Against the rising tide: an overview of the growing criminalisation of the Mediterranean region

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New challenges are reshaping the international order, requiring government leaders to consider new strategies and tools that integrate diplomatic, economic and military instruments of power. Nowhere is this more evident than around the Mediterranean Sea, which has progressively returned as a region of global strategic interest where political tensions, armed conflict, economic and social instability and transnational criminal networks demand solutions that cross traditional institutional boundaries of domestic and international policymaking.

The geo-political situation on the southern coast of the Mediterranean has radically changed, and new challenges have emerged for the European Union, United States, and beyond. Long-lasting issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or the tensions between Turkey and Greece, continue to be present, but new destabilising factors have emerged in the region following the Arab Spring of 2011.

The US, EU and NATO continue to maintain a significant military presence in and around the Mediterranean, but military capabilities must be nested within a whole-of-government, international approach. The challenges in this region demand unprecedented levels of civil-military and intergovernmental cooperation.

In this context, RAND established the Mediterranean Foresight Forum (MFF) in 2015 to support the development of comprehensive, integrated civil-military responses to complex regional challenges through an innovative combination of research, scenario-based sensitivity analysis and strategic-level exercises.

This publication is part of a series of four RAND Perspectives (PE) each focusing on different challenges in the Mediterranean region. Other PE cover the issues of Foreign Policy and Diplomacy, Defence and Security and Cross-cutting issues.

**Key observations**

- Criminal groups take advantage of weak governments, endemic corruption, vast porous borders, poor security conditions, and of the paucity of regional and cross-national coordination in the fight against the phenomena of trafficking and smuggling.
- The main challenge in addressing the situation is finding the balance between short-term interventions (focusing on repression and deterrence), and long-term strategies (focusing on curbing the socio-economic push factors as well as economic benefit pull factors) to disrupt criminal behaviours and activities across the region.
- Of particular concern is the development of links between criminal and terrorist actors in the Mediterranean region. This can occur where terrorist groups become involved in criminality as a means of generating funding and/or exploit criminal networks and commit criminal offences in pursuit of their objectives.
Introduction
The Mediterranean Basin is home to a wide array of criminal networks and organisations that run well-established trafficking and smuggling operations throughout the region. These groups take advantage of weak governments, endemic corruption, vast porous borders, poor security conditions, and of the paucity of regional and cross-national coordination in the fight against trafficking and smuggling phenomena (Browne, 2013).

The literature reviewed suggests that there is often a significant degree of overlap and intersection between routes, actors and implications emerging from different types of smuggling and trafficking activities. Such activities come together in an illicit economy, underpinned by four interconnected markets, namely those of smuggling in weapons, human beings, drugs, and other commodities. Shaw and Mangan (2014) suggest that different types of trafficking and smuggling activities come to be organised in intersected, hierarchical ways. However, to obtain a clear understanding of how different trafficking activities interact among one other, a thorough analysis of commodity-level activities first needs to be undertaken.

In light of the above, this RAND Perspective will present an overview of transnational criminal activities in the Mediterranean region, focusing in particular on three types of trafficking that are considered to mostly linked with regional stability: (i) human smuggling and trafficking; (ii) arms trafficking; and (iii) drugs trafficking. The discussion of these will be clustered around four of their key components and dimensions, namely: (i) routes; (ii) actors and groups involved; (iii) socio-economic impact and security implications of criminal activities; (iv) policy challenges and responses.

Routes, flows and commodities
Smuggling and trafficking of different commodities and irregular migration flows follow many of the same routes and use many of the same spaces in the Mediterranean and in countries in its basin, although at times these flows may move in different directions. Routes cross the region from south to north and from west to east, across the Sahara and the Mediterranean, connecting countries on different shores by building on traditional commercial and caravan routes that have been in use for centuries (Browne, 2013; Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2015; Shaw & Mangan, 2014). The following sections present the trafficking and smuggling routes crossing the Mediterranean, clustering them according to the type of product or commodity involved. For each type of commodity analysed, maps will also be provided throughout the next pages to aid the reader in identifying the various routes and flows discussed in the text.
Human smuggling and trafficking activities across the Mediterranean are profoundly intertwined with migrants’ and refugees’ flows across the region, and with the routes these flows follow. According to Europol (2016), more than 90 per cent of irregular flows of humans trying to access the EU from Southern and South-Eastern Mediterranean countries are facilitated, mostly by criminal networks and enterprises (Europol, 2016). Human smuggling and trafficking activities remain in fact very attractive crimes due to their low risk of detection and to the large profits they grant. Although there is only limited data available on criminal proceeds, it is estimated that, in 2015 alone, the criminal turnover connected to human smuggling and trafficking activities oscillated between EUR 3 and 6 billion (Europol, 2016).

Overall, more than 90 per cent of irregular crossings into the EU are linked to a limited set of third countries, which represent origin and/or transit points, namely: Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Western Balkan countries, Libya, Turkey, Morocco, and the countries of the Horn of Africa and West Africa (Frontex, 2016b). The literature reviewed suggests that human smuggling and trafficking operations occur mostly through three routes, linking countries on the Southern and South-Eastern shores of the Mediterranean to countries in the Northern shore and in the EU and Schengen area more broadly. The routes are known as the Western, Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes (Frontex, 2015a–d; Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2015). Figures 1 and 2 below provide an overview of how these routes move across the Mediterranean Basin and of the source-countries from which flows of migrants and refugees using them predominantly originate.

The Western Mediterranean route

The Western Mediterranean is home to established human smuggling and trafficking routes, although the volume of flows transiting through this area is reportedly slimmer than that of the Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes. Morocco is the primary departure point in this route that is favoured by economic migrants hailing predominantly from Morocco and Algeria. Smuggling routes here take advantage of sea routes leaving from the area of Tangiers through the Strait of Gibraltar or of overland crossings through the triple-fence system around the Spanish exclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. Algeria is also considered a point of departure in the Western Mediterranean route. Although flows originating from there are reportedly infrequent, smugglers are nonetheless known to operate boats departing from the areas around Ghazaouet and Oran and moving towards the coasts of Almeria in Spain (Frontex, 2015a & 2015d; Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2015).

The Central Mediterranean route

The Central Mediterranean route comprises a network of well-established routes that smugglers employ to facilitate the transit of individuals, coming from as far as West, Central, and Eastern Africa, to European countries of the Mediterranean, Italy and Malta.
in particular. In this web of routes, Libya represents the central smuggling hub (Frontex, 2016d).\textsuperscript{2} Despite the crackdown imposed in Libyan coastal cities on human smuggling activities during the last years of the Gaddafi regime, human smuggling and trafficking flows resumed and intensified quickly after the end of the 2011 civil war. As a result, Libya is once again used as a key transit route for individuals intending to reach Europe from West Africa, the Sahel, Eritrea, Sudan and the Horn of Africa (Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2015; Frontex, 2015a-2015d; Shaw & Mangan, 2014).

A number of sub-routes crossing Libya are used by smugglers to facilitate the movement of people originating from different regions. Migrants from Niger, The Gambia, Senegal, Mali, and other West African states reportedly start their journey by reaching Agadez in Niger, thanks to cheap bus companies operating large networks across the Sahel and West Africa regions. From there, smuggling networks operating in Libya move people along routes in the south-western and western parts of the country. These routes pass close to the Salvador Triangle and connect Madama in Niger to Al-Qatrun, Murzuq and Sabha in the Fezzan region of Libya. From there, migrants are then moved towards the north-western coastal cities of Zuwarah, Sabratah and Zawiya before being smuggled towards Italy or Malta on small boats. As for migrants originating from Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, Chad, Ghana, Nigeria and other sub-Saharan countries, smugglers move them mostly along the South-Eastern and Eastern regions of Libya before directing them to departing ports on the North-Western coast. Al-Kufra in the south-east of Libya represents the main transit hub for human smuggling and trafficking activities in this part of the country (Cole, 2012; Lacher, 2014; Shaw & Mangan, 2014; Frontex, 2015e; Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2015).

**Tunisia’s institutions have been able to develop more effective border management capabilities than those of Libya, thanks to EU support in this field.**

Human smuggling and trafficking from Tunisia towards EU countries on the Mediterranean represents less of a concern. Tunisia’s institutions have been able to develop more effective border management capabilities than those of Libya, thanks to EU support in this field. As a result, notwithstanding a peak in departures registered in the immediate aftermath of the Ben Ali regime’s downfall, human smuggling activities along the Central Mediterranean are now concentrated in Libya rather than Tunisia (Frontex, 2015a & 2015d; Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2015).

Within the Central Mediterranean route, Egypt plays a dual role as both a transit country and a country of destination. Syrian refugees, as well as refugees and economic migrants from Sudan, Eritrea and the Horn of Africa, reach Egypt with the intention of continuing their journey onward to Europe. However, due to risks associated with the long travel across the sea from Egypt to Europe, and to Egypt’s border policing efforts and repatriation agreements with EU countries, a significant number of migrants and refugees end up remaining in Egypt indefinitely. Smuggler networks are nonetheless active in the country as shown by the peak in irregular departures from Egyptian shores towards Europe, registered in 2013. This increase was due mainly to the growing presence of Syrian refugees in Egypt interested in moving towards Europe (Frontex, 2015a & 2015d; Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2015).
The Eastern Mediterranean Route
The Eastern Mediterranean route comprises smuggling and trafficking routes intertwined with migrants’ and refugees’ flows originating from as far as Pakistan and then transiting through Turkey towards the European Union’s (EU) external borders in Greece and Bulgaria. In the last few years this route has grown in importance in terms of regional dynamics for human smuggling and trafficking. Individuals smuggled across this route tend also to generate a knock-on effect on the so-called Western Balkan route that crosses Balkan countries and which would otherwise be characterised by mostly intra-Balkan movements of people. Furthermore, according to Frontex, the Eastern Mediterranean route is increasingly used in smuggling migrants and refugees on cargo ships from Turkey to Italy. This modus operandi is gaining traction among smugglers due to its financial profitability. Those who employ it reportedly can make a gross income ranging between EUR 2.5 to 4 million transporting between 200 to 800 migrants in a single trip (Frontex, 2015a–d). In parallel with this, a growing trend sees smugglers and traffickers use lorries and other land vehicles to hide individuals, and transport them irregularly through legitimate border crossings. Although only 3,642 instances of such cases were detected in 2015, this issue represents a growing concern for the road transport industry, also in light of attempts by individuals looking for a mean to cross borders to board lorries and trucks, sometimes aggressively, in bottleneck locations where they are moving slowly. Similar incidents were reported particularly at border crossings between Turkey and Bulgaria and between Serbia and Hungary (Frontex, 2016b).

The majority of individuals transiting through the Eastern Mediterranean route are Syrian, Afghan, Iraqi and Pakistani nationals crossing into Turkey via land. The perception that a more lenient policy was applied at the EU external borders and inside the Schengen area towards Syrian refugees reportedly has encouraged a number of Iraqis to move towards Europe via Turkey during the past two years. This phenomenon was also exacerbated by the economic downturn and widespread insecurity marring Iraq in recent years. In several cases, Iraqi nationals transiting along the Eastern route disguised themselves as Syrians, facilitated by their cultural proximity or through the acquisition of fake Syrian documents. It is worth noting, however, that Central and West African nationals are also increasingly transiting through the Eastern Mediterranean. The relative safety of this route, compared with the Central Mediterranean one, combined with a growing regional presence of Turkish Airlines in Central and West Africa, allows migrants from these regions to gain easier and safer access to the EU external borders. Individuals, in fact, reportedly fly into Turkey and then join existing streams of migrants and refugees being smuggled through the region (Frontex, 2015e; Frontex, 2016b).
Figure 1: Overview of main land and sea routes used by human smugglers and traffickers to facilitate the movement of migrants, refugees and trafficked individuals towards the Mediterranean region

Human Trafficking and Smuggling in the Mediterranean

- More than 90% of irregular flows of humans trying to access the European Union from the Mediterranean are facilitated, mostly by criminal networks
- Human trafficking and smuggling remain very attractive, low-risk, high-profit crimes
- In 2015 alone the criminal turnover for human trafficking and smuggling activities oscillated between EUR 3 and 6 billion
- Human trafficking and smuggling activities in the Mediterranean occur mostly through three routes:

SOURCE: RAND Europe elaboration of Frontex (2015a; 2015e; 2016a; 2016b; 2016c); Gartenstein-Ross et al. (2015); Shaw & Mangan (2014).
The UNHCR recorded 1,015,078 irregular arrivals via sea routes in European countries during 2015. The Eastern Mediterranean route represented the main transit route in 2015. The Central Mediterranean route remained the preferred route for Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa nationals despite widespread violence in Libya. Smaller flows are registered on the Western route, thanks also to co-operation between Moroccan and Spanish authorities.

**Routes:**
- Western Mediterranean route
- Central Mediterranean route
- Eastern Mediterranean route

**SOURCE:** RAND Europe elaboration of Frontex (2015a; 2015e; 2016); Gartenstein-Ross et al. (2015); Shaw & Mangan (2014).
Current challenges on the Northern shore

The burden imposed and pressure applied on European countries by human smuggling and trafficking activities occurring across the routes described above reached unprecedented levels in 2015. Frontex (2016c) described ongoing events as the largest migratory crisis faced by Europe since the Second World War. By way of example, it is worth noting that according to Frontex data, in July 2015 alone more illegal-border crossings on the EU external frontiers were detected than in the whole of 2012 and 2013 combined (Frontex, 2015a). In the first months of 2016, the worsening of weather conditions and the implementation of the EU-Turkey agreement led to a decrease in the overall number of illegal borders crossing. Nonetheless, irregular crossings recorded by Frontex between January and March 2016 represented the highest number ever recorded in any previous first quarter (Frontex, 2016d).

Table 1 and Figure 3 below present data available at the time of writing this Perspective for illegal border-crossings detected and recorded by Frontex between 2014 and 2016. These figures, however, can only provide a rough assessment of the true scale of events that occurred. Estimates by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) suggest that more than 1,006,000 migrants and refugees crossed into Europe in 2015, most of them transiting through countries on the Southern and South-Eastern Mediterranean. This trend is unlikely to be reversed soon. On the contrary, according to Europol (2016) and Frontex (2016b), flows of migrants and refugees across the Mediterranean could register further increases. Furthermore, since March 2016, authorities have observed an increased fragmentation of routes employed by smugglers and traffickers, particularly in the Western Balkan region. The establishment of new hubs, hotspots and routes by facilitators could further complicate the monitoring and detection of flows entering EU countries, as well as the tackling of health and security issues associated with these phenomena (Frontex, 2015d; 2016d; Europol, 2016).

The escalation of irregular migration flows facilitated by human traffickers and smugglers reached its apex along the Eastern Mediterranean route. Notably in 2015, large numbers of migrants and refugees crossed from Turkey into Greece and Bulgaria through the Aegean Sea to then proceed towards their desired final destinations. According to Europol (2016), migrants’ and refugees’ preferred destination countries are Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom. As a result of this, individuals entering the EU area in Greece and Bulgaria continued their journeys over-land, often in groups of 500–1,000 people, generating a knock-on effect on the so-called Western Balkan route (Frontex, 2016c). In this regard, the border between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and that between Bulgaria and Serbia functioned as the primary transit points towards Central and Northern Europe for several individuals coming from Turkey and Greece through the Eastern Mediterranean route. From Macedonia and Serbia, individuals would then continue their journey onward through Croatia and Hungary, and from there on to secondary routes across other countries in the Schengen area (Frontex, 2016c).

In 2015, as a result of this, and in a bid to stem irregular flows of people, various countries in the Western Balkan region, and in South Eastern Europe more broadly, re-established border controls, also with countries signatory to the Schengen Treaty. In other cases, a number of countries even proceeded to build temporary fences and obstacles on a number of border areas with Schengen
### Table 1: Frontex data on detections of illegal border-crossing between border-crossing points between 2014 and 2016

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eastern Mediterranean</strong></td>
<td>8,767</td>
<td>22,359</td>
<td>15,533</td>
<td>14,151</td>
<td>68,178</td>
<td>319,035</td>
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<td>19,798</td>
<td>13,675</td>
<td>12,645</td>
<td>65,996</td>
<td>314,289</td>
<td>480,137</td>
<td>151,490</td>
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<tr>
<td>Land</td>
<td>1,523</td>
<td>2,541</td>
<td>1,858</td>
<td>1,506</td>
<td>2,182</td>
<td>4,746</td>
<td>3,773</td>
<td>2,477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Western Balkan</strong></td>
<td>3,011</td>
<td>9,086</td>
<td>27,920</td>
<td>32,950</td>
<td>34,559</td>
<td>229,746</td>
<td>466,783</td>
<td>108,649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Mediterranean</td>
<td>53,054</td>
<td>75,263</td>
<td>31,291</td>
<td>10,252</td>
<td>60,179</td>
<td>61,745</td>
<td>21,772</td>
<td>18,766</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Mediterranean</td>
<td>1,496</td>
<td>2,880</td>
<td>1,412</td>
<td>985</td>
<td>1,729</td>
<td>1,680</td>
<td>2,610</td>
<td>1,408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sea</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>2,555</td>
<td>1,074</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>1,431</td>
<td>1,547</td>
<td>2,132</td>
<td>1,307</td>
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<tr>
<td>Land</td>
<td>816</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
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SOURCE: Frontex 2015d; 2016d.

### Figure 3: Frontex data on detections of illegal border-crossing between border-crossing points between 2014 and 2016

countries. Nonetheless, countries on the Northern shore of the Mediterranean and in their proximity were the most affected by these events as Italy, Greece, and Hungary recorded 97 per cent of illegal crossings into the EU in 2015.

The growth of flows across the Eastern Mediterranean route in recent months was not mirrored on the Central Mediterranean route. According to numbers provided by Frontex, flows across this route reached their peak in the summer of 2014, but have since somewhat decreased. This was mostly caused by growing instability in Libya, which discouraged migrants and refugees from venturing along a route that is also considered more dangerous from a navigation perspective. Nonetheless, the Central Mediterranean route continues to remain the preferred choice for Sahel and sub-Saharan African nationals, particularly Eritreans, who can easily access Libya via overland routes (Frontex, 2016b).

Flows through the Western Mediterranean route continue to be of comparatively small size as compared with other Mediterranean routes, also due to the close co-operation between Moroccan and Spanish authorities on this matter (Frontex, 2016d). Nonetheless, it was reported that Spanish authorities registered a 30 per cent increase in illegal crossings in the third quarter of 2015 as compared with flows in the same period of 2014, the majority of attempted crossings occurring mostly on the land borders of the Spanish exclaves of Ceuta and Melilila (Frontex, 2015d). This trend was further consolidated during the last quarter of 2015 and the first months of 2016 (Frontex, 2016d).

Box 1: The Trojan horse threat

The increasing flow of migrants and refugees transiting through the Mediterranean region and attempting to enter Europe has raised concerns that terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State, could exploit this as a means to get their operatives and cells into Europe. This tactic was used, for example, to infiltrate some of the terrorists involved in the November 2015 attacks in Paris. These individuals travelled through Turkey into the Greek Aegean Islands, and then onwards into Europe, posing as Syrian refugees and employing counterfeit documents.

Certainly, security measures adopted throughout the EU since those attacks and tighter controls might increase the costs and risks of legal travel to Europe enough to make it less palatable to terrorist groups. However, leading experts and Europol have pointed out that there are much easier ways for terrorist groups to get their active cadres into Europe. This could happen, for example, through the use of forged documents, or through the recruitment of radicalised extremists or individuals vulnerable to radical propaganda that are either European nationals or already living inside the EU.

Nonetheless, 2015 registered an uptake in the number of attacks carried out against migrants and refugees, or against asylum centres facilities, across the EU. Furthermore, an increased number of protests and counter-protests over migrant- and refugee-related issues were staged in a number of EU countries by a wide array of groups, spanning the whole political spectrum, from far-right to left-wing (Euractiv.com (2015); Europol (2016); Frontex (2015d; 2016b)).
Arms trafficking

Unlike human smuggling routes, which span the Mediterranean and link countries on opposing shores, arms trafficking routes are mostly circumscribed within either the Northern or Southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. As evidenced by Figures 4 and 5 below, arms trafficking in the Mediterranean Basin has its epicentre in the North Africa region, particularly in Libya. This phenomenon, however, is also seen as increasingly problematic within the EU, where the smuggling of arms and explosives from Balkan countries has proved to be a significant security threat.

Southern and South-Eastern Mediterranean

North Africa is the epicentre of arms smuggling activities involving not only this region, but also the Levant, the Sahel and parts of West Africa. Starting from the 1990s, conflicts in Algeria, northern Niger and Mali drove the regional demand of weapons up, progressively encouraging traffickers and smugglers across North Africa and the Sahel to join the arms trade and to turn the region into a major arms trafficking hub. Demand for weapons and armaments in unstable areas, such as Libya and a number of countries in the Sahel and West Africa, continues today to incentivise arms trafficking across countries on the Southern and South-Eastern Mediterranean shores (Browne, 2013; Holger, 2015; Lacher, 2012, 2014).

An increase in arms trafficking across countries on the southern bank of the Mediterranean was registered in 2012 as a consequence of the Libyan Civil War and of the growing demand for weapons in northern Mali. The fall of the Gaddafi regime and the collapse of Libyan security services allowed revolutionary brigades, traffickers and criminal groups to freely raid Libyan army depots and subsequently to re-sell surplus supplies obtained onto the regional black market. It is worth noting that following the 2004 lifting of the EU embargo and US sanctions on Libya, arms export licences worth EUR 1.13 billion had been granted to the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya by 2011. Weapons trafficked out of Libya since 2012 have been reported to include a variety of small arms and light weaponry, as well as surface-to-air missiles, RPG launchers, anti-personnel mines, grenades and ammunition stocks (Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2015; ICG, 2013; McQuinn, 2012; SAS, 2012; Shaw & Mangan, 2014).

The bulk of weapons and ammunition trafficked out of Libya since the 2011 revolution have moved from the country’s coastal population centres towards the southwest of the country and towards Egypt. Arms trafficked to the southwest of Libya are then moved through well-established trans-Saharan routes towards regions and non-state groups active in the Sahel (e.g. Mali, Chad, Niger) or to non-state groups operating in Algeria. As for the flow of arms towards Egypt, this originates predominantly in the Eastern cities of Tobruk and Benghazi. From there, arms are transported to Egypt by boat towards Marsa Matruh and surrounding areas before continuing their travel via land or sea towards other regions of Egypt, particularly the Sinai Peninsula, or other areas in the broader Mediterranean region where non-state armed groups have established significant footholds. Such areas include the Gaza Strip and Syria, where innumerable armed groups are now interested in receiving arms supplies (Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2015; SAS, 2014b; Shaw & Mangan, 2014).

Libyan military equipment has also reportedly made its way to Tunisia. While Tunisia remains a peripheral market for arms and weapons, firearms and explosive materials have entered the country
on a regular basis since the fall of Ben Ali. This phenomenon could have potentially serious destabilising effects on the country and the broader region (see Section 3 below). In Tunisia, arms trafficking takes place in the border area with Libya, between the border posts of Dhehiba and Wazen and those of Borj el-Khadra and Ghadames (ICG, 2013; Kartas, 2013; Shaw & Mangan, 2014).

According to the literature reviewed, the increase in arms trafficking registered after 2012 has led to a worrying proliferation across the Mediterranean region not only of firearms, but also of guided light weapons. These are now found in the hands of non-state groups in several countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean. In particular, man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS) and anti-tank guided weapons (ATGWs) are now part of the arsenals of a number of groups in Syria, Libya, Palestine, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Lebanon and across remote areas of the Sahel (Small Arms Survey, 2014a; 2014b; 2015a).

It is worth noting, however, that arms trafficking and arms originating from Libyan army depots are not the sole source of weapons moving across the Southern and South-Eastern Mediterranean. State-sponsored transfer of weapons to non-state groups in the region continues to represent a significant source of armaments and, consequently, instability in the region. Sales of weapons to countries in the region have also continued unabated, despite the widespread instability that followed the Arab Spring (Holton, 2015; SAS, 2014b, 2015a).

**Northern Mediterranean countries**

Although mostly concentrated in North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean, arms and weapons trafficking has come to represent a growing concern within the EU as well. In its 2015 and 2016 Risk Analysis, Frontex (2015a; 2016b) acknowledged the availability of military grade arms on illicit European markets and the growing issue represented by the sale of arms on the so-called dark web. Several of the weapons traded illicitly in Europe were reported to have been illegally traded from Balkan countries, where unregistered civilian possession of arms and weapons is rife. For example, shooters who took part in the November 2015 Paris attacks employed Zastava M-70 assault rifles of Yugoslav production, believed to have been smuggled from one of the former-Yugoslav countries (Deutsche Welle, 2016). In 2012, a UNDP survey found that 800,000 small arms and weapons were in illegal civilian possession in Bosnia and Herzegovina alone (Frontex, 2015a). A 2014 study from the Small Arms Survey (2014c) estimates that between 1,460,000 and 3,860,000 unregistered firearms are in civilian possession across Albania, Bosnia, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia. If we include registered ones, the total number of firearms in civilian possession in these countries jumps to a figure that comprises between 3,630,000 and 6,180,000 firearms (Small Arms Survey, 2014c).

Despite increasing attention being paid to the issue of arms trafficking, several problems still mar progress in tackling this phenomenon. One pressing issue hampering EU policy and decision-making in this area is represented by the lack of harmonised and reliable data mapping out arms trafficking routes and the volume of their flows at the international level. Furthermore, from a northern Mediterranean perspective, a cause of concern is also represented by the lack of deactivation standards and by the ease of converting gas, alarm, signal and pneumatic guns imported legally to the EU into lethal weapons (European Commission, 2015; Frontex, 2015a).
Arms Trafficking in the Mediterranean

- Arms trafficking routes are mostly circumscribed within either the northern or southern shore of the Mediterranean.
- Arms trafficking in the Mediterranean has its epicentre in North Africa in general and Libya in particular.
- Starting from the 1990s, conflict in Algeria and Mali drove the regional demand of weapons up engulfing the North Africa, Sahel and West Africa regions in a web of trafficking routes.
- The 2011 fall of the Qadhafi regime and collapse of Libyan security services allowed for a widespread looting and raiding of national arsenals by non-state groups and organisations.
- The phenomenon of arms trafficking is seen as increasingly problematic within the European Union, especially due to the impact of crimes enabled by trafficked weapons and explosives.

SOURCE: RAND Europe elaboration of Gartenstein-Ross et al. (2015); ICG (2013); Kartas (2013); SAS (2014a; 2014b; 2015a); Shaw & Mangan (2014); UNODC (2013).
Arms Trafficking in the Mediterranean

- Since 2011, non-state groups in the Mediterranean region have gained access to large stocks of small and light weapons, explosives, ammunition stocks, as well as guided light-weapons.
- In Europe, Balkan countries represent the main source of weapons for the black market. Estimates put the number of registered and unregistered weapons in civilian possession between 3,630,000 and 6,180,000 units.

SOURCE: RAND Europe elaboration of Frontex (2016b); Gartenstein-Ross et al. (2015); Kartas (2013); ICG (2013); SAS (2014a; 2014b; 2015a); Shaw & Mangan (2014); UNODC (2013).
Drug trafficking

With regard to drug trafficking in the Mediterranean Basin, literature reviewed suggests that a significant degree of overlap exists between countries that are used as hubs for this activity and those in which human smuggling and trafficking activities occur. However, the web of drug trafficking routes linking the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean is not as clearly mapped as that of human smuggling activities and it is characterised by a higher degree of interconnectedness and complexity. As a result of this, the following section will assess the role played by, and links of, individual countries on the northern and southern shore, rather than trying to cluster trafficking according to clear cut routes. Figures 6 and 7 below provide a graphic overview of routes to aid the reader navigating the different intra-Mediterranean and extra-Mediterranean routes discussed in the following pages.

Southern and South-Eastern Mediterranean

As for human smuggling and trafficking, North African countries and Turkey represent key transit hubs for drugs destined for European Mediterranean countries. These, in turn, play the role of both destination points and transit hubs towards Central and Northern Europe. However, actors involved in these illicit trades only marginally overlap (see Section 3 below) (EMCDDA, 2015; Frontex, 2015a; Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2015).

Across the western and central Mediterranean trafficking routes, drug trafficking and production occurs mostly in Morocco, Libya and Egypt. Unlike in the human smuggling industry, however, the major departure points for drugs destined for Europe are not located in Libya, which acts as a transit hub, but rather in Morocco and Egypt. As for Algeria and Tunisia, according to the literature reviewed, neither country is considered to be a significant transit or production hub for drugs in the Mediterranean, although drug flows entering and crossing these countries do exist (EMCDDA, 2015; Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2015; ICG, 2013; Shaw & Mangan, 2014).

Morocco has long been recognised as the world’s largest producer of cannabis resin and as the main supplier of cannabis resin to European markets, a role it continues to play today despite a slight decline in production registered in recent years. Moroccan cannabis resin is also smuggled to other countries on the southern shores of the Mediterranean, notably Libya and Egypt, both for consumption in internal markets and for further smuggling towards countries in the Arabian Peninsula (EMCDDA, 2015; Frontex, 2015a; Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2015).

The literature reviewed indicates that Libya’s role as a regional hub for drug trafficking is growing as a consequence of the instability and lawlessness marring widespread parts of the country. However, while the trafficking of hashish for internal consumption as well as for further trafficking is a long-established practice, increasing flows of cocaine and heroin entering Libya from Sahel countries are described in the literature as a relatively new and potentially destabilising phenomenon (Shaw & Mangan, 2014).

Hashish trafficking in Libya occurs along two routes. One sees hashish entering the coastal cities of Misrata, Tripoli and Benghazi from Morocco and continuing its journey towards Egypt. The second route sees hashish entering Libya in the south-west of the country from the Sahel and then moving towards Egypt and Libya’s coastal cities for both consumption and further trafficking. As for heroin produced in Asia and cocaine produced in South
America, these drugs are reportedly entering Libya through its south-western region.

Before drugs can reach any Mediterranean country, however, in a number of cases they first need to transit through Sahelian or sub-Saharan countries. To this end, three hubs across West Africa and the Sahel are used as the first entry point for drugs in Africa, particularly for South American cocaine, these are:

1. **Northern hub**, used for sea shipments of drugs into The Gambia, Senegal, Guinea and Guinea Bissau.
2. **Eastern hub**, used for air shipment of drugs into isolated air strips scattered across Mali and Mauritania.
3. **Southern hub**, used for sea shipments of drugs into Ghana, Benin, Togo and Nigeria.

From these hubs, drugs are then moved into Libya, via overland routes, and from there they are either distributed within nascent internal markets for consumption in coastal cities, or moved via sea-shipments towards Egypt and Europe. Libya is also described as a nascent transit hub for methamphetamines produced in West Africa and destined for east and south-east Asian markets (EMCDDA, 2015; Frontex, 2015a; Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2015).

Egypt plays a role similar to that of Libya in regional trafficking routes. Due to its location at the intersection between the Middle East and North Africa, as well as due to the presence of the Suez Canal, Egypt is considered an important trafficking hub for drugs destined for Europe. This includes heroin coming from Afghanistan and the Golden Triangle via sea shipments; Pakistani and Afghan hashish via sea shipments; and South-American cocaine trafficked from West Africa via Libya. Furthermore, Egypt is also considered a small illicit drug producer as both opium and cannabis are grown in the country (EMCDDA, 2015; Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2015).

As for countries in the Eastern Mediterranean region, Turkey represents a major regional trafficking hub and entry point towards northern Mediterranean countries and Europe for several drugs, including herbal cannabis, heroin, cocaine and MDMA. Turkey is considered a major trafficking hub for herbal cannabis. In 2013, despite making significantly fewer seizures than other EU countries, Turkey confiscated a larger volume of herbal cannabis (180 tons) than the rest of EU members states combined. Similarly, Turkey is the main gateway point towards Bulgaria, Romania, Albania and the rest of Europe on the so-called Balkan route, which is used to traffic heroin manufactured in Pakistan or Iran through Afghan opium crops. As a result of this, although direct shipments of heroin to other European countries in the Mediterranean Basin are reportedly gaining traction, data for seizures between 2006 and 2013 indicate that Turkey alone seized more heroin than all EU Member States combined. The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) also indicates that eastern Mediterranean ports in the Aegean Sea, including Turkish ones, are gaining importance as transit hub for cocaine coming from South America (EMCDDA, 2015; Frontex, 2015a).
Drugs Trafficking in the Mediterranean

- Drug trafficking routes in the Mediterranean are not as clearly mapped as those of human trafficking and smuggling
- A significant overlap appears to exist between countries affected by drug trafficking on the one hand and those used for human trafficking and smuggling activities on the other
- North African countries and Turkey play a key role as transit hubs for drugs destined to European countries
- Four transit hubs in West Africa are used for facilitating the shipment of South American cocaine in Europe
- Opium grown in the Helmand province of Afghanistan and refined in Pakistan and Iran is the main source of heroin transiting through Turkey and the Balkan route towards Europe

SOURCE: Adapted from RAND Europe elaboration of EMCDDA (2015); Frontex (2015a; 2016b); Gartenstein-Ross et al. (2015); Shaw & Mangan (2014); UNODC (2013).
Drugs Trafficking in the Mediterranean

- Volume-wise, Spain represents the main drug trafficking hub on the northern shore of the Mediterranean, especially for cocaine coming from South America and cannabis resin produced in Morocco.
- Italy and Greece are the main transit hubs for drugs moved from Egyptian and Turkish ports.
- Morocco and Egypt are the main departing points in North Africa for drugs destined to Europe.
- Libya’s regional role as a key drug hub has increased in recent years due to the widespread lawlessness marring the country.

Figure 7: Main drug trafficking flows and routes originating from and crossing the Mediterranean Basin and its countries.
Northern Mediterranean countries
Although no precise data are available with regard to drugs that transit across Mediterranean routes, data on drug seizures collected by the EMCDDA (2015) presented in this sub-section provide us with an indirect estimate of the volumes and preponderance of certain drug types trafficked on the European side of the Mediterranean. It is worth noting that, according to the literature reviewed, Southern European countries play a key role as transit hubs for drugs destined for European countries in general. However, drugs entering northern Mediterranean countries do not originate only from trafficking flows transiting through countries on the southern and south-eastern banks of the Mediterranean, but also from direct shipments via sea or air cargos originating from other parts of the world (e.g. South America).

Data available for seizures of different drugs in 2013 confirm that Spain represents the main trafficking hub on the northern shore of the Mediterranean for a variety of drugs, including cannabis resin, herbal cannabis, heroin, cocaine, and amphetamines. The use of Spain as a transit space for drug trafficking is particularly important for cannabis resin produced in Morocco and cocaine produced in South America. In 2013 Spain completed two-thirds of the total of European seizures of cannabis resin as well as the most cocaine seizures of EU Member States.

Besides Spain, data collected by the EMCDDA indicate that, similar to the human trafficking and smuggling routes, Italy and Greece represent two important transit and receiving hubs for a number of drugs transiting through Egyptian and Turkish ports and through other sea routes. Table 2 and Figure 8 below provide an overview of the available data for drug seizures in a number of countries on the southern and eastern Mediterranean in the past years (EMCDDA, 2015).

Table 2: EMCDDA data on number of seizures (in thousands) by drug for Northern and Eastern Mediterranean countries in 2013.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug</th>
<th>Spain</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Italy</th>
<th>Greece</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis resin</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbal cannabis</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroin</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocaine</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamine</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.1~1</td>
<td>&lt;0.1</td>
<td>&lt;0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDMA</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.1~1</td>
<td>&lt;0.1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: EMCDDA, 2015; Frontex, 2015a.
Figure 8: EMCDDA data for quantities (in tons) of drugs seized by year for Northern and Eastern Mediterranean countries

Source: EMCDDA, 2015.
Actors and groups

South and South-Eastern Mediterranean countries
As discussed in the opening section of this Perspective, the different trafficking and smuggling activities described above do not exist in isolation, but rather generate an illicit economy where they become profoundly intertwined and, to a degree, interdependent. As a result of this, the literature reviewed suggests that, especially in North Africa and in neighbouring Sahel countries, rather than having a host of distinct groups catering to individual trades, a continuous spectrum of actors is involved in various smuggling activities. In this sense, the spectrum of actors involved in different trafficking activities could be conceptualised as a hierarchical structure, comprising a variety of members of a certain community, all contributing with different skills and degrees of specialisation (Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2015; Shaw & Mangan, 2014). This spectrum could then ideally be placed in parallel to a similarly vertically-organised hierarchy of trafficking and smuggling activities ranging from armed trafficking at the top, requiring the most specialisation and protections, to contraband and smuggling of Box 2: The emergence of crude oil trafficking in the Mediterranean

A new phenomenon gaining traction across parts of the Mediterranean is that of crude oil smuggling. This phenomenon developed as a consequence of the breakdown of state authorities in Syria and Libya, which in turn facilitated the access to and control of oil fields, refineries and loading ports by non-state and terrorist groups. With regard to Syria, the IS has seized control of several oil fields and refineries across the province of Deir Ezzor, where production was reportedly stable at 30–40,000 barrels per day in October 2015. The IS then sells the crude it extracts from Syrian oil fields predominantly on the internal market, even in territory held by governmental forces or other rival groups, thanks to the work of independent traders (FT, 2015; 2016). Other oil fields are reportedly under control of the IS also in the Mosul governorate in Iraq. At its peak, the IS’ trade in oil across Syria and Iraq was estimated to earn the group up to USD 1.5 million a day. As for Libya, count-
subsidised goods at the bottom, requiring the least resources, planning and organisation.

The literature reviewed suggests that smuggling activities of subsidised goods is endemic and undertaken in countries on the southern Mediterranean on a quasi-individual basis by all community members, as part of regular transnational travelling or as a basic form of self-employment. Smuggling and trafficking of humans is also an activity where community engagement is ripe and occurs through flexible structures capable of adapting to shifting controls and requirements put in place by authorities. The flexible and scalable nature embedded in the approach to human smuggling and trafficking seen in place across the North African region is best expressed by the notion that individuals being smuggled pay on a ‘pay-as-you-go’ basis, as they transit from region to region, rather than paying a full-package service to a facilitator overseeing their journey in its entirety. This notion, however, does not appear to hold true for smuggling and trafficking across countries in the eastern and south-eastern Mediterranean regions and in their proximities, where Frontex suggests that these activities are under the control of sprawling criminal networks overseeing all phases of a migrant journey (Frontex, 2016).

Drug smuggling is reportedly becoming growingly intertwined with human smuggling as reports indicate that West African nationals are willing to transport small amounts of drugs during their journey to pay for it. However, drug smuggling remains a largely insulated and protected business with far fewer and more specialised individuals involved than human smuggling. At the top of the hierarchy of smuggling activities, however, sits arms trafficking. This activity is the one considered to require the highest degree of specialisation, insulation and protection to be performed successfully.

It should also be noted, however, that the more trafficking activities require for armed and legal protection to ensure a return on investments made, the more likely their undertaking entails the co-optation or corruption of members from security forces and state establishment to ensure the safe passage of commodities. For example, evidence suggests that a number of soldiers as well as entire militias or military brigades have played a pivotal role in facilitating the movements of arms from inside Libya to other countries in the region since 2012 (Browne, 2013; Cole, 2012; ICG, 2013; Lacher, 2012, 2014; Shaw & Mangan, 2014). Furthermore, although non-state groups in Libya, Tunisia and other countries in the region have effective control of large areas in border regions, the same cannot be said of road networks, ports and infrastructure in coastal cities and urban regions where the presence of the central state apparatus or of rival militias and groups is stronger, thus requiring further protection and co-option.

In North Africa, smuggling and trafficking activities are often dominated by networks of stateless groups. The largely artificial

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**The more trafficking activities require for armed and legal protection to ensure a return on investments made, the more likely their undertaking entails the co-optation or corruption of members from security forces and state establishment to ensure the safe passage of commodities.**
nature of African borders across North Africa and the Sahel in particular has facilitated the fuelling of transnational smuggling activities and the involvement of transnational ethnic groups. As the contemporary geopolitical regional asset of the Sahel and North Africa consolidated, several ethnic and tribal groups in the region found themselves splintered across a number of countries. However, taking advantage of well-established caravan routes and sticking to social norms encouraging kinship unity, groups have managed to maintain active ties across countries still to this day, facilitating in the process the establishment of transnational smuggling and trafficking activities across the region. In Sahel states, Libya, and Algeria, ethnic groups involved in smuggling activities include: the Tuareg, active across northern Mali, Niger, southern Algeria and south-western Libya; the Tubu, active across northern Chad, Niger and southern Libya; and the Arab tribes of the Awlad Suleiman and Zway, active across Chad and Libya. In the border areas between northern-eastern Algeria and western Tunisia, criminal groups and networks active in the smuggling and trafficking economy are instead commercial criminal cartels, not bound by kinship ties. Local kin communities are responsible for running smuggling and trafficking activities in the border areas between south-eastern Tunisia and Libya and between Libya and Egypt (Browne, 2013; Cole, 2012; Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2015; ICG, 2013; Lacher, 2012, 2014; Shaw & Mangan, 2014).

Northern Mediterranean countries
As for countries on the Northern shore of the Mediterranean, to facilitate the smuggling across borders of weapons, humans, drugs and excise goods, various criminal networks have developed (Shanty & Patit Paban, 2008). At the higher end, these networks have been able to involve and corrupt border guards and security officials (Center for the Study of Democracy, 2012). With the current economic downturn impacting both the Mediterranean region and the wider European area, many such organised crime networks have diversified their criminal activities across a range of smuggling and other criminal enterprises to provide greater economic resilience. Linked to such developments is an increased level of cooperation between organised criminal networks, collaborating in smuggling and other criminal enterprises and taking advantage of modern transport and computer technology.

The European Union’s law enforcement agency, EUROPOL, has identified five main hubs for organised criminal activity in Europe. While the North West and North East hubs are respectively centred around the Low Countries and the Baltic States, the other three hubs fall within the Mediterranean region: the South East hub, centred around Bulgaria, Romania and Greece; the Southern hub centred around Southern Italy; and the South West hub, centred around Spain and Portugal.

According to EUROPOL, these crime hubs fulfil different functions. With regard to the Mediterranean region, the South West hub, around Spain and Portugal, is mainly concerned with the transit and distribution of cocaine and cannabis resin, as well as with acting as a transit facilitator for human trafficking into Europe. The Southern hub around Southern Italy remains active in the provision of counterfeit currency and commodities, such as cigarettes, as well as a transit route for migrants and human trafficking. Finally, in the South East hub centred around the East Mediterranean and Balkan regions, the Albanian, Serbian and Bulgarian networks have been particularly active in smuggling both counterfeit goods and humans, being linked particularly to
Figure 9: Organised Crime Hubs in the Mediterranean and Northern Europe

human trafficking of women from Central and Eastern Europe for sexual exploitation and more recently for facilitating the transit of migrants and refugees from the Eastern Mediterranean and nearby regions (Europol, 2011).

**Facilitators of human smuggling operating in the EU and at its external borders**

As discussed above, individuals being smuggled across countries on the southern and south-eastern shores of the Mediterranean engage with criminals and facilitators on a ‘pay-as-you-go’ basis, rather than buying a whole service-package to reach Mediterranean EU countries. As a result of this, ad hoc criminal networks and freelance entrepreneurs have also flourished across EU countries in order to facilitate the entry and movement of smuggled individuals inside the Union (Europol, 2016).

As of 2016, the European Police Office (Europol) holds intelligence and information on approximately 40,000 individuals suspected of being involved with migrant smuggling. As a further indication of the transnational nature of this crime and of its appeal to different groups and organisations, suspects identified by Europol hail from more than 100 countries. Some of the prevailing traits for smugglers and traffickers identified by Europol are as follows:

- 44 per cent of smuggler networks comprise non-EU nationals only
- 30 per cent of smuggler networks comprise EU nationals only
- 26 per cent of smuggler networks comprise both EU and non-EU nationals
- The most common nationalities for suspects are: Bulgarian, Egyptian, Hungarian, Iraqi, Kosovan, Pakistani, Polish, Romanian, Serbian, Syrian, Tunisian and Turkish.

Figure 9 below presents additional data on smugglers and traffickers nationalities and areas of operation provided by Europol. Overall, 13 per cent of suspects operate in their countries of origin; others, like Polish, Bulgarian and Romanian nationals, operate outside of their country of origin, mostly within neighbouring EU member states. Criminal networks facilitating human smuggling activities to the EU often comprise a number of different individuals, from low-level facilitators, handling operational aspects, to highly specialised individuals, such as document providers and forgers, brokers, money handlers and local-level and network leaders. According to Europol (2016), legal businesses are also often involved in smuggling operations, providing operational support and facilitating money-laundering activities. It is also worth noting that human smugglers have been found to have clear and established links to other illicit activities as well. Based on Europol data for 2015, 22 per cent of human smuggling suspects were also linked to drug trafficking, 20 per cent to human trafficking, 18 per cent to document forgery and 20 per cent to property crime.
### Figure 10: Human smugglers’ nationality, country of activity and country of residence

**Main nationalities or countries of birth suspects**  
*Source: Europol data 2015*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of activity of the suspects (top 5)</th>
<th>Country of residence of the suspects (top 5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Hungary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Spain / Greece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Poland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Italy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SOURCE:** Europol, 2016.
Socio-economic dimensions and security implications of criminal activities

The smuggling and trafficking activities discussed in the pages of this perspective do not exist in a vacuum, but, on the contrary, are characterised by different social dimensions and have profound security implications on all shores of the Mediterranean. The following sections will present an overview of the main societal aspect of criminal activities discussed in the Mediterranean, as well as of their most significant security implications.

Socio-economic dimensions of criminal activities

Overall socio-economic dimensions and impact of criminal activities

According to the literature reviewed, strong socio-economic incentives exist in several parts of the Mediterranean region for the undertaking of the criminal activities described above. High unemployment rates, lack of socio-economic prospects, and paucity of business opportunities are indicated as significant barriers to the development of a legitimate economy and, in parallel, as drivers incentivising trafficking activities, especially across southern and south-eastern Mediterranean countries.

Due to these structural factors, smuggling in different commodities remains a very lucrative activity. This, over time, has also meant that smugglers have been able through corruption and co-option to further erode the weak reach of south and south-eastern Mediterranean state authorities in their border regions. Customs and security sector officials of all ranks in several countries are reportedly involved in, or at the very least complacent about, smuggling activities. The development of power groups with vested interests in the perpetuation of the smuggling and trafficking economy has also meant that transnational efforts aimed at curbing such phenomena and promoting legal trade opportunities have been met with widespread scepticism, if not outright suspicion (Browne, 2013; Gartenstein-Ross et al., Lacher, 2012, 2014; Shaw & Mangan, 2014).

Trafficicking and smuggling thus remain the pillars of economies for a number of regions in countries on the south and south-eastern Mediterranean. With this in mind, it does not come as a surprise that following the upheavals of the so-called Arab Spring and with the subsequent vacuums of power and instability this caused, armed confrontations and a reorganisation and reshuffling of smuggling groups and networks ensued. At present, instability in smuggling arrangements continues to be a feature of several countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean. In particular, due to the current climate of lawlessness marring parts of Libya, Tunisia, southern Algeria and Egypt, various armed groups in these countries see access to smuggling and trafficking profits as a shortcut to increased power and immunity, preventing them from committing to democratic governance and institutions, and to peaceful and inclusive political processes. Besides these overarching characteristics, however, different smuggling activities have peculiar societal-level impact and implications (Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2015; ICG, 2014; Lacher, 2012, 2014; Shaw & Mangan, 2014).

Human smuggling and trafficking

Although interlinked and overlapping, there is a distinction to be appreciated between ‘human smuggling’ and ‘human trafficking’ that has a fundamental impact on the individuals being smuggled or trafficked. While both activities involve criminal individuals and groups moving people, usually illegally, across borders, and for financial profit, human trafficking involves the additional factors of
coercion, a level of deception and abuse of authority. Both forms of exploitation tend to occur together in parallel and there have been numerous examples where migrants or refugees being smuggled have later been coerced, deceived or abused into becoming victims of human trafficking (UNODC, 2008, p. 122). Young women and children are particularly vulnerable to such human exploitation (UNODC, 2014).

In addition to the criminal and socio-economic impact generated by the smuggling of migrants and human trafficking, for a number of countries in the Mediterranean and North African region there are also major economic and security implications stemming from the large and increasing number of Syrian refugees housed in centres on their territory. The UNHCR currently estimates that there are over 4 million such Syrian refugees in camps based in countries neighbouring Syria (UNHCR, 2015). Currently there are 2,726,980 in Turkey; 1,033,513 in Lebanon; 655,990 in Jordan; 239,008 in Iraq; 114,911 in Egypt and 29,275 in the rest of North Africa (UNHCR, 2016). In most cases this has posed severe economic demands on their host countries, while also raising significant security concerns, and sometimes leading to social unrest between the refugees and nationals of the host country.

**Arms trafficking**

When analysing arms trafficking it should be noted that the threat and societal-damage emanating from this trade does not stop with the undertaking of the trade itself. On the contrary, arms trafficking should also be assessed on the basis of the crimes and damage it enables to be committed by virtue of providing non-state groups and individuals with weapons, as well as on the basis of the political tensions it generates (European Commission, 2015; Frontex, 2015a). A good example of the detrimental effects generated by the arms trade at the societal level comes from Tunisia. As previously discussed, arms and explosives have made their way to Tunisia illegally and unabatedly since the fall of the Ben Ali regime. This in turn encouraged the development of rumours, mutual suspicion and tensions across the whole political spectrum, especially in the aftermath of high-level political killings which marred political transition in the country. Furthermore, arms and training received in Libya were instrumental in allowing Tunisian Jihadists to carry out terrorist attacks on the country's tourist infrastructure, crippling Tunisia's sources of income (Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2015; ICG, 2013, 2014).

**Security implications of criminal activities**

The complex network of illegal activities and related actors described in this perspective has implications that go beyond the realm of law enforcement and policing and have a direct impact on the security of the entire region. The trafficking in, and proliferation of, weapons, explosives and CBRN materials contributes to the generation of an environment characterised by insecurity, violence and fear that fuels instability, discourages foreign investments and increases the level of threat to military personnel and humanitarian agencies deployed in the field. The maritime environment plays a major role in connecting the north and south shores of the Mediterranean and is highly exploited by a number of criminal enterprises. In this context, the use of naval assets in response to the migration crisis, while on the one hand being a necessary measure, on the other hand could pose a significant opportunity cost in an historical moment characterised by ageing fleets and budgetary restrictions.

In addition, should the situation in Libya remain unstable, it cannot be excluded that terrorists or criminal groups may decide
to target commercial shipping through piracy or armed robbery at sea, replicating the model that has characterised Somalia over the last ten years (piracy for ransom) or the Gulf of Guinea (piracy for booty). With the so-called Islamic State gaining control of oil fields in Syria and Libya, the link between criminal activities and terrorism has increasingly attracted the headlines, especially in relation to crude oil trafficking. Nevertheless, while the financing element related to illicit trade is certainly important, the links between crime and terrorism go beyond the trafficking of individual commodities, finding its roots in the socio-economic domain (see Box 3).

**Box 3: Links between terrorist and criminal groups**

Of particular concern is the development of links between criminal and terrorist actors in the Mediterranean region, a phenomenon known as the crime-terror nexus (see Makarenko, T. 2007. The Crime-Terror Nexus. London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers). This can occur where terrorist groups become involved in criminality as a means of generating funding and commit criminal offences in pursuit of their objectives. The presence of terrorist or radical Jihadist groups in the regions interested by smuggling and trafficking networks discussed in this chapter appears to be a contentious matter in the literature reviewed. Authors suggest in fact that this presence has often been exaggerated, especially with regard to the Fezzan region of Libya (Cole, 2012; Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2015; Lacher, 2014; McQuinn, 2012).

Certainly, the Al-Qa’ida branch in North Africa, AQIM (Al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb), and a variety of radical Jihadist groups in Tunisia, Libya and neighbouring countries do represent sources of insecurity, tension and conflict in the region. However, the degree to which such groups are operating as Jihadists, traffickers or both is unclear. With regard to AQIM, the literature suggests that the group has been involved in trafficking operations in the measure of claiming protection or transit taxes for smugglers transporting drugs and weapons across its areas of operations or oversight. From a criminal point of view, however, AQIM has certainly been heavily involved with the kidnap industry, using high ransoms paid by Western governments to finance its activities and bolster its members’ base (Browne, 2013; Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2015; ICG, 2013, 2014; Lacher, 2014).

As regards Tunisia, the picture there appears to be more complex. Fieldwork conducted in the region seems to indicate that informal ties between radical Jihadist groups and smuggling groups in border regions already exist due to kinship. Allegedly, this has already led Jihadist groups to carry out attacks in the border areas of Tunisia at the time of complex smuggling operations to divert the attention of the security apparatus away from trafficking routes in use. Besides this, however, a more concerning phenomenon observed in Tunisia is that of urban ‘Islamo-gangsterism’. In the crime-ridden environment of Tunisian suburbs, where drugs, firearms and other illegal goods are often traded, the presence of young radical Salafists and Jihadists is increasing, along with their participation in informal trades. Although still nascent, this phenomenon could create the conditions required for deeper and more stable ties between the worlds of trafficking and terrorism to be established, breaking the ideological barrier that so far inhibited such a development (Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2015; ICG, 2013, 2014; Kartas, 2013).
Policy challenges and responses to transnational criminal activities

A clear consensus emerges from the literature reviewed with regard to what policy responses should be adopted to tackle smuggling and trafficking activities in the region. It is argued that complex, holistic policy programmes must be implemented to ensure that the structural causes underlying criminal phenomena are addressed, and long-standing solutions are found. A transnational approach fostering co-operation among different stakeholders’ countries is also indicated as a prerequisite for ensuring that long-lasting solutions are achieved.

The adoption of adequate security measures and border management capabilities is necessary to curb ongoing smuggling and trafficking activities. However, policies focusing on the societal dimensions of these criminal phenomena are required to stem the long-term drivers and push-factors allowing them to flourish and perpetuate.

These economic, security and societal challenges require adequate policy responses to be devised and implemented by local political elites, where possible in cooperation and with the support of international partners (Frontex, 2016b). Certainly, many of the diplomatic and military engagements and programmes described in other Perspectives part of Mediterranean Foresight Forum series pursue broad strategies within which measures aimed at tackling criminal phenomena are also included (Reuters, 2016). For this reason, this section provides an overview of policy measures and responses adopted by countries in the southern and south-eastern Mediterranean, as well as of transnational initiatives between them.

At present, the policy responses implemented by countries in the southern and south-eastern Mediterranean regions appear to be skewed towards a securitisation of criminal phenomena and the adoption of technology-based solutions, rather than towards the devising of long-term holistic programmes. The societal issues facilitating the flourishing of these criminal activities appear to be neglected, except for the distribution, where possible, of large-scale subsidies and benefits to buy off popular discontent.

One example of such a policy approach comes from Algeria. Since turmoil started spreading across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region in 2011, and even more so after the events of the 2012 Mali uprising, Algerian political elites attempted to thwart security threats by tightening the country’s security posture and by further redistributing oil and gas generated income.

With regard to threats emanating from its vast borders and the illicit activities exploiting them, Algeria took measures in preparation of what has been described as a potential long war of attrition. In light of this, the country’s policy responses to smuggling and trafficking were conflated with those looking at the transnational...
terrorist threat. In May 2015, President Bouteflika decided to close all of the country’s land borders, with the exception of those with Tunisia. Border management was also militarised, as management responsibilities for it were moved from the Ministry of Interior to the Ministry of Defence. As a result of this, all borders were declared restricted military zones and several thousand army and air force troops were deployed along the 6,000+ km Algerian land borders with Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Libya. Currently, walls and electric fences are being built along the border with Morocco and additional ones are being considered for the border with Libya. Furthermore, the army’s deployment along the borders came at the end of a wide-ranging security sector reform launched in 2012 to ensure better performance of the Algerian Army vis-à-vis new and emerging security threats (Ben Khaled, 2015; Lacher, 2013).

Similarly to Algeria, Tunisia’s approach to tackling criminal and terrorist activities has taken the route of increased border security. In particular, in January 2016 Tunisia completed the first part of a 200 km security barrier along its south-eastern border. This complex of sand barriers and water trenches was developed to prevent the passage of vehicles across the border, in a bid to deter both criminal and terrorist activities. The barrier is set to be further enhanced with the installation of electronic equipment (BBC, 2016).

The overlap between Algeria’s and Tunisia’s policy approach to tackle smuggling, trafficking and terrorist threats was further confirmed when news of the formation of a military cooperation committee emerged. This committee was established to share intelligence on criminal and terrorist networks between the two countries, and improve border management coordination. This agreement marked the achievement of an unprecedented level of external coordination for both countries. Libyan institutions were also involved in initial talks aimed at coordinating border security. However, the country’s internal turmoil and institutional collapse hampered further participation by Libyan representatives in this initiative (Ben Khaled, 2015; Gaub, 2015).

The agreement between Tunisia and Algeria in the fight against smuggling, trafficking and transnational terrorist activities, however, represents the regional exception, rather than the rule. As evidenced by the events of the 2012 Mali insurgency, the southern Mediterranean region is characterised by a paucity of effective regional security cooperation tools and platforms (Gaub, 2015; Lacher, 2013; Reuters, 2015b). The lack of regional security integration, and ensuing lack of adequate policy responses to transnational threats, can be seen as a product of the long-standing rivalries between Morocco, Algeria and Libya. These rivalries have undermined efforts at establishing effective regional security frameworks since the post-colonial era. Examples of platforms and frameworks that were established by different countries in a bid to exert more regional influence, but that failed to translate into meaningful and comprehensive operational tools, include (Ben Khaled, 2015; Lacher, 2013):

- **Arab Maghreb Union (AMU)**, established in 1989 by Morocco, Mauritania, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya.
- **Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD)**, a platform established in 1998 by Libya with Mali, Chad, Niger, Sudan and Burkina Faso.
- **Joint Operational Army Staffs Committee (CEMOC)**, established by Algeria, Mali, Niger and Mauritania in 2010 to coordinate the fight against transnational terrorist and criminal threats.
Similar issues to the ones characterising co-operation among North-African countries limit also co-operation among countries in the south-eastern Mediterranean. Here, sectarian divides and long-standing territorial disputes have prevented the achievement of a stable regional asset, let alone the establishment of meaningful co-operation security platforms.

In this part of the Mediterranean, Egypt and Israel have also adopted a similar security-focused approach to the tackling of smuggling and trafficking activities, including those of humans, occurring across the Sinai Peninsula towards the Gaza Strip and Israel. In particular, in 2010, the Israeli government launched the construction of a security fence along the border with Egypt. The fence construction was completed in 2013, leading to an almost complete drop in the number of illegal entries registered by Tel Aviv (The Algemeiner, 2013; Arutz Sheva, 2013; BBC, 2010; The Washington Post, 2011). As for Egypt, smuggling activities across the Sinai Peninsula have long been reported as both a security concern and one of the few available economic opportunities in the region. Policy responses adopted from the Cairo establishment have, however, so far failed to address the underlying socio-economic factors underpinning such activities, reportedly ranging from complacency to repression in accordance with the national and regional political climate (Gold, 2014).

**Conclusion**

The Mediterranean is a region characterised by a high degree of overlap and mutual influence between (in)security and crime, both in the land and maritime domain. Consequently, while the role of intelligence agencies, military and law enforcement forces remains distinct in principle, several dependencies can be found at the operational and tactical level, and this poses severe coordination and cooperation challenges. While criminal networks and different forms of trafficking and smuggling are certainly not a new phenomenon, the rise of the migration crisis to unprecedented levels has provided the opportunity for criminal enterprises to flourish and expand. The main challenge in addressing the situation is finding the balance between short-term interventions (focusing on repression and deterrence), and long-term strategies (focusing on curbing the socio-economic push factors and financial gain pull factors) to disrupt criminal behaviours and activities across the region.

In this context, the EU and Western countries in general have a key role to play both at strategic level and at the operational/tactical level. At the **strategic level**, efforts should concentrate on supporting economic development to provide to a wider range of the population viable alternatives to criminal behaviours. Economic development is a prerequisite of sustainable stability. In a broader sense, stabilising the MENA region in the long term would require, primarily, the establishment of a virtuous economic and social circle, rooted in a stable political context. To achieve this virtuous circle, the international community, and the EU in particular given its geographic proximity, should go beyond the provision of financial/economic support by creating the conditions for MENA economies to access regional and international markets. Economic support may help in developing national economies, but issues such as trade barriers may severely impact the ability of such economies to become independent and self-sustainable. At the **operational and tactical level**, the EU supported by the wider international community has two key roles to play. **Internally**, it should focus on improving coordination and coherence among already existing initiatives (including those implemented at the national level), oper-
ations and cooperation platforms to ensure more effective information sharing, to avoid duplication of efforts and to minimise the risk of scope creep. **Externally**, focusing specifically on the MENA region, the EU should leverage its geographical, political and economic position to facilitate the establishment of, or use of existing, regional instruments and platforms for cooperation.

The intrinsic transnational nature of the main criminal activities in the Mediterranean region calls for an unprecedented transnational effort to cooperate. Given how deeply rooted certain criminal behaviours are in several societies around the Mediterranean Basin, the sustainability of any result obtained at the operational and tactical level will rely on the success of more strategic actions taken at the political level in support of economic and social development.

**Notes**

1 Frontex is the European Union agency for the management of operational cooperation at the external borders of the Member States of the European Union (Frontex, 2016c).

2 Frontex (2016d) reports that in the first quarter of 2016, 94 per cent of migrants reaching Europe through the Central Mediterranean route transited through Libya before embarking on a sea crossing.
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About the Mediterranean Foresight Forum

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