# JAMMING THE PRINTERS – EPISODE 15

## THE EUROPOL PODCAST SEASON 2 EPISODE 7

## INTRODUCTION

**Tuomas, Finnish Detective**

I believe that was the first. But certainly, it won't be last case that we will need the help of Europol.

**Alan, Europol**

The threat always stays high when it comes to violence, right-wing extremism and right-wing terrorism. And yes, absolutely, we, together with our partners, foiled several attacks already. You will not read them on the news. You will not hear anything about it.

**Leon, Europol Expert**

I think the biggest danger is the difficulty in detecting if someone is producing a 3D weapon by law enforcement.

**Narrator**

Welcome to The Europol Podcast, the official podcast of the EU agency for law enforcement cooperation. In this series, we shine a light on some of the biggest cases Europol has supported, and how we continue to fight crime.

**Today's episode:** Jamming the Printers.

## CONTEXT OF THE CASE

**Narrator**

Finland. 2022. Four men are exchanging messages in a closed group chat.

This is not the type of group chat that you or I would be part of. The four participants subscribe to an extreme right-wing ideology, one built on white supremacist and Nazi principles. This chat is where they discuss their beliefs, and ways to spread their violent ideology.

**Tuomas, Finnish Detective**

I would describe them as a kind of a 'loose' group. There was no hierarchy or no chain of command or nothing like that. They had ideology in common and through that, they decided to discuss it with each other and started building those weapons. And they started talking about what should they do to advance their ideology.

**Narrator**

The voice you're hearing is that of Tuomas, a senior investigator in organised crime and terrorism cases, from the Finnish Police.

**Tuomas, Finnish Detective**

My name is Tuomas and my title is Detective Chief Inspector, and I work through organised crime in Finnish police.

**Narrator**

Tuomas was in charge of the investigation into this small extremist group.

**Tuomas, Finnish Detective**

We investigated a case where we had four suspects, that were related on building 3D printed firearms, and those suspects had a far-right ideology, which motivated them building those weapons.

**Narrator**

The suspects were building a type of semi-automatic firearm which can be built almost entirely independently using a home 3D printer. And the parts they were talking about in their group chat, these were the elements of these weapons.

You might have encountered 3D printers before – you may even have one in your home. But a growing concern to law enforcement is that these printers can be used to make firearms, which could be hard to trace and shoot dozens, if not hundreds, of real, live rounds.

**Tuomas, Finnish Detective**

I would describe them as a far-right extremists, which all including theory of accelerationism, terms like siege, rage war and Day of the Rope. And I would they had a lot of far-right material they were reading and sharing with each other.

**Narrator**

This extremist group subscribed to something called 'accelerationism'. In a far-right context, the ideology asks adherents to take action to deliberately bring about the collapse of modern society, to accelerate its demise. Their aim is to bring about a global war, which, they believe, would be fought along racial lines.

**Tuomas, Finnish Detective**

And I believe that the weapon building also was based on ideology, and that's why they started building to be prepared for the race war and maybe to be sure that they had some firearms if they needed those.

**Narrator**

One aspect of this accelerationist ideology, known as 'Siege', is the belief that the more discontent there is with the current system, the more people will join their cause. This is used to legitimise attacks on people, objects or infrastructure, because this will 'accelerate' this discontent. But first, let's look closer at these 3D printed firearms.

**Leon, Europol Expert**

I think the biggest danger is the difficulties in detecting if someone is producing a 3D weapon. So, there's a whole new community with people not previously known to the police who can have access to firearms because they produce them themselves and they do not need to address to criminals or criminal firearms traffickers to obtain the firearm.

**Narrator**

Leon is Europol's top expert in the area of weapons trafficking.

**Leon, Europol Expert**

My name is Leon, and I'm the head of team for the Analysis Project Weapons and Explosives at Europol.

**Narrator**

Analysis Projects, or APs, are operational teams at Europol who are dedicated to focusing on a specific criminal phenomenon. In Leon's case, it's weapons and explosives.

**Leon, Europol Expert**

3D printing is a technology where a printer can print layers of plastic filaments into a 3D shape of pretty much anything. You know, we're going to talk about weapons, but you can print whatever you want to print. And the 3D printing, of course, is a fantastic thing because it will enable our society with lots of good stuff. For instance, if you lose your leg in the future, they will probably 3D print your, you know, your artificial leg.

**Narrator**

A 3D printer allows you to cheaply make whatever plastic shape you want at home. So, the idea of needing special equipment to make all kinds of different objects and components goes out of the window.

**Leon, Europol Expert**

It's relatively cheap to 3D print because the computer and the printer understand exactly what they need to print the size, the shape.  And when you look at conventional machinery, you need to, you know, set them you need to have special machinery to produce something to make a 3D object.

**Narrator**

Like many technological advances, there are chances that criminals will exploit 3D printing, particularly when it comes to making weapons. The first example comes from 2013.

**Leon, Europol Expert**

I got acquainted with the 3D printed 'Liberator'. That was around, I think 2013 when this American guy, presented a single shot pistol which was fully 3D printed with the exception of a firing pin.

For which a simple nail could be used. So, the rest was all plastics except for the ammunition. before the Liberator, there was actually no awareness in law enforcement that this 3D printing could ever be used to produce lethal weapons.

**Narrator**

A single-shot pistol isn't exactly a fearsome addition to the criminal arsenal. What's more, the Liberator was a pretty low-quality firearm. It was fairly unreliable – the plastic could shatter and explode when you tried to fire a cartridge from it.

So potentially more danger for the user, rather than the intended target.

**Leon, Europol Expert**

So, you know, they just stuck to the conventional weapons at that time.

**Narrator**

However, law enforcement took the threat very seriously.

**Leon, Europol Expert**

This liberator was actually a wakeup call because in the post 9/11, era, there was much fear that this 3D printed plastic weapon that could be used by terrorists, for instance, to easily enter buildings or airplanes, and to do their assaults. So that's when monitoring of this threat started.

**Narrator**

However, innovations soon began on the Liberator and before long, new designs for 3D printed weapons emerged. More serious firearms, and lookalikes of conventional firearms, were under development.

And then things changed. In 2019, a right-wing extremist in the German town of Halle attacked a synagogue in a shooting. He carried five firearms with him. And one of those had 3D printed elements.

**Leon, Europol Expert**

He was aware that the quality of his design was pretty poor. So, although fully loaded, he never used this gun at the assault in the end. He probably took it as a backup. But it was actually the first time when there was a serious incident where someone carried a 3D printed gun, at least, a partially 3D printed gun.

**Narrator**

Law enforcement's job is to scan the horizon for emerging threats, and the Halle synagogue shooting made the world of 3D weapons very real for law enforcement.

It was around the same time that the first semi-automatic firearms almost entirely made with a 3D printer were developed.

These models are widely regarded as the most effective and deadly of 3D printed weapons designs. Reliable, tough, and looking very similar to a conventional firearm, some designs are world famous.

**Leon, Europol Expert**

So, the large interest this community showed into the manufacturing, into manufacturing their own weapons, this caused an increasingly enthusiastic online community and not only wanting to produce, but also to design new types of 3D weapons. And that's when, you know, the rest is history. Now we're in the middle of it.

**Narrator**

The application of 3D printed weapons extends beyond making firearms. There are also designs for parts that modify regular firearms. And some of these are just as dangerous as building a weapon from scratch.

**Leon, Europol Expert**

I'll give you example for the United States, where you can have a semiautomatic rifle, for instance, and specifically the most popular one, the AR 15. There was a little, let's say, device which you can then after 3D printing, just assemble in your, your rifle and then it will change indeed, from a semiautomatic to an automatic.

**Narrator**

If you aren't into firearms, let me explain what this means. A semi-automatic weapon fires a shot every time the trigger is pressed. An automatic weapon will keep firing shots while you hold down the trigger. So automatic weapons have a much faster rate of fire, which is especially deadly when the weapons are deployed by terrorists or in other criminal contexts.

In most jurisdictions, automatic weapons can never be sold commercially; hence the need for these modifications.

**Leon, Europol Expert**

And of course, you know, it has greater power when the weapon is automatic. In the end, it's a more dangerous weapon.

**Narrator**

So, how is this 3D printing technology is changing the world of firearms cases for agents like Leon? Harder to trace, constantly changing designs, and a mix of mods and full weapons means there are all kinds of new threats to consider. And it's not going to break the bank either.

**Leon, Europol Expert**

You can buy a 3D printer for EUR 250, which is absolute fine to produce your own firearm. No problem.

**Narrator**

The technology is limited though. There are several challenges in getting it to work, and then there's the matter of finding metal bullets and gunpowder to actually shoot.

**Leon, Europol Expert**

Yeah, well, we have seen 3D printed ammunition, but it's not completely 3D printed. Of course, a plastic bullet will not reach his goal. It will probably melt during its travel towards the goal or the target, and or even the ammunition might not work and explode in the gun. And then there will be some issues. But we see, for instance, for the 3D printed guns, indeed, they are still using conventional ammunition.

**Narrator**

So, I asked Leon what he thinks of 3D printed firearms today – are they likely to replace conventional firearms for organised crime?

**Leon, Europol Expert**

I can give a short answer to that. We have some but little information on the use of 3D weapons in the criminal context. I cannot say any more about that, I think. And although we are aware that they are illegally trafficked, the larger organised crime gangs which we are focusing on at Europol - of course - they still prefer the conventional firearms so far.

Not saying that it's not happening, that criminals produce and use these weapons, for instance, in the drug scene, but for now, like I said, the bigger OCGs still, they prefer the conventional ones.

**Narrator**

So, 3D weapons, when it comes to crime, are more suited to the needs of terrorists than say typical organised crime groups. They just aren't reliable enough for the types of groups that regularly need to show force against rivals. At least, not yet.

However, for a one-off extremist attack, a 3D printed weapon, is likely a more suitable choice. It's harder to trace, doesn't cost much, and there's no need to try and befriend an arms trafficker – who may not sympathise with your plans for starting a race war and bringing society down.

Let's go back to Finland, and find out how Tuomas took action against the terrorist cell we were listening in on at the start of the episode.

## TAKING ACTION AGAINST A TERRORIST CELL

**Narrator**

The extremist group in Finland followed the logic we just discussed, and were mainly producing their own weapons instead of trying to buy conventional firearms illegally. And so, the four members had individual roles to this end.

**Tuomas, Finnish Detective**

There were four suspects there, they had different types of roles where one was building, the other took part in getting the AR 15 launching mechanisms. Third was using the firearm and participating in dialogue, and the fourth was supplying ammunition, rifle and participating in dialogue. I would describe the fourth person, sort of a father figure when it comes to planning different types of actions. For example, towards the ideological enemies.

**Narrator**

And what was the nature of the conversation between these four extremists?

**Tuomas, Finnish Detective**

They discussed a lot of things, especially on the bilateral conversations. They would reveal their acceptance of the use of violence to further their own ideological goals. So, they were discussing about planning attacks towards people and infrastructure on people that were left wing-politics, immigrants and also Finnish parliament.

**Narrator**

For example, a prominent political figure was planning to visit a party office at a square near the suspects' location.

**Tuomas, Finnish Detective**

And they were discussing how they should go there, but they decided not to go because there would be police present.

**Narrator**

The group were manufacturing weapons to be used in one of these attacks – against a person, a politician, or demographic they did not like. As well as human targets, they also discussed infrastructure targets too.

**Tuomas, Finnish Detective**

And while those plans about infrastructure, there were like railways, electricity network, water supply, that type of things. And typically, it would be some sort of a guerrilla or a lone wolf type of that they would use. They used to do those and actually, we have a photo where two of the suspects visit a water pressure boosting pump, which they found in part of a forest.

They took their picture. So that's how we know they were there. And so, it showed how they would be able to build a thermite bomb or cut down the railways or something like that.

**Narrator**

This extremist cell was firmly on the radar of the Finnish Police. They were manufacturing 3D printed weapons that could be used in a major attack, and they were discussing all kinds of options for who, what and where they could strike. This is a serious terrorist threat.

**Tuomas, Finnish Detective**

Our main suspect was a bit under 30 years old man who lived in Lahti, which is a city in the southern part of Finland, and our main suspect was the actual builder of those firearms. During our investigation, mainly from the evidence we got from device searches, we got more knowledge of their discussions and their ideology.

**Narrator**

After long nights poring over criminal data, Tuomas as chief investigator had built up a picture of the four suspects. As well as the violent ideology, and the discussion of targets, analysis showed that the firearms threat was real.

**Tuomas, Finnish Detective**

Well, I would say we were building on small pieces and our investigation began through our intelligence; different types of information requests and long-term information gathering. So, we started on those.

**Narrator**

But this is a whole new area of crime. This was the first case of its kind for the Finnish police. So Tuomas and the Finnish authorities had to make sure the law was clear first.

**Tuomas, Finnish Detective**

Those indicated that two of our later suspects might have something to do with manufacturing those firearms. Then we had to look at the next legislative state regarding on all firearms.

We needed to prove that they were actually working to make those firearms work. Because if you have illegal thought, then you don't have a crime case. So, we have to make sure that we are they are doing some kind of crime related activities. And of course, our target was that we could show that it was an aggravated firearms offense they were making.

So, which meant that we really should have to be we should show that they were making ten or more or they were manufacturing particularly dangerous weapon. So those were the two options for us.

**Narrator**

Thankfully for the investigation, the intelligence showed the threat of an attack was real and that these were indeed dangerous weapons.

**Tuomas, Finnish Detective**

And after we started our investigation and when we were sure that they had a functioning firearm. We were able to make two arrests of those two suspects and after through their device searches, we were able to reveal two other suspects.

**Narrator**

By August 2022, the four suspects were successfully identified and apprehended by the Finnish police.

**Tuomas, Finnish Detective**

There were four people, all male, most of them were under thirties and the fourth suspect was a bit older, nearly 60. And while the group was gathered through common ideological bases, they are, I believe that they have met in the far-right gatherings or by through each other.

**Narrator**

The Finnish authorities learned more about the extremist ideology the four subscribed to, and the literature behind their views. Books such as the Turner Diaries, a neo-Nazi book from the 1970s, featured prominently. The suspects were preparing for something known in far-right circles as 'the day of the rope'.

**Tuomas, Finnish Detective**

Day of the Rope, is the day when the race war starts or something movement that starts then day of the rope comes to those who oppose them, who have a different type of ideology, who are their enemies and such, and is that very come from.

**Narrator**

And during the arrest, all the manufactured weapons were seized.

**Tuomas, Finnish Detective**

We confiscated four. One of which was still under construction. And I believe that we were able to confiscate all of those weapons that our suspect made. He also made up one homemade cheap gun. It just kind of looks like a small pipe.

And also, we confiscated a lot of ammunition and that sort of thing over, if I remember correctly, about 1400 9-millimetre cartridges. And also .22 cartridges. Well, not as many.

**Narrator**

There was one classic firearm, a rifle with some rounds, but the rest of the seized weapons were homemade, 3D printed firearms. The four men had the capability – and extremist ideology – to carry out a horrific attack on innocent civilian targets. And this is where the case would end, but one of our would-be terrorists had other ideas.

**Tuomas, Finnish Detective**

Also, this case was kind of a two-part investigation because this, our first case where I was leading the investigation had a continuation, because our main suspect continued building weapons basically right after the release from our first pretrial investigation.

**Narrator**

You'd think if you were arrested for planning a terror attack and building illegal firearms in your home, you'd give up. But the main suspect wanted to keep printing and sharing far-right material, even while they were on release pending trial for their first round of crimes. He even entered satanic forums, moving onto even more extreme literature than he'd been looking at before.

**Tuomas, Finnish Detective**

That suspect continued sharing ideological material online. Some of that public and some of them on closed groups. But the main thing was he ordered a new 3D printer, educated himself more on 3D firearms and continued manufacturing those weapons. This time he was building his own model, which was his version of fully automatic model of a firearm, and he was taken into custody again before he was able to complete that fully automatic model firearm.

**Narrator**

The suspect was so radicalised, so desperate to continue planning for their deluded fantasies about the 'day of the rope', that they kept going. They were even making their own 3D printed weapon designs. This led to further charges, and eventually all four suspects were sent to trial, and sentenced.

**Tuomas, Finnish Detective**

Our investigations led to the conviction of three suspects on terroristic offenses. And this is the first case in Finnish crime history for a terroristic offense related on far-right ideology and extremists.

**Narrator**

Three of the four were sentenced for terroristic offences, and one of them also got hit with the firearms offences. The main suspect was jailed for a little over three years, with the accomplices receiving slightly shorter sentences.

And where was Europol in all this?

**Tuomas, Finnish Detective**

Well, Europol came to investigate this and they offered us help and we were glad to take it. And especially on, analytics and international information sharing and gathering those information. Did our suspect have any international counterparts or friends abroad? So, in that specific Europol was very much of help to us and, and it was a pleasure doing business with Europol and I believe that this was because this was the first. But certainly, it won't it will not be last case that we will need the help of Europol.

# 3D WEAPONS AND INTERNATIONAL TERRORIST GROUPS

**Alan, Europol**

Well, prior to my time at Europol, I was working for the special units in Belgium, Federal Police. I started my police career in 1995. So actually, talking to a very old man here.

**Narrator**

The European Counter Terrorism Centre, one of Europol's five operational directorates, looks at all kinds of extremism.

**Alan, Europol**

My name is Alan. I'm a senior specialist and I'm in charge of the team who's working exclusively on the violent right-wing extremism in right-wing terrorism.

**Narrator**

When a right-wing terrorism case like this Finnish one comes to Europol, Alan and his team will be the ones ready to take it on.

Allan's portfolio also covers extremism that falls under left-wing, animal rights, incels, and groupings like that.

For the Finnish case, Allan's team in ECTC (the European Counter Terrorism Centre) worked in partnership with the IRU (the Internet Referral Unit). You might remember them from our earlier episode, countering online terrorist propaganda. Go listen to it if you haven't already.

**Alan, Europol**

Actually, it is the EU IRU who is responsible for initiating this investigation because, they monitor terrorist content online and they were also notified by third partner that there was a suspicious profile.

**Narrator**

The IRU monitors the web for extremist content that should be removed – things that glorify violence, the most serious kinds of content. They then make 'referrals' to the host or online service provider, who act on the referral and remove the content. And the IRU found content being posted by one of the Finnish suspects.

**Alan, Europol**

And because they are responsible for the referrals so they take of the content because it's terrorist content, and they identified the suspects residing in Finland. So, they send out Sienna to Finland if they were allowed to take this content offline.

**Narrator**

And that's where the weapons came in:

**Another person**

Finland replied to the SIENA requests from EU IRU that they had an ongoing case on this specific person of interest residing in Finland. What was so interesting about this case is that this user on this platform was disseminating manuals on how to manufacture 3D printed weapons.

**Narrator**

Alan and his team got to work supporting the Finnish authorities.

**Alan, Europol**

So, Finland sent us the suspects and they provided us the selectors. So, what they do is they give us the names of the people of interest as much as selected as possible, so it can go from user accounts to telephone numbers to email accounts, whatever is needed. And then they request us to cross checks. These cross checks were done by our analysts who already left, which I still look up to. He was also from Finnish background, and he took complete responsibility of this case. He found very interesting links with other ongoing cases that we were supporting for other member states.

**Narrator**

What does Alan mean by cross-checks?

**Alan, Europol**

So, Finland's they provide these selectors as we call them, and when we look at these selectors, we compare it to every operation, every data that we hold in our database that we received from other ongoing cases or cases that's already been closed. As soon as we have a link and the better, the more unique the selector is, the more clear the outcome will be for the requesting member states.

So as soon as we see in our database that there is a link with another case, we disseminate it to the requesting Member State.

**Narrator**

With cross-checks complete and relevant links found, the analysis was then ready to be actioned on back in Finland.

**Alan, Europol**

These links were provided immediately back to Finland and Finland to start digging deeper into the interesting links that were found, because there were links with Atomwaffen Division, but also with "the order of the nine angles" and with terrorgram, which is also a neo-Nazi collective responsible for indoctrinating youngsters via telegram.

**Narrator**

The analysis connected the persons of interest with multiple fringe groups – neo-nazi groups such as the Atomwaffen division, and Satanist movements such as the order of the nine angles. Since Allan is an expert on terrorist groups and their motivations, here he is to explain some of the core components of the suspects' beliefs.

**Alan, Europol**

Siege is actually a subculture within the neo-Nazi and white supremacist scene. And the siege culture is an outcome of collected letters written by James Mason, who is the founder of well, well, who's actually the founder of the Siege book.

So, what it stands for actually, according to James Mason and also Charles Manson, there is no political solution for what's happening. So, they want to collapse the system and that's what they stand for out of this.

**Narrator**

And then there are subcultures within right-wing extremism that take varying approaches to this position.

**Alan, Europol**

Some divisions popped up like, for example, Atomwaffen Division and Fueurkreig division, Sonnekreig and division Rapewaffen division, all sorts of divisions who endorse the accelerationism. So, this accelerationism is a way of thinking of people believing in the siege culture, and it's already within the words accelerate. They want to accelerate society to be collapse as soon as possible, and they want to go for a total race war in which the final outcome to have like the only one survivor, is the Aryan race.

**Narrator**

Alan and his team work a lot of cases that look at right-wing extremists with this kind of ideology. And, like with the Finnish case, he's seeing more of these 3D printed weapons show up in their investigations:

**Alan, Europol**

I'm going to say not every case that we deal with in the violent right-wing extremism is linked to 3D printed weapons, but many cases are. The only thing you need is like a 3D printer that you can buy on Amazon or AliExpress or whatever the metal parts that are needed for the 3D printer.

**Narrator**

When it comes to right-wing extremism in particular, Allan has observed a growing interest in homemade, 3D printed firearms.

**Alan, Europol**

And recently we also did our annual meeting. So, we invite all our members to come over and then during the tour de table they also discussed that they see the increase of people interested in 3D printed weapons. So, it's also flagged by the Member States.

It's these manuals on how to print weapons are they are massively going around in these accelerationism scenes in a telegram scene so they're a big fan of it. But you also need to know that freedom fighters in Myanmar with nothing to do with right-wing. They're also using these weapons. We don't have the tunnel vision because we do look to what's happening in the jihadism spectrum or in the left-wing spectrum. It's just obvious that these accelerationists are a big fan, so for us, if somebody will use it, most likely it will be one of the right-wingers.

**Narrator**

As you might imagine, in our modern, online and connected world, the extremist groups on Alan's radar are increasingly connected and overlapping. And while this helps them organise and spread their ideology, it also helps law enforcement spot and neutralise international extremist networks.

**Alan, Europol**

What the interesting thing is that, every case that's been contributed by us never stands alone. We see these international links, these international dimensions, these divisions who are connected to each other. These pan-European networks. So, we're connecting the dots. And it's really interesting to see that one case can open up another case or one case can be of an added value for the investigators to bring it to court.

## WRAPPING UP

**Narrator**

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