exerting a notable influence on global engagements, the preservation of order, and the resolution of shared security challenges. Theoretical frameworks in international relations, encompassing realism and liberalism, shape the diplomatic tactics employed to address security concerns. Conventions, accords, and international organisations bolster inter-state collaboration in confronting transnational security threats. Diplomacy serves as the conduit for enhancing cohesion in international relations, predominantly through mechanisms of trust and mutual reciprocity. Within this context, police forces engaged in cross-border partnerships contribute to resource projection, strategic intelligence sharing, and concerted effort coordination. Hence, collaborative endeavours and effective communication emerge as pivotal elements in navigating the multifaceted intricacies of a globally interconnected milieu characterised by competitive dynamics and enduring incongruities.

The preceding analysis suggests that OLMAI, designated as police diplomatic agents, operate and engage within a nuanced and ambivalent milieu characterised by competitive-collaborative paradigms, multi-layered interactions, and the involvement of diverse strategic entities. Their engagements are informed by criteria such as opportunism, entrepreneurial acumen, professionalism, discernment, allegiance, mission-centric ethos, knowledge, and technical prowess (Block, 2010; Fernandes, 2022b).

An OLMAI operative, by necessity, embodies a suite of advanced communication competencies, cultural acumen, and a unique capability to integrate seamlessly with international law enforcement apparatuses.

Their pivotal function is centred upon catalysing collaborative ventures and orchestrating the strategic dissemination of information. To be an effective policing diplomat, a profound understanding of legal paradigms, diplomatic protocols, and nuanced socio-cultural milieus must be demonstrated. This involves cultivating trust among international counterparts and ensuring the fluidity of information exchange to adeptly navigate and respond to global security exigencies. Essential attributes encompass adaptability, discretion, and a steadfast commitment to both domestic and international legal frameworks.

The substantial autonomy vested in such roles predicates upon foundations of trust and intimate collaboration, emanating not only from the sovereign State but also from a spectrum of stakeholders with whom engagement transpires. Mastery in negotiation and adept diplomatic capabilities are indispensable for crafting bespoke strategies tailored to specific constellations of police forces, nation-states, and overarching networks, considering intricate interplays of cultural, religious, political, and legal variables (Bigo, 1996; 2000; Lemieux, 2015).

From a comprehensive analysis, it is discernible that the quintessence of diplomatic endeavours – spanning representation, intelligence diffusion, negotiation, advocacy, protective mandates, and the enhancement of public service – are inherent to the routine operations of the OLMAI. These operatives function as *bona fide* police diplomats, vested with the authority to actualise security imperatives, all while championing and upholding Portuguese interests on the international stage, within predetermined temporal frameworks (Magalhães, 2001; Tomé, 2019; Fernandes, 2022b).

Police liaison officers emerge as vanguards in architecting a unique paradigm of diplomatic-security synergies at a supranational tier, symbolising an authentic internationalisation of internal security. Functioning as intermediary governmental emissaries, they command respect within diplomatic echelons and are entrusted with the nuanced execution of foreign and cooperative policy agendas. Their purview often encompasses intricate geopolitical challenges with a technical-political essence (Stevanović, Jacimovski, & Kekić, 2012; den Boer & Block, 2013; Lemieux, 2015; Fernandes, 2022b).

The expansive network of police diplomats and their pivotal contributions to Portugal's external representation within global law enforcement collaborative frameworks are unequivocal elements within the contemporary paradigm of transnational security and policing. They epitomise a resilient, dynamic, and efficacious global security infrastructure (Brodeur, 2010).

Despite the inherent vulnerabilities to an array of risks, tensions, and ambiguities of multifaceted origins, police diplomacy, as exemplified by the OLMAI ensemble and its cadre of diplomats, has pioneered innovative strategies and fortified resilience against unconventional hazards and disruptive challenges, consistently championing the cause of Human Security and the unwavering advocacy for Human Rights.

Police diplomacy serves as a crucial instrument for confronting modern expansionism by facilitating collaboration, sharing intelligence, resolving conflicts, and promoting stability and security. As geopolitical tensions continue to evolve, effective diplomatic engagement within law enforcement remains essential for safeguarding global peace and security in the face of contemporary challenges. In a deeply interconnected, fast-paced, and polarised world full of uncertainties, this ability to build diplomacy for peace and liberty is of vital importance. As Sofi Oksanen taught us, freedom is not a choice, it's a necessity.

**Contacts:**

**Roberto Narciso Andrade Fernandes, PhD**

E-mail: [rnfernandes@psp.pt](mailto:rnfernandes@psp.pt)

Police Research Center (ICPOL – R&D&I Unit)

Higher Institute of Police Sciences and Internal Security (ISCPSI)

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# **A SURVEY AMONG ESTONIAN RESIDENTS ONE MONTH AFTER THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE: RESILIENCE IS KEY**

**Kristjan Kask, PhD**

*Tallinn University  
Associate Professor of Legal Psychology  
Estonia*

**Valeri Murnikov, MA**

*Tallinn University  
Visiting Researcher in Education Sciences  
Estonia*

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of our study was to investigate the relationship between resilience and symptoms of depression and anxiety, perceived stress, and post-traumatic stress in Estonia one month after the start of the war in Ukraine. The survey was responded to by 342 participants and included information about the study, a set of demographic questions as well as self-report scales. Resilience was negatively correlated with perceived stress, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety. Perceived stress and post-traumatic stress symptoms were both positively correlated with depression and anxiety. Based on the results of the path analysis, higher resilience predicted less perceived stress, depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress. In addition, higher depression and anxiety scores predicted higher scores in perceived stress and post-traumatic stress. We can conclude that resilience plays an important role in predicting psychological distress, perceived stress, and post-traumatic stress.

## INTRODUCTION

“War is one of the most devastating experiences humans may face and this experience is accompanied by many difficult struggles that often bring individuals to the limit of their abilities” (Kimhi, Kaim et al., 2023 p.1). The troops of the Russian Federation entered the Republic of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the Independence Day of the Republic of Estonia. This invasion is still ongoing and is considered the most serious military conflict in Europe since 1945 (Kurapov et al., 2022).

This war has had an effect not only on Ukrainian people but also on European countries and communities concerning several aspects of life (Kimhi, Kaim et al., 2023). Millions of Ukrainians have been displaced, forced to leave or fled within Ukraine or its neighbouring countries (over six million globally). Almost 86,000 Ukrainian citizens entering Estonia have stated that they plan to stay in Estonia for a while. Temporary residence permits have been issued to almost 36,000 war refugees (by 19.12.2023, Ministry of the Interior, 2023). This might mean that Estonian residents have had closer contact with the refugees either via media representation or on an individual level.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, surveys about mental health increased considerably. In Estonia, studies have been conducted on the effects of the COVID pandemic on aspects of mental health among the general population (Kulbin et al., 2021; Kulbin & Kask, 2022; Reile et al., 2021; see also Laidra et al., 2023), athletes (Parm et al., 2021), and coaches (Kiens et al., 2023). However, other external factors might affect people’s mental health as well. Studies have demonstrated that war exerts various adverse psychological effects on individuals, irrespective of their age, gender, or level of participation (Winter et al., 2015). Due to the proximity of Ukraine to Estonia, the war might influence aspects of mental health among

Estonian residents as well. As the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated, large differences were seen in the way countries reacted and populations were affected (Abdalla et al., 2023). Thus, in the context of the war in Ukraine, in this paper, we focus on protective factors such as resilience as well as other aspects of mental health, such as psychological distress, perceived stress, and post-traumatic stress.

Resilience is an important mental skill that can be defined as “a dynamic process encompassing the capacity to maintain regular functioning through diverse challenges or to rebound through the use of facilitative resources” (Bryan, O’Shea, & MacIntyre, 2019, p. 77). In addition, an integral aspect often included in resilience definitions is the effective ability to confront diverse challenges and swiftly bounce back once the situation has ended (Métais et al., 2022). Bonanno et al. (2011) view individual resilience as a stable trajectory of healthy functioning after a highly adverse event. However, resilience can be seen on different levels – individual, group, or society. For example, in the current situation in Estonia, societal resilience has been analysed in terms of perceptions of socio-economic threats and wellbeing (Teperik, 2023).

From an internal security point of view, for example, officials who have close contact with Ukrainian refugees might be influenced by their stories and traumatic reactions. Hearing the stories might lead the officials to experience secondary traumatic stress, which is a term describing the emotions and behaviours stemming from exposure to a traumatising event that occurred to someone else (Figley, 1995). Similar trends can be present in the public when reading consecutive news items about Ukraine; there can be a wish to not consume news evoking certain emotions (known as compassion fatigue; Sorenson et al., 2017). Therefore, it is important to be aware of the way people might behave and react (see Teperik, 2023). Resilient people can employ strategies that are not only essential in taking care of their mental health but also in a

larger context (at a community or country level, e.g. working for the safety of a country).

The transactional stress model (e.g. Ben-Zur, 2019; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) states that a person's capacity to cope and adjust to changes in life is a result of interactions between a person and the environment. The capacity to manage stress hinges on whether an individual perceives that they possess the resources to alleviate or eliminate the source of stress. Cohen and colleagues (1983) discuss that a psychological state of perceived stress occurs when a situation in a person's life is processed as threatening or demanding and, at the same time, resources to cope with the situation are insufficient.

Psychological distress is viewed as an emotional disturbance that might impact the social functioning and day-to-day living of individuals (Wheaton, 2007). It is defined as emotional suffering to which the symptoms of anxiety and depression contribute and which may be associated with somatic symptoms (Drapeau et al., 2012; Mirowsky & Ross, 2002). It is known that depression has been widely associated with excessive stress (Hammen, 2005).

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can develop after direct exposure to or witnessing a traumatic, life-threatening event (Eshel et al., 2023). PTSD is a condition marked by enduring distress following a traumatic event that includes actual or threatened death or injury. It manifests through the re-experiencing of traumatic events, avoidance symptoms, and negative alterations in cognition and arousal (Eshel et al., 2023). War traumas can be seen as risk factors for PTSD; therefore, post-traumatic stress might sometimes lead to PTSD (Eshel et al., 2023).



Since the start of the war in Ukraine, these constructs and their relationships have been examined in scientific literature. For example, a special issue concerning the war in Ukraine and its impact on mental health on a global level was recently published (Vintila et al., 2023), focusing on the mental health of the people in several European countries as well as that of asylum seekers and war refugees. Higher exposure to war and a higher sense of danger increase PTSD and distress symptoms, whereas higher well-being, higher individual resilience, being male, and being older decrease their level (Eshel et al., 2023). In their study, however, most respondents did not reach the critical level of PTSD or distress symptoms. The highest severity of stress, anxiety, and PTSD was observed among Ukrainian refugees (Lushchat et al., 2024). Resilience has been found to be linked with mental health in other studies with people from war zones such as Ukraine (Kimhi, Eshel et al., 2023) and Syria (Sharifian et al., 2023).

One study also involved Estonian participants. Kimhi, Kaim et al. (2023) conducted a web-based study from July to October 2022 in six participating countries (Ukraine, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Estonia), with approximately 1,000 participants per country. Hope was the best predictor of community and societal resilience in all countries. The level of sense of danger was highest among the Ukrainian respondents, while the Estonian respondents reported the lowest; the Ukrainian respondents reported the highest level of distress symptoms, while the Lithuanian and Estonian respondents reported the lowest; and the Estonian sample reported the lowest level of perceived threats.

Comparisons with the COVID-19 pandemic regarding mental health were also conducted. For example, Gottschick et al. (2023) conducted a survey in Germany from 4-21 March 2022 that was responded to by 4441 participants (who had responded to a similar survey in March 2021 during the period of the strongest COVID-19 pandemic-related restrictions in Germany). They found that the

population in Germany reacted to the Russo-Ukrainian war with substantial distress (anxiety was strongly increased), exceeding reactions during the strongest restrictions in the COVID-19 pandemic. Fear of the impact of war was associated with worse mental health.

As it is important to monitor mental health in different countries in response to such grave external changes in our environment, in this survey, which we conducted a month after the war started, we wished to explore resilience as well as its associations with psychological distress, perceived stress and post-traumatic stress. Previous research has indicated that higher resilience is strongly associated with lower stress reactions (Kiens et al., 2023; also see Gottschick et al., 2023). Therefore, we expected higher resilience to be associated with and a good predictor of lower perceived stress, post-traumatic stress and psychological distress (operationalised as symptoms of depression and anxiety).

## **1. METHOD**

### **1.1. SAMPLE**

The survey was responded to by 342 participants (308 female), with a mean age of 40 ( $SD = 12$ , range 18 to 76). Regarding marital status, 90 (26%) were single, 116 (35%) were married, 24 (7%) were divorced, 90 (26%) were in an open relationship, 18 (5%) in a civil partnership, and 4 (1%) widowed. In terms of education, 6 (2%) had graduated basic school, 70 (21%) vocational school or high school, and 266 (77%) higher education. The native language for 339 (99%) participants was Estonian; for three participants, Russian.

## 1.2. PROCEDURE

The web-based survey created in the GoogleForms environment was distributed in Estonian to potential participants through Tallinn University's homepage and social media channels. The data collection wave in a convenience sample was conducted from 25 March to 18 April 2022. The survey included information about the study, a set of demographic, health and wellness questions, and a set of self-reported scales about mental health and well-being. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Ethics Committee of Tallinn University, Estonia.

## 1.3. INSTRUMENTS

*Emotional State Questionnaire-2* (EST-Q2; Ööpik et al. 2006). The EST-Q2 is a self-report questionnaire for assessing symptoms of depression and anxiety and symptoms related to depression and anxiety. The questionnaire consists of 28 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all; 5 = all the time) in six subscales: depression (cut-off point >11), anxiety (>11), agoraphobia/panic (>6), social anxiety (>3), fatigue (>6), and insomnia (>5). In this study, we focus only on the subscales of depression and anxiety. The EST-Q2 reflects symptoms of depressive and anxiety disorders according to the ICD-10 and the DSM-IV during the past month. The internal consistency of the scales is  $\alpha = .69-.88$  (Ööpik et al., 2006).

*Perceived Stress Scale* (PSS; Cohen et al., 1983). The PSS is a self-report measure designed to assess the degree to which individuals appraise experiences as difficult to manage and overwhelming. Participants are asked to indicate on a five-point scale (0 = never; 4 = very often) how often they felt or thought a certain way during the last four weeks (e.g. 'How often did you feel unable to control the important things in life?'). We used the shortened version of this scale consisting of 10 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (0 =

never; 4 = very often; for items 4, 5, 7 and 8, the scale is reversed). The PSS total score was obtained by summing the scale items. This scale has demonstrated good internal reliability in English ( $\alpha = .84-.86$ , Cohen et al., 1983) and in Estonian ( $\alpha = .89$ , Kulbin et al., 2021).

*PTSD Checklist Civilian version (PCL-C; Weathers et al. 1993).* The PCL-C is a self-report rating scale for assessing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The PCL-C consists of 17 items that correspond to the DSM-IV symptoms of PTSD. Respondents are instructed to indicate how much they have been bothered by each symptom in the past month using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all; 5 = extremely). Internal consistency is good in English with Cronbach's  $\alpha = .97$  (Weathers et al., 1993) and also in Estonian ( $\alpha = .93$ ) (Kulbin et al., 2021).

*Brief resilience scale (BRS; Smith, Dalen, Wiggins, Tooley, Christopher, & Bernard, 2008).* The BRS is a 6-item scale to determine whether it is possible to reliably assess resilience as bouncing back from stress, whether it is related to resilience resources, and whether it is related to important health outcomes. Items 1, 3, and 5 are positively worded, and items 2, 4, and 6 are negatively worded. The BRS is scored by reverse coding items 2, 4, and 6 and finding the mean of the six items. It is asked to indicate the extent to which a person agrees with each of the following statements by using the following scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Internal consistency is good in English, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from .80-.91 in four different samples (Smith, Dalen, Wiggins, Tooley, Christopher, & Bernard, 2008) and also in Estonian ( $\alpha = .87$ ) (Kiens, Kask, & Jõgi, 2023).

#### 1.4. STATISTICAL ANALYSES

To examine the associations between constructs, SPSS 27.0 was used for Pearson's correlations. Path analysis was used for testing

the structural relations between measures. The PSS, PCL-C, and EST-Q2 depression and anxiety subscales were set as outcome variables predicted by the BRS. All possible (residual) correlations were allowed to be estimated in the path model. The pathj module from the statistical platform jamovi (The jamovi project, 2023; R Core Team, 2022; Galliucci, 2021) was used for path analysis. Results yielding  $p < .05$  were considered statistically significant.

## 2. RESULTS

Descriptive statistics along with the internal consistencies of the scales are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Means, standard deviations, and percentages above cut-off point and Cronbach's alpha of the scales across three waves (n=342)

SCALE	M	SD	PROPORTION OVER CUT-OFF POINT (%)	CRONBACH'S $\alpha$
PCL-C	37.66	14.74		.938
PSS	27.12	6.30		.828
BRS	18.90	5.30		.914
EST-Q2 subscales				
Depression	11.60	7.17	49	.900
Anxiety	10.89	5.66	43	.881

First, our aim was to ensure the consistency of results across diverse socio-demographic factors. We sought to investigate that no differences in outcomes would emerge among various social and demographic variables, including gender, education, and age. There was no difference between male and female participants in any constructs (see Table 2). There were statistically significant correlations between age and mental health constructs and between

those constructs and education. However, relationships between variables were low; none of the correlations exceeded a higher value than .288 (ranging from .135 to .288), indicating that covariation between variables was present in fewer than eight per cent of cases.

**Table 2.** Differences between male and female participants across scales

		M	SD	t	df	p
Depression	Male	11.52	7.77	-0.038	339	0.97
	Female	11.6	7.08			
Anxiety	Male	9.67	6.07	-1.28	339	0.20
	Female	11.0	5.61			
BRS	Male	20.45	5.23	1.77	339	0.08
	Female	18.7	5.30			
PCL-C	Male	34.85	15.07	-1.12	339	0.26
	Female	37.9	14.62			
PSS	Male	26.85	7.11	-0.24	339	0.81
	Female	27.1	6.21			

Second, associations between mental health constructs were analysed (see Table 3). The EST-Q2 depression subscale was correlated with anxiety ( $r = .711, p < .01$ ). This indicates that respondents who showed more depression symptoms also showed more anxiety symptoms, and *vice versa*. The BRS was negatively correlated with the PSS ( $r = -.57, p < .01$ , PCL  $r = -.66, p < .01$ ) and the EST-Q2 subscales ( $r$ -s =  $-.58$ - $.66, p < .01$ ). These relationships suggest that those individuals who show higher resilience perceive less stress and fewer symptoms of post-traumatic stress, depression, and anxiety. The PSS was positively correlated with the EST-Q2 subscales ( $r$ -s =  $.68$ - $.72, p < .01$ ). The PCL-C was positively correlated with the EST-Q2 subscales ( $r$ -s =  $.75$ - $.80, p < .01$ ).

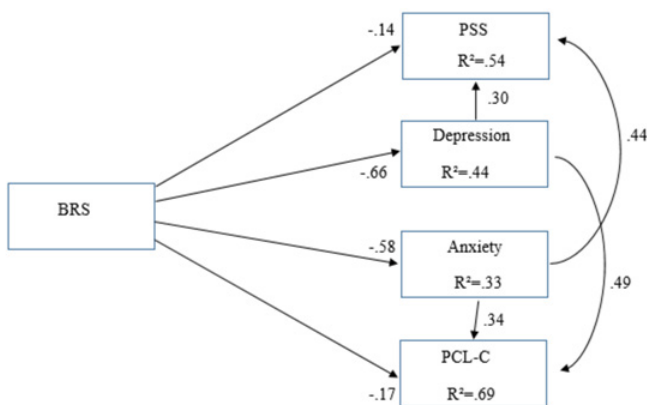
Next, the effect of the BRS on the PSS, PCL-C and EST-Q2 depression and anxiety subscales was estimated in path analysis (see

Figure 1). The BRS appeared as a significant predictor of all outcomes. The higher the participants' resilience, the lower the PSS ( $\beta = -.14, p < .001$ ) and PCL ( $\beta = -.17, p < .01$ ) scores. Resilience was also a strong predictor for EST-Q2 depression ( $\beta = -.66, p < .001$ ) and anxiety ( $\beta = -.59, p < .001$ ) scores. In the current model, in addition to the BRS, the EST-Q2 depression and anxiety scales significantly predicted PSS and PCL-C scores. Specifically, the higher the depression score, the higher the PSS ( $\beta = .30, p < .001$ ) and PCL-C ( $\beta = .49, p < .001$ ) scores. Similarly, the higher the anxiety score, the higher the PSS ( $\beta = .44, p < .001$ ) and PCL-C ( $\beta = .34, p < .001$ ) scores.

**Table 3.** Associations between scales and subscales (n=342)

	DEPRESSION	ANXIETY	PSS	PCL-C
Anxiety	.711**			
PSS	.681**	.708**		
PCL-C	.803**	.746**	.659**	
BRS	-.663**	-.578**	-.574**	-.656**

Note. \*\* =  $p < .01$ .



**Figure 1.** Graphic display of estimated path analysis mode (only significant associations are displayed)

### 3. DISCUSSION

In this study, we aimed to explore how resilience as a coping trait is related to individuals' psychological distress, perceived stress, and post-traumatic stress. We found that individuals with higher resilience experienced less psychological distress, such as traits of depression and anxiety, as well as less perceived stress and post-traumatic stress. These results support previous findings in studies that have used similar constructs (Kiens et al., 2023; Eshel et al., 2023; Gottschick et al., 2023). Eshel et al. (2023) also found that lower resilience predicted higher anxiety and depressive symptoms as well as PTSD. Kiens et al. (2023) also found that lower resilience predicted higher PSS and EST-Q2 depression and anxiety scores. Thus, our results align with previous findings that resilience as a coping ability mediates individuals' psychological distress and stress.

Furthermore, the path analysis indicated that resilience was the best predictor of depression, anxiety, perceived stress, and post-traumatic stress. In addition, symptoms of depression and anxiety predicted significantly higher perceived and post-traumatic stress. The relationship between psychological distress and perceived and post-traumatic stress outlines the importance of resilience as an ability to cope with negative mental states (see also Eshel et al., 2023).

Resilience has been shown to be an important psychological phenomenon for coping with psychological distress and other mental challenges. In recent years, this construct has been studied in the context of COVID-19 as a mechanism that helps cope with crises (Kulbin et al., 2021; Kulbin & Kask, 2022; Reile et al., 2021; see also Laidra et al., 2023). Previously, studies have addressed the similarities in the importance of resilience between the COVID-19 crisis and the war crisis (see e.g. Kimhi, Kaim et al., 2023). It has been shown that similar reactions occur in the population in both COVID and war conflict situations. Previous studies have shown



that in the Estonian population, resilience was an important coping mechanism in overcoming psychological distress and various mental health challenges during the COVID pandemic (Kulbin et al., 2021; Kulbin & Kask, 2022; Reile et al., 2021; see also Laidra et al., 2023). Considering the similar reaction to the COVID pandemic and the war conflict, resilience as a construct creates the opportunity to compare the impact of COVID-19 and the war on the Estonian population.

Resilience, as an important coping mechanism, has been studied in the context of the armed conflict in Ukraine. Since the onset of the war in Ukraine, studies have addressed the impact of the conflict on resilience and distress factors. For example, Kimhi, Kaim et al. (2023) analysed the relationship between distress factors and resilience in the Ukrainian population compared to Israelis. The study showed that resilience was an important psychological phenomenon related to lower distress and higher hope in the Ukrainian population. One of the interesting findings was that the Ukrainian population during the war showed higher resilience than Israelis. The authors argued that higher resilience could be associated with the perception of the war. Specifically, this difference might suggest that higher resilience could be associated with the fact that Ukrainians perceive the war as a fight for independence and the survival of the nation as a whole. This suggestion aligns with the results of the current study as the Estonian population can relate to this kind of perception of a war conflict based on similar historical processes and aggressor.

Therefore, it is important to support resilience in individuals and society overall regardless of whether there is direct armed conflict. Factors that build resilience can be learned, such as open-mindedness and mental flexibility when facing fears, decisiveness, effective problem-solving skills, optimism, and social support (Everly & Lating, 2019).

As a limitation of the study, it can be pointed out that our sample size was small, so we have to be cautious in generalising the results. In addition, although in some previous studies, gender and age have been important predictors of stress reactions (e.g. Kiens et al., 2023), we did not include these variables in our analysis since there was no statistical relationship between gender and our constructs and the correlations between our constructs and age and education level were not strong enough. The absence of a relationship between gender and the constructs is related to the sample. In our study, the majority of the respondents were women (308 out of 342 responders). There is no clear explanation for this disproportion in gender within the sample. Data for the current study was collected through social media, thus it can be only suggested that women had a greater interest in participating in the current study than men. However, this cannot be controlled since the method of data collection does not allow us to track channels and their impact on participation.

Observing the proportion of respondents who exceed the cut-off scores of the EST-Q2 depression and anxiety subscales (which means that a clinician should evaluate them further regarding symptoms of depression and anxiety disorders), we see that 49% exceed the cut-off score for depression and 43% for anxiety. Although direct comparisons cannot be made, when comparing these results to similar scores from the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic from Kulbin et al. (2021), for depression, these scores were between 22 and 24% and for anxiety 18 and 26%. This comparison indicates that the symptoms of these conditions accumulate over time (bearing in mind that, worldwide, the COVID-19 pandemic started roughly two years before the Ukrainian war in February 2022). Thus, we can attribute the increase to the start of the war in Ukraine.

Although Kimhi, Kaim et al. (2023) found that Estonian respondents reported the lowest level of distress symptoms and perceived threats, Estonian residents might have had direct or indirect

contact with Ukrainian refugees. Given the current geopolitical environment, resilience is important not only on a community or society level (Teperik, 2023) but also on an individual level as many Ukrainian refugees have fled to Estonia either temporarily or more permanently.

## CONCLUSIONS

Like Kimhi, Kaim et al. (2023), this survey closely examined resilience and aspects of mental health, such as psychological distress, perceived stress, and post-traumatic stress, among Estonian residents. Higher resilience predicts lower depression and anxiety as well as perceived and post-traumatic stress. Our results demonstrate that strengthening resilience is an important factor in coping better with changes in our external environment. In the context of the war in Ukraine, certain skills can be practised and applied to everyday behaviour to strengthen resilience. It is paramount to promote these practices on an individual and a broader level, such as community or country. It is also important to repeatedly monitor aspects of mental health among Estonian residents. As the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated, changes in our environment are associated with changes in our mental health (Kulbin et al., 2021; 2022); therefore, it is important to target changes in people's mental health in a timely manner.

**Contacts:**

**Kristjan Kask, PhD**

E-mail: [kask@tlu.ee](mailto:kask@tlu.ee)

Tallinn University

**Valeri Murnikov, MA**

E-mail: [valeri.murnikov@tlu.ee](mailto:valeri.murnikov@tlu.ee)

Tallinn University

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# INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEWING OF CHILD WITNESSES IN ESTONIA

**Kristjan Kask, PhD<sup>1</sup>**

*Tallinn University  
Associate Professor of Legal Psychology  
Estonia*

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<sup>1</sup> The author is a member of COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology; [www.cost.eu](http://www.cost.eu)) Action CA22128 Establishing Networks to Implement the Principles on Effective Interviewing for Investigations.

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## **ABSTRACT**

In 2004, the first unit was formed in the Estonian Police and Board Guard specialising in investigating crimes against children. To celebrate 20 years from this event, we reflect on how the investigative interviewing of child victims and witnesses in Estonia has developed over the years from a psychological perspective. We cover the relevant literature and research concerning this topic in Estonia along with the changes in legislation regulating the area. We also focus on interview training and the opening of the Children's House (Barnahus) service and highlight some important issues to keep in mind in this field for the future.

## INTRODUCTION

On 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2004, the first unit specialising in investigating crimes against children was formed in the Estonian Police and Board Guard. To celebrate 20 years from this event, this paper aims to give an overview of this area, focusing on the psychological perspective of the investigative interviewing of child witnesses. The paper seeks to answer the following questions: (i) how has the investigative interviewing of child witnesses in Estonia developed over the years; and (ii) based on new initiatives in the field, what important developments must be kept in mind for the future?

To reach this aim, we first give a brief overview of the main legislative changes along with the research from a psychological perspective. The Barnahus service, which opened in 2017, is described, as are the best practices of interview training. Finally, some new initiatives in the field are introduced.

## 1. LEGISLATION REGULATING INTERVIEWING CHILD WITNESSES

In 2022, 530 sexual crimes against children were committed, of which 280 were contact crimes and 250 non-contact crimes (Ministry of Justice, 2023). Concerning contact crimes, the most reported crimes were rape and acts of a sexual nature against a child's will. The average age of the victims was 11 years (86% girls). In 46% of the cases, these crimes were committed by a family member, in 35% by acquaintances, and in 19% by someone the child did not know. Regarding non-contact crimes (88% of these were on the web or using the means of info technology), the most registered crimes were those concerning the creation of child pornography or activities enabling creation.

In Estonia, one important part of the state's priorities for fighting crimes is fighting sexual crimes against children, especially on the web and across borders (Priorities of legal protection, 2024). Fighting child sexual abuse is also a priority in the European Union. On 12 July 2007, the European Committee adopted a declaration on defending children from sexual abuse and sexual violence, which gives member states guidelines

on how to proceed with such cases (Council of Europe, 2007). Several recent presidencies have taken this into focus. During the Spanish Presidency agenda from 1 July to 31 December 2023, the aim was to develop a proposal for the Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing rules to prevent and combat child sexual abuse (EU Council Presidencies and their impact on children, 2024). From 1 January to 30 June 2024, the Belgium Presidency will evaluate and update the European and international policy agenda on children, youth and children's rights. It also plans to advance the work on preventing and combatting child sexual abuse and push for the implementation of the European Child Guarantee (EU Council Presidencies and their impact on children, 2024).

The new Code of Criminal Procedure (CCP) was adopted in 2004. According to the CCP, it was possible to video record interviews with children younger than 14 years of age in pre-trial criminal proceedings, but the children still had to testify in court proceedings as well unless a combined psychiatric and psychological expert assessment stated that testifying in court would have a negative impact on the child's mental health.

Several important changes to the CCP regarding the investigative interviewing of children were introduced on 11 September 2011. Subsection 1 of § 70 (Special rules for interviewing or examining an underage witness) states that "the proceedings authority may require a child protection official, social worker, teacher or psychologist to be present when it is interviewing or examining an underage witness" and subsection 2 states that "if the proceedings authority has not received appropriate training, enlisting the assistance of a child protection official, social worker, teacher or psychologist for interviewing or examining a minor is mandatory if: 1) the witness is younger than ten years of age and interviews or examination may have a harmful effect on the minor's mental well-being; 2) the witness is younger than fourteen years of age and the interview or examination relates to domestic violence or to sexual abuse; 3) the witness has a speech or sensory impairment or an intellectual disability or suffers from mental disorders". Subsection 3 adds that "where this is needed, the interview with, or examination of, the minor is video recorded and in a situation mentioned in subsection 2, the interview with the minor is video recorded if – for the reason that the minor's

first-hand examination in court is not possible due to the minor's age or the minor's mental state – the intention is to use that interview as evidence in judicial proceedings”.

Two CCP sections regulate the examination of child witnesses in court proceedings: § 290 (Special rules for examining an underage witness) and § 290<sup>1</sup> (Special rules concerning statements made during pre-trial proceedings by an underage witness). Section 290 points out that for a witness younger than fourteen years of age, an adversarial examination is not used (subsection 1) and the court “may use the assistance of a child protection official, social worker, teacher or psychologist of who may put questions to the witness with the permission of the judge” (subsection 2). The examination of a minor under the age of 14 can begin with the judge's invitation to tell the court everything they know concerning the criminal case (subsection 3). After that, the minor is examined by the prosecutor and defence counsel in the order determined by the court. The accused may ask questions to the witness through the defence counsel (subsection 4). With the permission of the court, leading questions may be put to the witness (subsection 5). Taking into consideration the mental or physical condition and age of the witness, the court may interrupt their examination by the parties to judicial proceedings and examine the witness of its own motion or based on written questions submitted by the parties (subsection 6).

According to subsection 290<sup>1</sup> (1) of the CCP, on a motion of a party to judicial proceedings, the court may decide not to summon a minor and to allow a statement made by the minor during pre-trial proceedings to be presented as evidence, provided the statement was video recorded and the defence counsel had the opportunity to put questions to the witness during pre-trial proceedings about the facts constituting the subject matter of evidence, where clauses 70 (2) 1)-3) of the CCP are applied. However, subsection 290<sup>1</sup> (2) states that “if the court, having examined an item of evidence mentioned in subsection 1 of this section, finds that it is necessary to question a minor about any further circumstances, the court may question the witness of its own motion or based on written questions submitted by the parties to judicial proceedings”.

To summarise, this all indicates that (i) when the investigators have completed special training on the investigative interviewing of children

and (ii) when the interview with a child, regarding the aforementioned circumstances, is video recorded, said video recording can be used as evidence later in court proceedings. In this case, the child has to be interviewed only once, which has a great impact on diminishing the secondary victimisation (Classen & Clark, 2017) of the child by preventing repeated interviews in preliminary and/or court proceedings. We have to remark that some studies do not demonstrate the adverse effects of repeated interviews (Quas et al., 2007). Duron and Remko (2018) note that even though single interviews remain the ‘gold standard’ of investigative interviews with children, sometimes it is necessary to conduct multiple interviews, which is especially important when interviewing vulnerable children suspected to be victims of sexual abuse. Still, to conclude, interviews should be conducted in a child-friendly manner and be carried out according to the principles of the NICHD protocol (Orbach et al., 2000, see also Fernandes et al., 2023).

## **2. INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEWING LITERATURE**

Literature from a psychological perspective on this field in Estonia has been scarce. In 2016, a handbook on the investigative interviewing of children was published in Estonian (Liivamägi-Hitrov and Kask, 2016); it contains an overview chapter in English on the current state of affairs regarding interviewing victims and/or witnesses (Kask, 2016). From a legal perspective, several papers have been published over the years. In 2006, a paper was published about interviewing minors in pre-trial proceedings in criminal cases (Rammo, 2006). Kask (2011) examined the changes adopted by the CCP on 1 September 2011 and found that they were in accordance with the European Committee declaration (Council of Europe, 2007) and also with the practice of the European Court of Human Rights. A judge of the Supreme Court has also published a paper in Estonian concerning the credibility of child witnesses in criminal proceedings from the point of view of a legal professional (Randma, 2022). Just recently, the special treatment of minors using the example of the Police and Border Guard Board was analysed (Kajo & Rohuniit, 2023). In addition, there have been some overview studies and analyses in both Estonian (Kask, 2009; 2015) and English (Kask, 2012; Kask et al., 2022; Pompemma et al., 2021).

A few studies have been conducted regarding the quality of investigative interviews in Estonia during the 20 years since the unit's introduction. In 2012, the first analysis was published (Kask, 2012), where interview transcripts with 66 children from 2004 to 2008 (mean age 9 years (range from 4 to 14); 65% female, mean length 27 minutes) were examined. In his analysis, Kask found that the investigators preferred to ask open (who, what, where, how) and option-posing questions (did it happen once or twice?). However, the children's answers to invitations (tell me...) were lengthier. He suggested based on these results that structured interview methods such as the NICHD protocol should be implemented in training Estonian investigators and that the training should be followed by continuous supervision and feedback (Kask, 2012). This could all manifest in increasing the quality of interviews.

The next analysis regarding the quality of investigative interviews in Estonia was published in 2015 (Kask, 2015), in which 10 interview transcripts from 2011 to 2014 (child mean age 10 (range 5 to 17); 5 girls; mean length 42 minutes) were compared. The study aimed to examine the differences between investigators who have completed the two-week specialised training compared to those who have not. Only a small number of interviews were provided: seven by the specialised investigators and three by those without specialisation (interviews conducted within the presence of a specialist such as a psychologist, child protection worker, social worker or teacher). Although the number of interviews was small, it was found that specialised investigators asked a higher proportion of invitation questions and open questions, whereas those not specialised asked more suggestive and closed questions. Kask summarised the need to continuously give feedback on the interviewing skills of investigators.

### **3. BARNAHUS OPENS IN 2017**

In 2016, the Ministry of Social Affairs started to make preparations to implement the Children's House (Barnahus; in Estonian, *Lastemaja*) concept in Estonia based on attempts in the Nordic countries (Iceland, Norway, Sweden). The Barnahus model is a service whereby different specialists, such as child protection officials, the police, prosecutors, psychologists and many others, work together to ensure the welfare of



children (Social Insurance Board, 2023). The Barnahus team assesses the child's health, social situation and need for further assistance, carries out the investigative operations necessary to resolve the case and offers the child the help they need (read more about applying the Barnahus model in Nordic countries in Johansson et al., 2017). In Estonia, the focus of Barnahus is mainly on children who are victims/witnesses of sexual abuse or who practice harmful sexual behaviour.

In Estonia, the Barnahus service is coordinated by the Social Insurance Board. Barnahus now has four different locations in Estonia (the first opened in January 2017 in Tallinn). In 2022, the Barnahuses in Estonia were contacted 631 times (Social Insurance Board, 2023), mostly with suspicions of sexual abuse (53%) or harmful sexual behaviour (24%). The average age of the children was 11 years (66% girls).

According to the current CCP, interviews with witnesses can be used as evidence when conducted by investigators. Since the first unit specialising in crimes committed against children was formed in 2004, the Police and Border Guard have implemented and modernised child-friendly interview rooms in several prefectures. Currently, investigators also conduct interviews with child witnesses in Barnahus premises. As alleged child sexual abuse victims and witnesses can contact Barnahus directly, their personnel has to plan for many activities, including interviews with children to find out what happened and future activities in case the child needs further help.

Thus, the child can be interviewed and video recorded (if the child agrees) by a Barnahus specialist. If references to a crime (or crimes) are present, the Barnahus specialist stops the interview and the police investigator begins to interview the child as a procedural act. If no references to a crime are present but the child still needs psychosocial help, the Barnahus specialist finishes the interview. This Barnahus video recording can be used later by other specialists who are working with the child to better understand what has happened to the child without repeatedly asking questions about the same topic over and over again to prevent secondary victimisation.

## 4. INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEW TRAINING

Research has shown that children recall the most accurate information when asked certain types of questions (Lamb et al., 2018), such as free recall (tell me what happened...), open questions (what, where, who, how), or facilitators (demonstrating active listening skills, such as saying ‘uh-uh’ or mirroring the child’s previous phrase). In contrast, forced-choice questions (did it happen once or twice?), suggestive questions (he touched you, didn’t he?) or closed questions (did you...?) result in less accurate answers by children. Thus, it is recommended by the literature that the interviewers should use structured interview protocols such as the NICHD protocol (Hershkowitz et al., 2007; Orbach & Lamb, 1999).

It is also important that interview training includes multiple practice sessions (Lamb et al., 2002) as well as continuous, immediate and detailed feedback (Lamb et al., 2002; Smith, 2008). It is known that theoretical training in child witness interviewing skills increases knowledge of the topic, but the knowledge transfer to practical investigative interviewing skills may not take place (Johnson et al., 2015).

However, theoretical training that involves practice with real cases or mock interviews with colleagues or actors pretending to be children has been demonstrated to be effective (Lamb et al., 2002). When detailed feedback is given on the investigators’ performance, the use of open questions increases and suggestive questions decreases. Still, Benson and Powell (2015) summarised the training studies, stating that the training effects will fade within six months after the training has finished or if feedback is not given.

At the beginning of the 2010s, specialised adult training for investigators started on how to interview child witnesses. The introductory training lasts approximately two weeks. During that time, the investigators gain a theoretical overview of the memory principles regarding interviewing, and the NICHD protocol is introduced (Orbach et al., 2000). The training ends with a one-day practical skills session, where roleplays are used to practice the NICHD protocol in a safe environment (see also Kask, 2016, for an overview). Since 2022, there have also been advanced two-day training sessions in place for investigators who have completed the introductory training. Two-day investigative interviewing training

for judges (also prosecutors, lawyers and police investigators) on how to interview children in court in criminal and civil proceedings has also repeatedly taken place since the end of the 2010s (organised by the Supreme Court).

In addition, a novel way to implement rapid and detailed feedback is to use serious gaming solutions, which have been created to simulate child witness interviews (Pompedda et al., 2015; Dalli, 2021; Baugerud et al., 2021). One of the first solutions of this kind was Empowering Interviewer Training (EIT, Pompedda et al., 2015), which was quickly translated and adapted for the Estonian language and cultural context. The Estonian version of EIT was first tested among a student sample to examine whether only changes in question type when interviewing avatars in EIT software would differ from the control group when the feedback for the questioning styles was given after every avatar interview (Pompedda et al., 2021). They were also interested in whether the knowledge transfers to practice as well in real mock interviews with real child mock witnesses conducted a week later. They demonstrated that the proportion of recommended questions (invitations, open-ended questions, and facilitators) was higher in the feedback group compared to the control group in both EIT training interviews and real interviews with mock child witnesses (among 5–7-year-old children).

A similar procedure was then replicated among 17 Estonian police investigators (Kask et al., 2022). The Police and Border Guard Board gave access to 36 anonymised real video recorded interview transcripts (predominantly from 2018) before and after EIT training (mean age of children 9 years (range from 3.5 to 13); 39% girls; average length 30 minutes; 32% child sexual abuse and 68% physical abuse allegations). Per interview, approximately 7.5 invitations, 33 facilitators, 41 open-ended questions, 36 option-posing questions, six suggestive questions, five multiple questions and 12 long or confusing questions were asked. The proportion of recommended questions in the feedback group was 59% after EIT training compared to 48% before EIT training. Thus, it can be concluded that this type of training is effective in increasing the proportion of recommended questions among the investigators.

## 5. SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE AND NEW INITIATIVES

Several changes in criminal proceedings have been put in place since 2004. Currently, the law enforcement personnel regarding minors in criminal cases is specialised. In the best-case scenario, a child is interviewed once by a specialised investigator, the evidence collection is done by a specialised prosecutor, the court proceedings are led by a specialised judge, and the child is represented in pre-trial and court proceedings by a specialised lawyer.

All the parties (judges, prosecutors, lawyers, and investigators) must be trained in a similar manner. The main aim of these training courses has so far focused on interviewing and video recording the interviews of children younger than 14 years. So far, structured interview methods such as the NICHD protocol (Orbach et al., 2000) have emphasised investigating contact crimes. However, as the proportion of non-contact crimes against children is also increasing (NSPCC, 2023), it is important to guide investigators to investigate these crimes in criminal proceedings as, by their nature, the details differ considerably from those of contact crimes. Recently, a handbook for forensic child interviews in presumed cases of trafficking has also been released (Korkman, 2024).

It is also encouraged to video record interviews with children aged 14 to 18 in preliminary proceedings for use in court proceedings. The current CCP provides a legislative solution for this in § 291<sup>1</sup> (Earlier witness statement as evidence in court when agreed by the parties) by saying “where the Prosecutor’s Office, the accused and the defence counsel have reached the corresponding agreement, the court may decide not to order an adversarial examination of the witness and to accept, as evidence, the statement made by the witness during pre-trial proceedings”.

In court proceedings, we urge the court to use subsection 290 (3) of the CCP more extensively by allowing the child witness to first say in their own words what has happened as free recall provides the most accurate details (Lamb et al., 2018). When the child witness is vulnerable in age or mental/physical state, we urge the court to use subsection 290 (6) of the CCP to examine the child on their own (or based on written questions submitted by the parties).

As a new international initiative (COST Action CA22128 Establishing Networks to Implement the Principles on Effective Interviewing for Investigations, IMPLEMENTENDEZ), from the psychological perspective of investigative interviewing, an extensive number of suggestions on legislation, practice and training are presented in a document created in the lead by Professor Juan E. Méndez, former UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, published in May 2021 (hereafter the 'Méndez Principles', Principles on Effective Interviewing for Investigations and Information Gathering, 2023). The document consists of six principles covering recommendations for good practices, vulnerability, training and implementation of the principles. The document states that effective interviewing is instructed by science, law and ethics. It notes that interviewing is a process by which to gather accurate information while implementing legal safeguards. It states that interviewing requires identifying and addressing the needs of the interviewees in situations of vulnerability and that interviewers should receive specific training. Furthermore, interviewing requires transparent and accountable institutions as well as national measures for the implementation of these principles. In 2024, the United Nations launched a manual on investigative interviewing for criminal investigation (United Nations, 2024). Both of these documents focus on investigative interviewing broadly covering not only witness but also suspect interviews.

In addition, scientists belonging to the European Association of Psychology and Law recently published a joint White Paper with ten key recommendations on how forensic child interviews should be conducted (Korkman et al., 2024), reviewing the literature on how to conduct and protocol the interviews and how investigators should be trained. The paper states that children should be interviewed by specialised professionals who use evidence-based child interviewing methods, such as the NICHD protocol or other protocols based on scientific research. The authors emphasise that the interviews should be child-friendly and the interviewer must establish good contact with the child, investigating alternative hypotheses as to what may have happened. Electronic recording of the interviews is essential and it is recommended that only the child and the interviewer are in the interview room. Cultural aspects should be taken into account and if interpreters are needed, the interviews should be planned accordingly. Regarding the training of interviewers, specialised training should be in place, including the continuous

assessment of their interviewing style and feedback to guarantee good quality during these interviews.

The documents cited above provide research-based evidence on how effective information gathering should be carried out. It is suggested that these principles should be taken into account as the gold standard of best practices in Estonia when conducting investigative interviews and training. Based on the above, training for law enforcement personnel should be science-based according to the latest available literature. Training should be conducted and law enforcement personnel should be given feedback on their performance (interviewing quality) continuously. The literature finds that continuous feedback on performance prolongs the effect of training and facilitates the transfer of theoretical knowledge from training to practice (Lamb et al., 2002; Smith, 2008).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This paper gave an overview of the development of the investigative interviewing of child witnesses in Estonia from a psychological perspective. First, several changes to legislation have been made during the last 20 years concerning the preliminary and court proceedings of child witnesses. During this timeframe, the way investigators are trained in Estonia has also changed considerably based on the results of scientific research. In addition, in cases of suspicion of sexual crimes against children, the victims can use the services of Barnahuses in several locations in Estonia. The Méndez Principles (Principles on Effective Interviewing for Investigations and Information Gathering, 2023), the United Nations manual on investigative interviewing for criminal investigations (United Nations, 2024), and especially the White Paper by the European Association of Psychology and Law (Korkman et al., 2024) provide guidelines for the science-based best practices of interviewing witnesses that should be applied in practice when investigating crimes involving child victims and/or witnesses.

**Contacts:**

**Kristjan Kask, PhD**

E-mail: [kask@tlu.ee](mailto:kask@tlu.ee)

Tallinn University

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A large blue geometric shape, resembling a triangle or a sector of a circle, is positioned in the top-left corner of the page. It is solid blue and has a sharp, angular edge.

# **INTENTIONAL HOMICIDES IN BALTIC AND NORDIC STATES 1990–2021**

**Jüri Saar, PhD**

*Estonian Academy of Security Sciences  
Institute of Internal Security  
Researcher  
Estonia*

**Keywords:** intentional homicides, Estonia, Baltic states, j curve, statistical data.

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## ABSTRACT

The main goal of the article was to analyse data on homicides in Estonia and the other Baltic states in the years 1990–2021 and to conceptualize these changes. The level and dynamics of intentional homicides committed in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania during the last three decades were assessed to highlight their similarities and differences. The situation in the field of homicides in the Baltic states was put next to the three Nordic countries: Finland, Sweden, and Norway. Evaluating the number of intentional homicides in the three Nordic countries, we see that the picture is radically different. The homicides committed in the Nordic countries during the last thirty years are characterised by a persistently low rate, without substantial changes. A hypothesis was set and controlled according to which the dynamics of intentional homicides committed in the Baltic states largely coincide with the mirror image of the j curve.

## 1. PURPOSE AND METHODS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to analyse data from six European countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, Sweden, and Norway) on the homicides in the years 1990 to 2021 and to conceptualize the level and dynamics of this crime. The study takes the definition of intentional homicides outlined by the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes (ICCS) as a basis. According to the ICCS, intentional homicide is defined as “unlawful death inflicted upon a person with the intent to cause death or serious injury” (UNODC, 2015, p. 102). This classification encompasses various forms of intentional homicides, including murder, honour killings, fatal serious assaults, deaths resulting from terrorist activities, femicide, infanticide, and extrajudicial killings.

Intentional homicide as a specific crime type is characterised by a high detection rate, i.e. a low degree of latency, relatively low dependence on the will of a specific legislator, and statistical manipulations (Saar, 2010). The study of intentional homicides is important not only because of the seriousness of this type of crime but also because intentional homicide is a well-measured and comparable indicator of violence in general. Due to the lethal outcome, intentional homicide is particularly suitable for carrying out longitudinal studies and cross-national comparative studies since such specificity ensures good comparability (Eisner 2008, 2014; Johnson et al., 2010; Aebi, Linde, 2014; Lappi-Seppälä, 2014).

Research in criminology has repeatedly proven that there is a strong link between a country’s homicide rate and its level of socio-economic development (Fowles, Merva, 1996; Weatherburn, 2001). These two elements form part of a so-called *vicious circle*, with a low level of development likely to push the homicide rate up, which in turn further hampers development. Countries with pronounced income inequality are likely to have a higher homicide rate than those with narrower income gaps (Nivette, 2011; Santos, 2021). Although some recent studies have questioned the existence of a direct relationship between a country’s homicide rate and the proportion of young people (normally taken to refer to those aged between 15 and 29) in its population, the latest available data do point to a positive and statistically significant correlation (Santos, 2018).

It has also been repeatedly identified that the easy availability and spread of firearms in the population correlates with high levels of homicide (Aguirre, Muggah, 2020; De Schutter, Duquet, 2023, Smirano, 2023). The widespread presence of organised crime groups and high levels of lethal violence are strongly correlated (Kamprad, Liem, 2021). At the same time, the presence of organised crime groups does not always translate into a high rate of homicide. Indeed, the dominance of a hegemonic organised crime group can have a restrained impact on violent crime, particularly when it successfully exerts control over territory and criminal markets. Moreover, criminal organisations may also enter ‘gentlemen’s agreements’, precisely to avoid violent confrontations. Usually, this leads to the authorities inevitably ceding control of some local jurisdictions. Such informal pacts of non-interference can result in a ‘*pax mafi-osa*’, a relatively low level of violence in territories dominated by criminal groups (Finckenauer, Chin, 2006; Zabyelina, 2009).

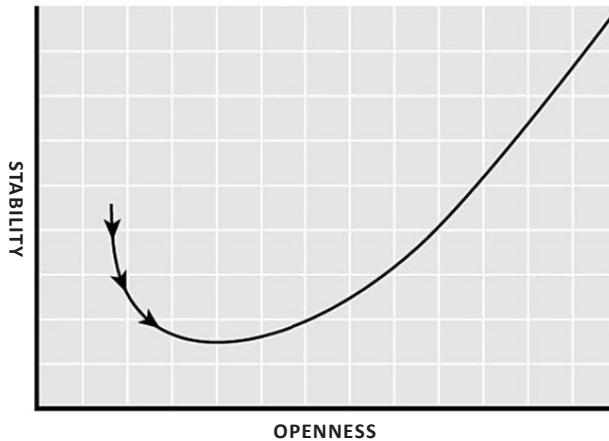
At the same time, it is not known exactly how social changes and the level of intentional homicides are related in the long term, that is, whether society quickly transitions from a strict, even overcontrolled totalitarian way of life to a democratic society that allows people great personal freedom. It would be simplistic to assume that after these kinds of changes, things will start immediately to progress better than before. All kinds of sudden changes in the living environment, regardless of the direction of changes in society, have reason to be considered a source of stress and frustration. New circumstances present new challenges to people when previously used adaptation mechanisms no longer function (Durkheim, 1982). It is not excluded that the stress accompanied by rapid changes will be fatal and that democratic reorganisations will therefore run into the sand.

The large-scale socio-political change in Europe that accompanied the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 can be regarded as a wide-ranging social experiment that allows for the closer examination of the impact of different development paths on violent crime, especially intentional homicides. One clear group is formed by the Baltic states that have regained their independence and have been able to decide their own affairs for more than three decades now. Their developmental path can be compared with the geographically and culturally relatively close

Nordic countries, which had a much more stable situation during the same period.

This study was based on a longitudinal time series approach, where the variables were the level of intentional homicides per year in the sampled countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, Sweden, and Norway). The study used cause-of-death statistics from the UNODC/UN-CTS and Eurostat databases. The raw data were obtained from international databases, which are compiled based on the official crime statistics of countries. The number of victims of intentional homicide or assault per 100,000 inhabitants was used as a statistical indicator. In addition, a more qualitative approach, namely cross-country observational data, was used in the analysis to compare specific countries in terms of socio-economic development.

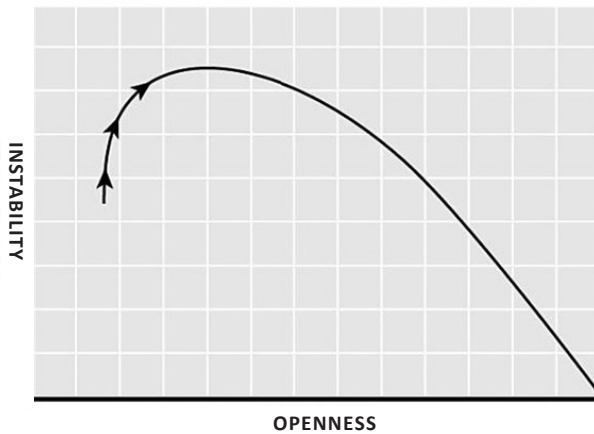
A hypothesis was set and controlled according to which the dynamics of intentional homicides committed in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania largely coincide with the j curve (Bremmer, 2006).



**Figure 1.** A j curve demonstrating the relationship between societal stability and openness (Bremmer, 2006, p. 7)

More precisely, it coincides with the mirror image of the j curve, where instability instead of stability is placed on the ordinate axis.





**Figure 2.** A mirror j curve demonstrating the relationship between societal instability and openness

Ian Bremmer used the j curve image to describe the social processes taking place in transitional societies when they develop from authoritarian to free types of society. Interest in the processes of changing societies had already grown in the social sciences (Huntington, 1968). The j curve describes the changes that take place in stability when society opens both in terms of political processes and the movement of people, goods, and information across national borders. First, with the opening of society, a sudden decrease in stability occurs in all previously closed societies—a shock that puts people and state institutions in front of serious trials. Every state that changes from authoritarian to democratic rule, from a closed, overcontrolled society to an open, free one, must inevitably go through a stage of instability, social disorganisation, and anomie (Durkheim, 1982) before reaching the next stage, i.e. the new growth of stability. When the crisis caused by instability is overcome, a period of increasing stability is reached, which also marks the successful economic and social development. The changes that take place in open, democratic societies and the accompanying increase in stability are not sudden but smooth and lasting, while temporary setbacks are also possible.

According to the hypothesis, similar dynamics in terms of intentional homicides do not occur in the three Nordic countries (Finland, Sweden, Norway), which did not undergo equally fundamental changes at the

beginning of the nineties during the 20<sup>th</sup>-century transitions and have been stable welfare societies for the last thirty years. The level of homicides there should also be stable; therefore, the levels of intentional homicides in these countries should increasingly resemble the levels of the Baltic countries.

## **2. INTENTIONAL HOMICIDES IN ESTONIA, LATVIA, AND LITHUANIA SINCE REGAINING INDEPENDENCE**

In the early 1990s, a rapid increase in violent crime was recorded in all three Baltic countries, but the increase was particularly sharp in Estonia. The international homicides committed in Estonia at the beginning of the 1990s, due to their high numbers, attracted a lot of international attention. Based on the data of intentional homicides, in the 1990s, Estonia was next to the countries known for the highest level of violence in the world. For example, the United Nations Statistical Yearbook, which looked at general trends in Europe and North America, highlighted the levels of intentional homicides in the two European countries as exceptionally high. These were Russia and Estonia, where the corresponding indicator exceeded 20 cases per 100,000 inhabitants and more than doubled from 1990–1994 (UNO, 1999). The 1999 United Nations Human Development Report provided 1994 data on intentional homicides from all over the world. Estonia's position was the seventh worst, with the country surpassing even Russia by two places, and the homicide rate was higher only in third world countries such as São Tomé and Príncipe, the Bahamas, Colombia, Lesotho, Guatemala, and Jamaica (UNDP, 1999).

The general socio-economic situation in Estonia at that time was difficult. The state's opportunities to improve people's livelihoods were very limited because, in the first half of the 1990s, Estonia's gross domestic product (GDP) decreased, while at the same time, the average life expectancy of people was at a low point. Life expectancy at birth in Estonia was 60.5 for men and 72.8 for women in 1994 (Statistics Estonia). The number of suicides, alcohol poisoning incidents, traffic deaths, and other violent deaths was also at its peak (Ahven, 2000). The high level of violence in this period, in addition to the rapid increase in intentional homicides, was also evident in the suicides committed in Estonia, the

number of which began to increase in the early 1990s and peaked in 1994 when more than 40 suicides were committed in Estonia per 100,000 inhabitants (Värnik et al., 2021).

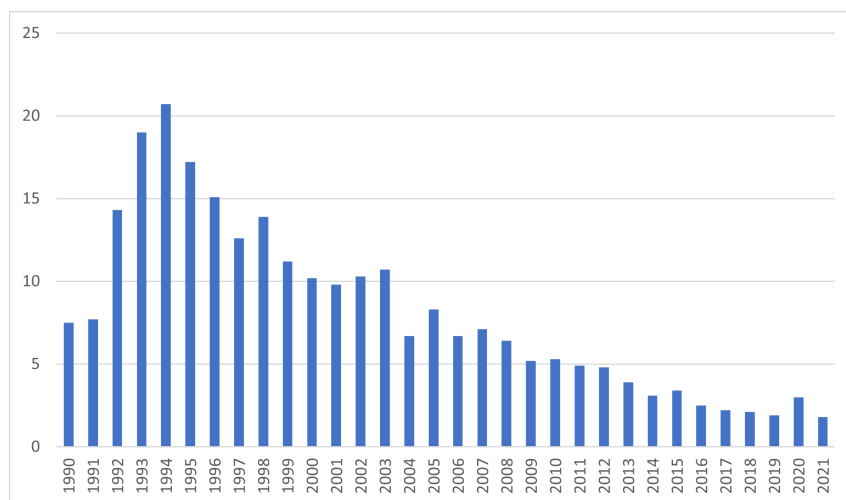
The peak of homicide victims among men aged 20–49 in the 1990s was partly associated with crimes committed in the criminal milieu (Salla et al., 2012) as one result of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the growth of social insecurity (Lappi-Seppälä, Lehti, 2014; Stamatel, 2012). The conditions at that time in Estonia were favourable for the rapid growth of various types of illegal behaviour, too, including the increasing activity of organised criminal groups. This kind of connection between the changes in the country's political and socio-economic conditions and crime has been repeatedly presented in international scientific literature (Kim, Pridemore, 2005; Messner, Rosenfeld, 1997).

In the first period after the restoration of independence, i.e. until the mid-1990s, Estonian society rapidly became more and more open, and the previous social order disappeared. Political, legal, and economic reforms, including the radical restructuring of the criminal justice system, were carried out at a rapid pace, which left a large part of the population facing serious difficulties. The cardinal loss of control led to a phase of social disorganisation when previous control mechanisms were no longer effective but new control mechanisms had not yet begun to function effectively. The creation of a new criminal justice system in Estonia required a radical overhaul and often the liquidation of the previous crime control institutions (Saar, 1999). Public order deteriorated, and crime, including organised crime and corruption, became increasingly apparent.

At this point, it is interesting to note that together with the peak of violent crime, the total number of registered crimes in Estonia decreased in the period 1992–1994 (Saar et al., 2002). Indeed, the simultaneous increase in the number of serious, violent crimes and the decrease in the number of recorded crimes points to the reduced capacity of law enforcement services to capture and prosecute relatively minor crimes. Figuratively speaking, when the house is burning with an open flame, no one has time to deal with cleaning around the house and decorating the home because all the energy goes to putting out the fire in the house.

However, after reaching the maximum level, we then see a continuous and smooth decrease in the frequency of intentional homicides, which has lasted until today. The dangerous period of instability in Estonia was overcome by the mid-1990s; thereafter, the indicators of social stability began to grow smoothly. Since then, the level of homicides and other forms of social pathology has steadily declined. The level of suicides in Estonia has also decreased significantly from its peak in 1994. In 2019, there were registered a little more than 12 cases of suicides per 100,000 inhabitants (WHO, 2019).

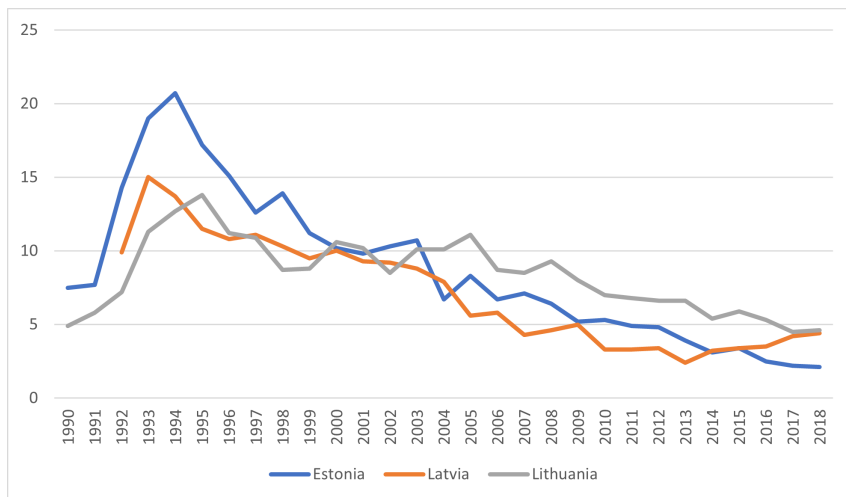
From the peak in 1994, a continuous decrease in intentional homicides in Estonia began. In 2022, 27 intentional homicide cases were registered in Estonia, at a rate of 2.0 per 100,000 inhabitants (Ministry of Justice, Crime Statistics Estonia, 2023). This trend therefore has continued for almost three decades now.



**Figure 3.** Homicide rate (victims of intentional homicides per 100,000 inhabitants) in Estonia 1990–2021. Data for 1990–2018 (UNODC, UN-CTS), data for 2019–2021 (Statistics Estonia Database)

As mentioned, the exceptionally high level and rapid growth of Estonian homicides in the 1990s was noticed at the international level. This phenomenon has been studied repeatedly and the corresponding conceptual interpretations have been proposed as explanations (Lehti, 2001; Ceccato, Haining, 2008). The fact that the number of homicides has decreased in Estonia for nearly thirty years has not received adequate attention in scientific literature. Even in the most recent international approaches, this empirical fact has remained largely unnoticed. For example, a study looked at the reduced level of homicides in Estonia in the context of the general decrease in violent deaths in Europe and highlighted only the change in homicides in Estonia: a decrease in the proportion of homicides related to the criminal milieu and an increase in the proportion of domestic homicides (related to alcohol consumption) (Suonpää et al., 2022). Since the significant decrease in intentional homicides in Estonia has remained relatively unnoticed by experts, the question of explaining this phenomenon has not been raised.

The situation regarding violent crime in two other Baltic countries – Lithuania and Latvia – has been similar to Estonia. The initial level of homicides in Lithuania in the early 1990s was approximately one-third



**Figure 4.** Homicide rate (victims of intentional homicides per 100,000 inhabitants) in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania 1990–2018

lower than the initial level of homicides in Estonia (4.9 vs. 7.5). Like Estonia, homicide rates in Lithuania began to grow rapidly and reached their peak (13.8) in 1995, i.e. a year later than the peak in Estonia. Here, it is worth noting that the growth of homicides in Lithuania by the mid-1990s was not as sharp as in Estonia, and the peak in Lithuania remained significantly lower than Estonia's (20.7).

From then on, the homicides in Lithuania began to decrease, as in Estonia; however, the decrease was not as obvious as in Estonia but alternated with years of stability. The level of homicides in Estonia remained higher than the indicators of Lithuania until 2002–2003, then the levels were essentially equal (in the years 2005–2006). Since then, the level of homicides committed in Estonia has been lower than in Lithuania. The dynamics of homicides in Lithuania are also described by the j curve; although it is in a somewhat lower position, the increase was not as sharp as in Estonia, and the further decrease has not been as consistent as in Estonia.

The level and dynamics of homicides in Latvia are like both Estonia and Lithuania. The maximum level of homicides in Latvia occurred in 1993 (15.0), i.e. a year earlier than in Estonia and two years earlier than in Lithuania. The maximum levels of homicides in Latvia were higher than in Lithuania but remained lower than in Estonia. The level of homicides in Latvia decreased until 2013. Since then, there has been a moderate increase in the level of homicides. The general dynamics are also in the form of a j curve for Latvia, although the decline of the curve is even flatter than for Lithuania.

### **3. PROCESS OF INTEGRATION OF THE BALTIC STATES INTO THE WESTERN WORLD**

It can be stated that the level and dynamics of homicides in all three Baltic states are basically the same, as is the general pattern of development of these countries in the 20th century. All of them gained independence for the first time after the First World War and functioned as small independent states in the years the 1920s and 1930s and lost their

independence at the outbreak of the Second World War. Their fortunes after the collapse of the USSR also followed the same path.

All three Baltic states regained their independence essentially at the same time, joined the organisational structures of the Western world at the same time, and faced the same socio-economic and political problems. Estonia and the other Baltic countries quickly, after regaining independence, became members of a great variety of international economic, financial, and political organisations. All three Baltic countries were admitted to the UN immediately in 1991. Estonia joined the European Council in 1993, Lithuania became a member of this organisation the same year (1993), and the adoption of Latvia was postponed for two years (1995) due to concerns about the Russian-speaking minority there. Estonia and Latvia became members of the World Trade Organization in the same year (1999), and Lithuania followed in 2001.

Although the IMF and the World Bank recommended that all Baltic states remain in the rouble zone, the Estonian government made a bold decision and introduced its own currency as early as June 1992 – the Estonian kroon. Unlike Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania temporarily adopted a parallel monetary unit alongside the rouble (Rubelis in Latvia and Talonas in Lithuania) before switching to their own currency in 1993. After some time, all three national currencies were pegged to the euro.

Due to the rapidly implemented economic reforms, Estonia was the only one among the Baltic states invited to start accession talks with the European Union in 1997. Although this kind of differentiation raised some doubts about the sustainability of Baltic solidarity, Estonia's example encouraged Latvia and Lithuania, with whom accession talks began two years later. In the end, all the Baltic countries were so-called diligent students and deservedly became members of the European Union on 1 May 2004 (Kasekamp, 2010, pp. 236-240).

In parallel with the integration into the European Union, the Baltic states also started the process of joining NATO. The Baltic countries were included in NATO's new Partnership for Peace programme in 1994. In addition to implementing the necessary military reforms, the Baltic countries had to put a lot of effort into disproving the misconception

introduced by Russia that the former external borders of the USSR represented a 'red line' that NATO must not cross (Asmus, 2002, pp. 252-255). The Baltic countries became NATO members on 29 March 2004.

Today, the integration of the Baltic countries into economic and social life as the security structures of the Western world is so diverse and wide-ranging that highlighting one area would undeservedly overshadow others. At the same time, some minor differences between the three countries in terms of socio-economic indicators can still be highlighted, where, according to the general pattern, Estonia's development has been somewhat faster. For example, evaluated based on the Human Development Index in 2021, Estonia was in 31st position (score 0.890), Lithuania in 35th position (score 0.875), and Latvia in 39th position (score 0.863) (UNDP, 2022). According to the 2022 data from the International Monetary Fund, the gross domestic product per inhabitant was USD 29,344 in Estonia, USD 24,032 in Lithuania, and USD 21,482 in Latvia. According to the data of the World Bank in 2021, the GDP per capita in Estonia was USD 27,944, in Lithuania, USD 23,723, and in Latvia, USD 21,148 (World Bank, 2021).

According to the corruption perception index, Estonia ranked 13th in 2021 (score 74), Lithuania 34th (score 61), and Latvia 36th (score 59) (Transparency International, 2021). Studies by the European Council on Foreign Relations rate Estonia's influence in the EU higher than that of Latvia or Lithuania; at the same time, they lag behind Nordic countries (Busse et al., 2020). Although Estonia's indicators have improved somewhat faster than those of the other two Baltic countries, the general picture of the socio-economic development of the three Baltic states remains unchanged.

The conceptual question is whether the decrease in the level of homicides in the Baltic states is a manifestation of a general civilizing process that has led to a decrease in violence and an increase in the value of human life on a global scale. The deepening opposition to violence and the fundamental denial of violence as a means of achieving goals is one of the 'landmarks' of human development that has taken place. According to several authors, the decrease in the level of intentional homicides also characterises the process of civilization globally (e.g. Elias, 2000; Pinker, 2011). Logically, this kind of process is ongoing at different speeds in



different parts of the world. The rapid rise in the standard of living and the emergence of welfare states are associated, among other things, with the “three famous decades of the Western World – 1945-1975” (Fourastie, 1979). The centuries-long civilization process includes more and more countries alongside the core countries of the Western world.

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, all countries that were previously forced to be part of the totalitarian empire went their own way. Many of them tried to move from a region where, according to Englehart (2018), “survival issues are dealt with” to one where “survival is self-evident, and self-realisation is at the fore”. Perhaps due to the relatively small size, for some historical<sup>1</sup> and cultural reasons, and due to the geopolitical location of the Baltic states, these processes have been faster and more noticeable here. Today, it can be stated that the processes have not been the same in all former parts of the Soviet Union, and it is not wrong to say that the Baltic states are exceptional among the former Soviet republics.

The direct opposite example to the Baltics is Russia’s path, where, at the end of the decade of transformation (1990s), Vladimir Putin became the leader of a big country with no effective economic or military power. His famous comment in 2005 calling the end of the Soviet Union the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century (NBC News, 2005) is indicative of the huge gulf in understanding between Russia and the West. He set the goal of restoring in Russia not only economic and military potential but also status and international respect as a superpower using the centralisation of power and resources as a method. However, the real democratisation of society and the growth of people’s freedoms did not take place in Russia. On the contrary, it was during this period that the systematic strengthening of Putin’s power vertically took place when the power authorities established increasingly strict control over the population.

To assess the developments in crime in Russia, let’s look at the level of intentional homicides in the country. The dynamics of intentional homicides in the Russian Federation have differed from that of the Baltic countries. Homicide rates continued to rise from the early 1990s to the late 1990s and were exceptionally high over a longer period compared to

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<sup>1</sup> The Baltic states had an earlier experience of independent statehood in the 20th century.

the Baltic states. According to research conducted by UNO, this trend in homicidal violence in the Russian Federation has been attributed to various drivers, including changes in alcohol consumption patterns, the availability of firearms, and the socio-economic upheaval resulting from the country's transition from a communist to a capitalist society (UNODC, 2019). Furthermore, since 2002, the number of victims of intentional homicides has decreased from 30.5 to 8.2 cases per 100,000 inhabitants in 2018 in Russia (UNODC, 2023).

As we can see today, such an approach on Moscow's part was not effective in overcoming the difficulties in the long term, and Russia's socio-economic development is taking a deep step back. In other words, this country gradually returned to an overcontrolled society, which in this case is represented by a "criminal state, kleptocratic authoritarianism" (Dawisha, 2015, pp. 313-350), where, like the *'pax mafiosa'*, a relatively low level of violence could be observed for a while. Here, it is noteworthy that since 2018, Russia has no longer forwarded data on intentional homicides to the UNO. However, the large-scale military action against Ukraine since February 2022 has brought Russia onto the list of socially unstable countries where homicide statistics in their peacetime sense have lost their usual meaning.

It must not be forgotten that intentional homicide as an indicator of social development is only applicable in a stable state of society, and in the event of war or other total social cataclysms, this indicator loses its usual meaning. The intentional taking of life in such situations does or does not belong to intentional homicides because its classification depends on many contextual circumstances that must be considered. For example, mass killings committed by groups of up to a few hundred members during armed conflicts do not fall under the definition of intentional homicides (UNODC, 2015).

In summary, it can be said that the path chosen by the Baltic states after the collapse of the Soviet Union was a fully justified decision. All-round integration with all kinds of institutions of the Western world ensured a maximally quick transition from the previous totalitarian society to a liberal-democratic market economy. In addition, the effective work of the police and other law enforcement agencies in controlling crime, especially organised crime, must be mentioned. The central question of

crime prevention and criminal justice policy has also been resolved as well as how quickly the principles, strategies, and practices of crime control used in the Western world will take root, become normal, and prove effective in the Baltic states.

#### **4. HOMICIDES COMMITTED IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES AND THE J CURVE**

Next, we look at the situation in the Nordic countries in terms of intentional homicides. The fact that the Nordic countries are so-called welfare states is evident in the levels and dynamics of violent crime too. The homicide rate there is exceptionally low, so all, even relatively small, changes in absolute numbers lead to fluctuations in the homicide rate. This is how the rapid growth of Norway in 2011, which was directly related to the mass murder committed by Anders Breivik (Leonard et al., 2014), became noticeable in statistics.

The Nordic countries are characterised by a persistently low homicide rate, averaging about 1.0 case per 100,000 inhabitants (Lehti et al., 2019). Finland's homicide rate was more than 3 cases per 100,000 inhabitants in the early 1990s – more than three times higher than the other two Nordic countries (Lappi-Seppälä, 2001). Since then, Finland's homicide rate has steadily decreased and is approaching that of the other Nordic countries, amounting to 1.6 cases per 100,000 inhabitants in 2019. In general, however, we can say with certainty that there is no dynamic of violent crime like the Baltic countries, and we cannot find anything resembling a j curve when evaluating the homicides of the three Nordic countries.

Norway, Sweden, and Finland did not go through dramatic changes comparable to those of Estonia and the other Baltic states in the early 1990s. These three countries permanently belong to the top of the world as democratic welfare states, where socio-economic livelihood significantly surpasses that of other countries. For example, based on the Human Development Index in 2021, Norway ranked 2nd (score 0.961), Sweden 7th (score 0.947), and Finland 11th (score 0.940) (UNDP, 2022). According to the 2023 data from the International Monetary Fund,

the GDP per capita in US dollars is USD 101,103 in Norway (3rd), USD 55,395 in Sweden (14th), and USD 54,351 in Finland (15th) (International Monetary Fund, 2022). Based on the Corruption Perception Index, Finland's position was 2–3 (score 87), Norway's 4 (84), and Sweden's 5–6 (score 83) (Transparency International, 2022).

The entire 20th century passed quite differently in the three Nordic countries than in the Baltic countries. In Norway, the personal union with Sweden was abolished after a referendum in 1905, resulting in Norway becoming an independent state. In the First World War, Norway remained neutral, but in the Second World War, Germany occupied Norway despite declaration of neutrality. Norway has been a member of NATO since 1949 but voted against joining the European Union in 1994. Norway's prosperity is ensured by the development of the oil industry, which began in the 1970s.

Finland's separation from Russia and its gaining national independence took place in 1918, as with the Baltic states. Finland, like the Baltic states, came under pressure from the Stalinist Soviet Union, but despite Finland's military defeat in World War II, country's national independence was preserved. Throughout the post-war period until the collapse of the Soviet Union, Finland was formally neutral but had to consider the prescriptions of its aggressive neighbour to a very important extent. As a result of a wise and flexible policy, Finland succeeded in integrating into the Nordic community and creating a very capable economic environment. Finland joined the European Union in 1995.

The neutrality chosen by Sweden as early as after the Great Northern War (1700–1721) essentially allowed this country to stay out of the cataclysms of the two world wars that took place in the 20th century. After World War Two, Sweden was able to fully focus on building a welfare society. Like Finland, Sweden joined the European Union in 1995. The Russian-Ukrainian war that started on 24 February 2022 significantly changed the security prospects of the Nordic countries. On 18 May 2022, Sweden and Finland submitted applications to join NATO, which meant the end of the neutral status of both countries. Finland joined NATO in 2023 and Sweden in 2024.

The curve characterising homicides in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, where a rapid increase in the level of homicides was followed by a continuous decrease in the level of homicides, which essentially continues to this day, is unique compared to the Nordic countries and led to a new situation by the beginning of the 2020s. As a result of such development, by 2019, the level of homicides in the Baltic states and the Nordic countries had essentially equalised, which shows the depth and speed of the positive changes that have taken place in the Baltic countries. These states reaching the consistently low levels of the Nordic countries in terms of homicides is no longer a utopia or wishful thinking and may become a reality within the next decade.

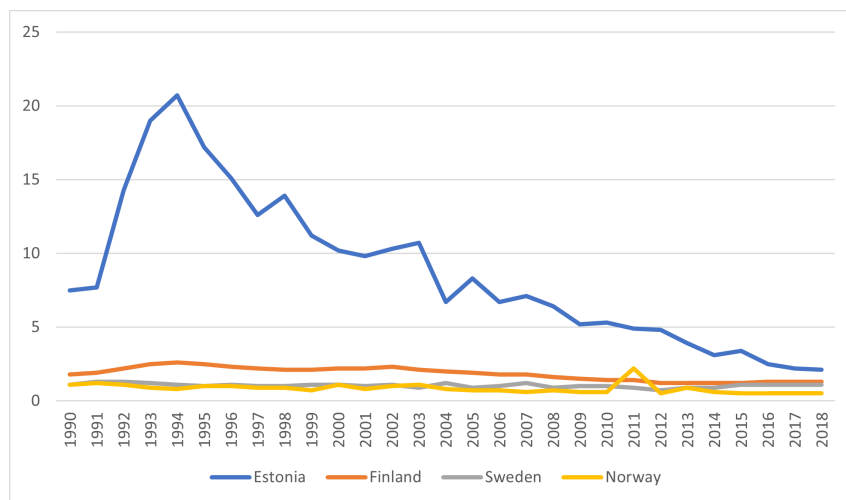
It should be added that in one of the Nordic countries (Sweden), the situation regarding intentional homicides has worsened in the last fifteen years or so. Sweden was traditionally considered among the European countries with exceptionally low levels of homicide. Since the beginning of the 21st century, however, the homicide rate has increased in Sweden and is now higher than that of many other countries. In 2022, a total of 116 cases of lethal violence were registered there, which equals a homicide rate of 1.2 per 100,000 inhabitants. Since 2010, the use of firearms to commit intentional homicide has increased fourfold in Sweden (from 15 cases in 2010 to 63 cases in 2022). In Sweden, the number of firearm homicides doubled between 2000 and 2019 (UNODC, 2023).

Patterns of gun violence exhibit strong near-repeating patterns in Sweden, with a fourfold increase in the risk of a shooting nearby after an initial shooting (Gerell et al., 2021). Significant patterns were found for all three major cities in Sweden (Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö) (Sturup et al., 2018). The near-repeating patterns are due to conflicts within or between criminal networks, which results in increasing intensity of gun violence as conflicts flare up. Gun violence has also been spatial-temporally linked to hand grenade attacks, with each detonated hand grenade in an area being associated with 1.7 more shooting incidents (Sturup, Gerell & Rostami, 2020).

Sweden has experienced unprecedented levels of gang violence in recent years. This increase in the number of firearm and bomb homicides is related to criminal milieux in socially disadvantaged areas in the country. The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention reported that

Sweden had one of the highest levels of firearms-related deaths in a study of over 20 European countries (Selin, 2021). Violence taking place in Swedish cities in recent years is related to the settling of scores among criminal gangs of foreign origin (Ganpat et al., 2011; Gerell et al., 2021). In Sweden, there are areas in big cities where immigrants make up most of the residents. Gangs battle there over drug-trafficking territories and settle their disputes with guns and bombs. By now, however, the violence has moved out of the suburbs and into the heart of the city (Helsinki Times, 2022).

If these problems are not dealt with, we might soon be talking about a certain process of disorganisation in some regions, or even schismogenesis (Bateson, 2000). Of course, these hypotheses need to be checked more precisely in the future, but the new democracies in the form of the Baltic states should be particularly attentive to such phenomena, so as not to face the same difficulties in the future by uncritically copying the experience of other countries.



**Figure 5.** Homicide rate (victims of intentional homicides per 100,000 inhabitants) in Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Estonia 1990–2018

## CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the crime situation in the Baltic states before and after the political breakthrough shows very fast and sudden changes. Since the restoration of independence in 1991, the level of intentional homicides in the Baltic states has undergone a definite, empirically detectable increase. The first period, which culminated in 1994, placed for example Estonia in the same company as Russia and third world countries where the value of human life tends to be evaluated as lower than is generally accepted in the Western world. This situation was evidently caused by the coincidence of several factors, the most crucial of which are highlighted below.

Immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in the Baltic countries, the process characterised as the formation of new societies began. This meant the total disorganisation of the former society concerning all spheres of life, bringing along the cessation of many well-established values and norms of the past. Societies growing out of an overcontrolled totalitarian system will inevitably collide with human activity both positively and negatively. During such periods, social pathology, especially violence in people's conduct, appears more frequently.

The first stage of development in the Baltic states can be described as the first phase of capital accumulation. This means the highly unequal distribution of material wealth among the population, i.e. the rapid enrichment of some and life on the verge of poverty for others. There is a clear and well-established link between homicide rates and income inequality. This situation could not have been foreseen by people who used to live under conditions of shared poverty during the Soviet period. As the experience of the Baltic states shows, inequality can be overcome only through the better distribution of profits by the state when a certain level of development has been reached.

The former criminal justice systems collapsed, impairing the crime control function of the state. The establishment of the new enforcement institutions of the state was met with difficulties, wrestling in market competition with the private sector offering security services. At the same time, a rapid increase in the activity of organised criminal groups in all Baltic countries was observed, with many of them arriving from other former

Soviet Union republics. The ineffective functioning of law enforcement institutions increased the sense of impunity on the one hand and the pessimism of the law-abiding population on the other.

The drastic and long-lasting decrease in the level of intentional homicides that has taken place in the Baltic states since the mid-nineties reflects a more general civilizational comeback to their 'right place'. The content of this process is the positioning of the Baltic states beside the Western countries. The dynamics of the level of homicides are good evidence of how fundamental the change was from a closed to an open society (Popper, 1995), which has taken place in the Baltic states since the restoration of independence.

On the one hand, we consider this as a good empirical confirmation of the general theory of civilization and the process of pacification when people had to increasingly control their aggressions and instincts (Elias, 2000; Pinker, 2011); on the other hand, we cannot neglect yet another aspect. The Baltic states are grudging regions situated between civilizations where, according to Huntington, Western Christianity ends, and (Russian) Orthodox Christianity begins (Huntington, 1996, pp. 158-163). In the last thirty years, the Baltic states have had to deal with a phenomenon that Huntington described as a clash of civilizations.

More than half a century of occupation and annexation damaged their socio-economic environment and distorted human development but did not force them onto alternative paths of development. As soon as there was an opportunity to bring life back to normal, it was done. Since the restoration of independence, to ensure their legal system and public order, the Baltic states have relied on the model of the rule of law, which characterises the Western European and Nordic countries, and have consistently moved away from the authoritarian governance model. Encouraging the market economy and people's entrepreneurship led to rapid economic progress, which has made it possible to consistently reduce people's economic inequality and increase the GDP in the Baltic countries. This is why the respective indicators of the Baltic and Nordic countries have become increasingly similar during the last 30-year period.



In conclusion, we can state that intentional homicides are indeed a type of crime that deserves special attention for at least three reasons. First, the criminal justice systems of countries have a direct duty to deal primarily with the prevention and detection of serious crimes against the person, among which controlling homicide is the most important task. Second, the level and dynamics of intentional homicides are an adequate indicator of both public safety and the capacity of law enforcement agencies. Third, the use of the level of intentional homicides as an indicator of the general social situation is a valuable and adequate tool.

**Contacts:**

**Jüri Saar, PhD**

E-mail: [jyri.saar@sisekaitse.ee](mailto:jyri.saar@sisekaitse.ee)

Estonian Academy of Security Sciences

**Appendix 1.** Victims of intentional homicides in Finland, Sweden, Norway, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia per 100,000 inhabitants 1990–2018 (UNDP, UN-CTS), 2019–2021 (Eurostat, crude death rate)

YEAR	FINLAND	SWEDEN	NORWAY	LATVIA	LITHUANIA	ESTONIA
1990	1.8	1.1	1.1	na	4.9	7.5
1991	1.9	1.3	1.2	na	5.8	7.7
1992	2.2	1.3	1.1	9.9	7.2	14.3
1993	2.5	1.2	0.9	15	11.3	19
1994	2.6	1.1	0.8	13.7	12.7	20.7
1995	2.5	1	1	11.5	13.8	17.2
1996	2.3	1.1	1	10.8	11.2	15.1
1997	2.2	1	0.9	11.1	10.9	12.6
1998	2.1	1	0.9	10.3	8.7	13.9
1999	2.1	1.1	0.7	9.5	8.8	11.2
2000	2.2	1.1	1.1	10	10.6	10.2
2001	2.2	1	0.8	9.3	10.2	9.8
2002	2.3	1.1	1	9.2	8.5	10.3
2003	2.1	0.9	1.1	8.8	10.1	10.7
2004	2	1.2	0.8	7.9	10.1	6.7
2005	1.9	0.9	0.7	5.6	11.1	8.3
2006	1.8	1	0.7	5.8	8.7	6.7
2007	1.8	1.2	0.6	4.3	8.5	7.1
2008	1.6	0.9	0.7	4.6	9.3	6.4
2009	1.5	1	0.6	5	8	5.2
2010	1.4	1	0.6	3.3	7	5.3
2011	1.4	0.9	2.2	3.3	6.8	4.9
2012	1.2	0.7	0.5	3.4	6.6	4.8
2013	1.2	0.9	0.9	2.4	6.6	3.9
2014	1.2	0.9	0.6	3.2	5.4	3.1
2015	1.2	1.1	0.5	3.4	5.9	3.4
2016	1.3	1.1	0.5	3.5	5.3	2.5
2017	1.3	1.1	0.5	4.2	4.5	2.2
2018	1.3	1.1	0.5	4.4	4.6	2.1
2019	1.1	1.0	0.5	3.3	2.2	2.0
2020	1.3	1.3	0.6	3.5	2.5	3.2
2021	1.2	0.9	0.5	3.2	2.7	1.9

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