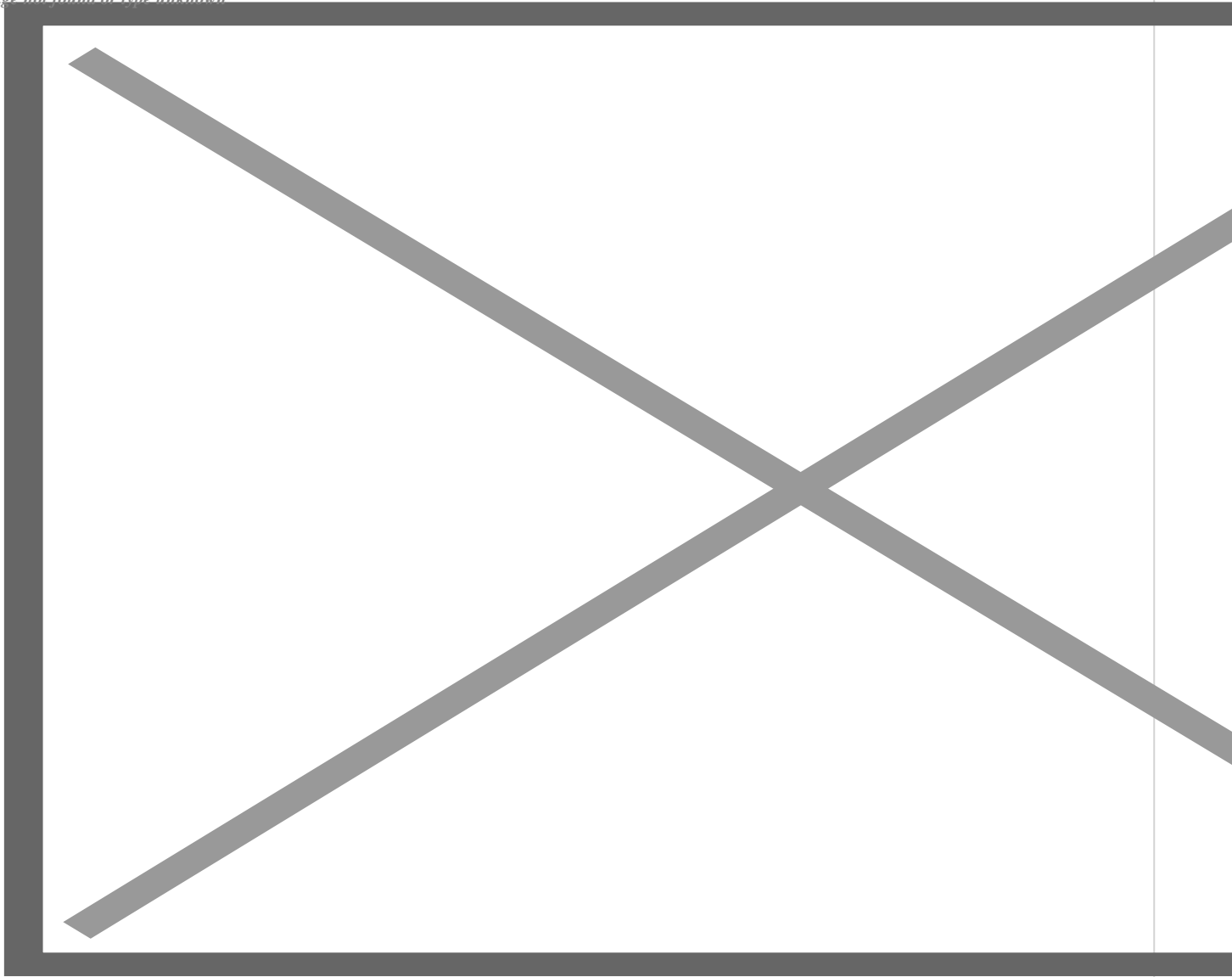


Austrian police seize weapons intended for German far right

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Five men aged 21 to 53 with links to neo-Nazi groups were arrested in Austria. (Photo: BMI/Austrian Interior Ministry/AFP)

Vienna, December 12 (RHC)-- The Austrian police have seized a huge cache of automatic weapons, explosives and hand grenades intended to arm far-right "extremist" groups in Germany. Austrian Interior Minister Karl Nehammer said on Saturday five men aged 21 to 53 with links to neo-Nazi groups were arrested following a series of house searches.

"We have struck a massive blow against the right-wing extremist scene in Austria and organised crime, and how they are connected," Nehammer told a news conference in the capital, Vienna. The weapons were to be used to "establish a far-right network" in Germany with the goal of attacking society, democracy and basic freedoms, Nehammer said.

The raids were carried out as part of an investigation initially into a drug-related crime, but officers also uncovered links between far-right groups and organized crime, the minister said. The raids led to the seizure of 25 semiautomatic and fully automatic weapons, believed to have been bought with the proceeds of drug trafficking, said Michael Mimra from the state criminal police office in Vienna.

The haul included Uzi sub-machine guns, AK-47 assault rifles, Scorpion machineguns and ammunition, Mimra said. More weapons and ammunition were seized on Thursday, while more than 100,000 rounds of ammunition were found in a warehouse in Lower Austria.

Overall, 76 automatic and semiautomatic weapons were recovered, along with 14 handguns and ammunition and six hand grenades, as well as detonators and explosives. Some had been packed for transport. Investigations in Germany meanwhile had led to two arrests and the seizure of a large quantity of drugs, Mimra said.

Investigators are now trying to establish the origin of the weapons, with forensic examinations under way to see if they have been used in crimes. "The investigation has only just begun," Mimra said. "It will last a while."

In October, Austrian investigators began to track drug deliveries from Germany and discovered that the profits were being used to buy arms.

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