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## Converted Firearms in Europe: *Conversion of downgraded firearms*

Dr. Jovana Carapic, Small Arms Survey



# In this session we will...

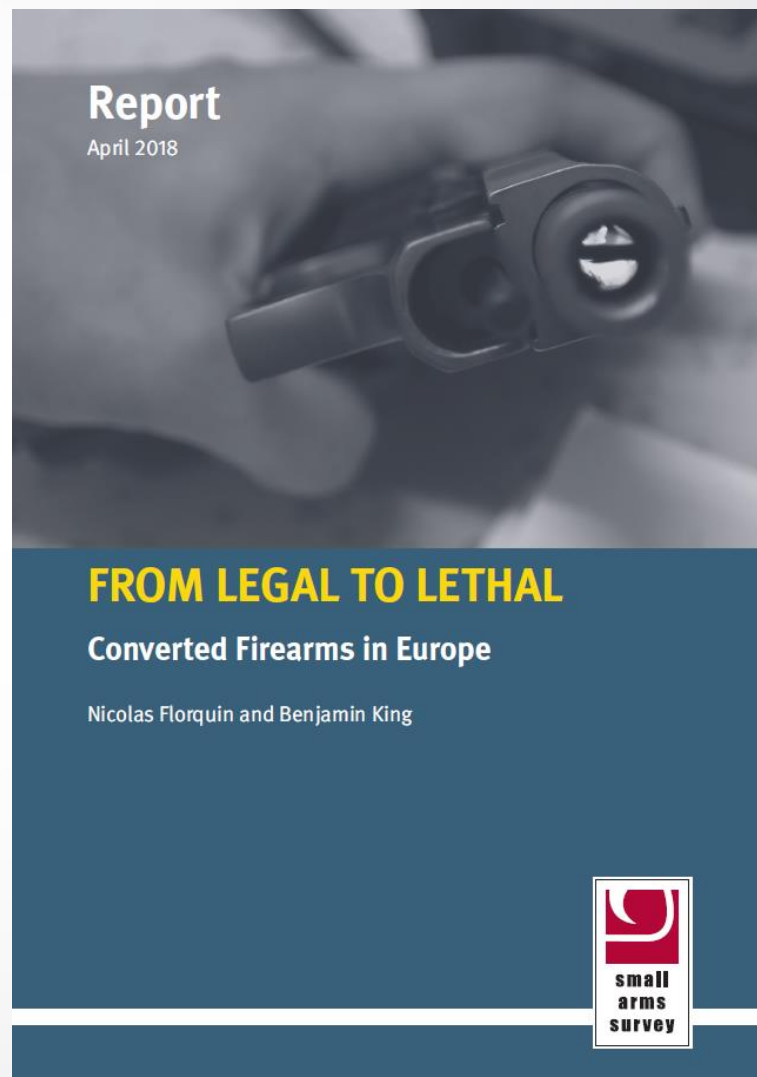
- The Report: from Legal to Lethal
- Key Definitions
- Deactivated Firearms
- Acoustic expansion weapons (AEW)
- Weapons modified to Flobert calibre



# From Legal to Lethal – Overview

Provides a detailed examination of the conversion challenge in Europe:

- Typology of converted firearms;
- Nature and scope of the threat;
- Mechanics and trafficking; and
- Legislative and operational response.



# From Legal to Lethal – Activities



- Key stakeholder interviews (KSI)
  - Law enforcement and forensics experts
- Country and regional data requests
- In-country visits:
  - Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Romania, Spain, UK
- Expert meetings/workshops
  - SAS and Empact Firearms Workshop (June 2017); 11 countries + regional institutions
  - Participation in 2016-17 ENFSI firearms/GSR meetings, 2017 IFFS



# Key Definitions

## What is a firearm?

- any portable barrelled weapon that expels, is designed to expel **or may be readily converted to expel a shot, bullet or projectile** by the action of an explosive, excluding antique firearms or their replicas

(UN Firearms Protocol, 2001, art. 3(a))

## What is conversion?

- The alteration of originally non-lethal-purpose imitation firearms and the reactivation of firearms whose firing capabilities were removed or significantly downgraded.

(Florquin and King, 2018, p. 16)



# Key Definitions

## What are 'readily converted' firearms?

- International and regional instruments do not define the principle of 'convertibility'
  
- UK legislation as guidance on readily convertible firearms:
  - It can be converted without any special skill on the part of the person converting it in the construction or adaptation of firearms of any description;
  - The work involved in converting it does not require equipment or tools other than those in common use by persons carrying out works of construction and maintenance in their own homes

(UK, Firearms Act, 1982, para. 1.6)



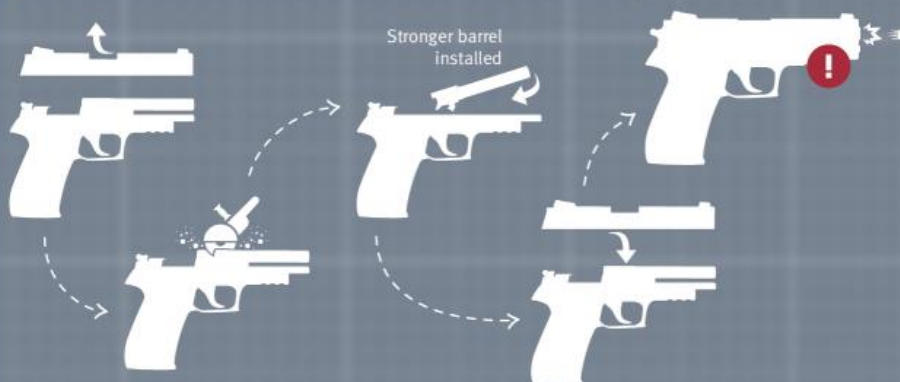
# Mechanics of conversion

- Engineering skills, available workshop space, and the right tools are some of the key features that allow individuals to convert firearms

Removing obstructions and inserting a metal sleeve to reinforce the barrel



Replacing the original barrel with a more resistant model of the same calibre



Removing obstructions and adding projectiles to blank ammunition, usually in the form of ball bearings



# Key Definitions – conversion types

*Conversion refers to modifications of objects that are incapable of firing a projectile, to ones capable of doing so.*

Alteration of originally non-lethal purposed imitation firearms



Non-lethal purposed firearms

Conversion

Lethal imitation firearms

Source: Florquin and King (2018), p. 14.

# Key Definitions – conversion types

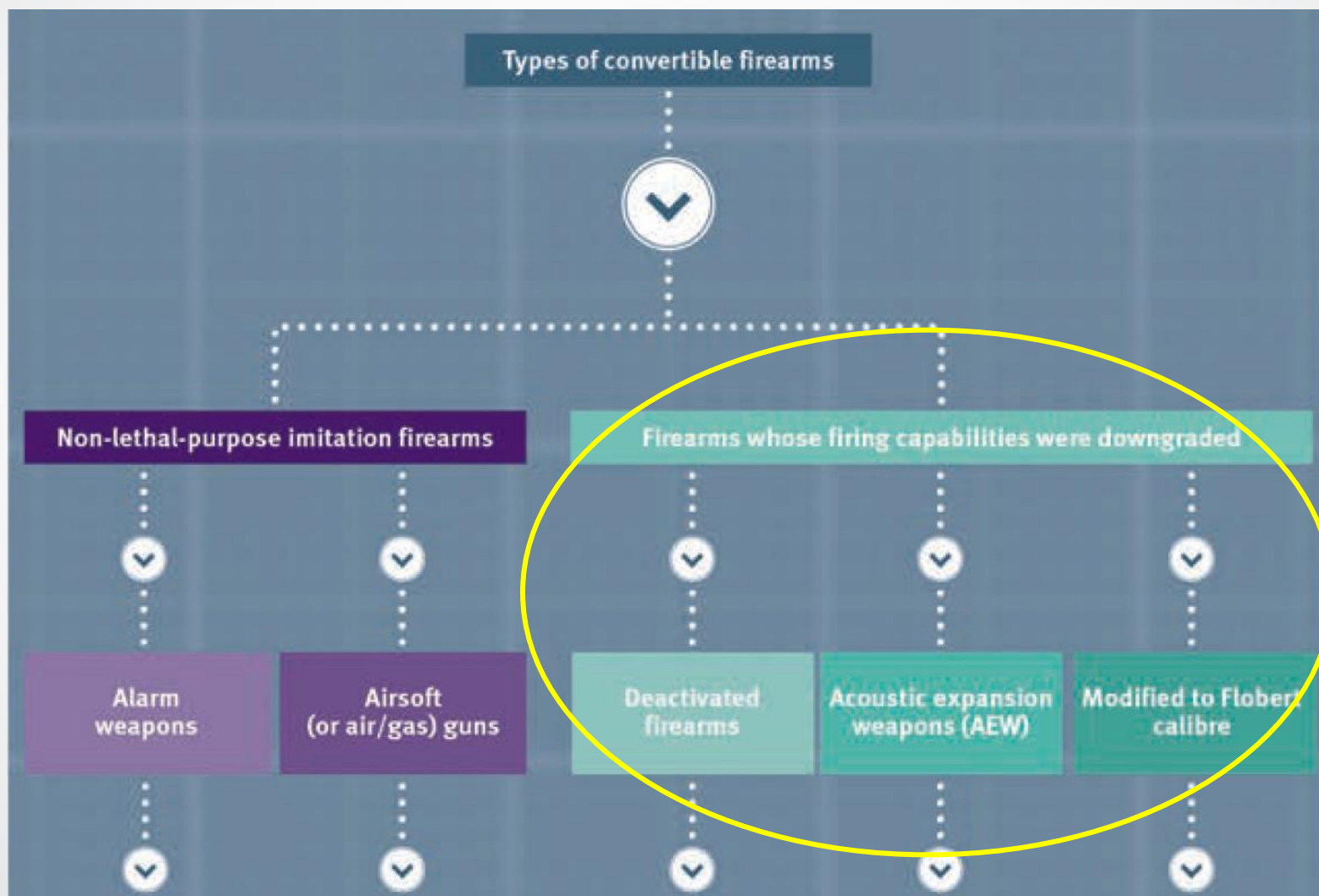
*Conversion refers to modifications of objects that are incapable of firing a projectile, to ones capable of doing so.*



Source: Florquin and King (2018), p. 14.



# Types of convertible firearms



(Florquin and King, 2018, p. 21.)



# Misuse of reactivated firearms

- **2012: Toulouse and Montauban**
  - Reactivated Llama Max-II pistol (deactivated in Spain), 2012, Toulouse and Montauban
- **2015: Montrouge and Hypercacher**
  - Two converted vz. 58 rifles, 6 converted Tokarev TT33 pistols (modified to AEWs in Slovakia)
- **2016: Munich**
  - Reactivated Glock pistol (purchased on the Dark Web)



**Amedy Coulibaly**; deactivated vz 58 (Czech-made)



# Deactivated firearms

- Real firearms that have been altered so that they are **no longer** capable of expelling a projectile or even of firing a blank cartridge.
- Outer appearance remains the same as a lethal-firearm, but includes a ‘proof’ mark indicating deactivation



# Acoustic Expansion Weapons (AEW)

- Sub-section of the deactivated firearms category
- AEW were once working, lethal firearms which were subsequently modified to no longer be capable of expelling a firearm
- Able to fire blank ammunition
- Firing mechanism left operational → potentially easier to convert



**Image 3** Converted AEW seized by the Spanish Guardia Civil. Markings indicate the new ammunition requirements and proof of transformation of the vz.61 to a blank-firing AEW. Photographed on 18 April 2017. Source: Benjamin King/Small Arms Survey



# Firearms modified to Flobert calibre

- Initially developed for indoor shooting; today advertised as weapons for target practice
- Do not fire traditional cartridge-based ammo; but percussion caps filled with a projectile;
- Real firearms modified to fire flobert ammunition, reducing the restrictions on purchasing them
  - Including: vz 58 automatic rifles previously modified to AWE

Sellier Bellot Flobert Ammunition  
Flobert 4mm RANDZ CURTE  
200pcs



✔ Temporary out of stock  
✉ You will be informed by phone about availability

Subtotal: **19.2 €**

1 + - Buy 🏠

Flobert 4mm bullets are packed as 200 pieces. It feature with a round cartridge. Production of these charges takes place in the Czech Republic and therefore the quality is guaranteed.



# EU Response

## December 2015

EU adopts deactivation standards (entered into force April 2016, and revised March 2018).

## 2015–2016

Operation Mars targets Slovak-origin AEWs and seizes hundreds of weapons.

## 2016

Operation Bosphorus seizes hundreds of Turkish alarm weapons smuggled from Bulgaria.

## 2017

Operation Portu seizes thousands of readily convertible deactivated firearms at a sports equipment store in Spain.

## 2017

EU Firearms Directive is amended to increase restrictions on AEWs, deactivated firearms and alarm weapons.

## September 2018

EU to adopt technical specifications for alarm weapons.

## Ongoing concerns:

- Firearms intelligence and information-sharing
- Record-keeping requirements for imitation weapons
- Firearms ‘downgrading’ (e.g. Flobert conversions)
- Sales of military surplus firearms



# Guiding questions

- How can we measure the impact of the new EU regulations?
- How can we monitor the implementation?
- What control lessons can be passed on to other parts of the world?
- Are Flobert seizures distinguishing between ‘purpose built’ and ‘downgraded’?
- Will record sharing efforts capture data crucial to understanding the conversion issue?



# THANK YOU!



Maison de la Paix, Chemin  
Eugène-Rigot 2E  
1202 Geneva, Switzerland



+41 22 908 5770



[jovana.carapic@smallarmssurvey.org](mailto:jovana.carapic@smallarmssurvey.org)

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Small Arms Survey Focus Areas

Weapons

- Definitions of SALW
- Producers
- Products
- Transfers
- Stockpiles
- Tools

Highlights

Publication: The Small Arms Survey 2010: Gangs, Groups, and Guns reviews a range of issues related to gangs and armed groups.

Focus Projects: The Sudan Human Security Baseline Assessment has launched a new Facts & Figures section on its website.

Focus Projects

- Sudan Human Security Baseline Assessment
- Timor-Leste Armed Violence Assessment
- Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development

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Small Arms Survey  
Avenue Blanc 47 | 1202 Geneva, Switzerland  
t +41 22 908 5777 | f +41 22 732 2730  
e [info@smallarmssurvey.org](mailto:info@smallarmssurvey.org)

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