Latino Gangs in Catalonia: Latest Police Operations Expose Extent of the Problem, Signal Policy Shift

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Last year was witness to three police operations against gangs in Catalonia, targeting the Latin Kings, the Mara Salvatrucha (MS13), and the Bloods. Coming after a period of intense immigration from Latin America and attempts by authorities to engage some of the gangs by treating them as cultural youth movements, they may provide the necessary perspective to reflect on the extent to which gangs are present, their roles and deeds, including criminal activities, and the future direction policy may take. While providing data of interest to the comparative researcher, such an overview can also be of interest to practitioners, given Catalonia's strategic location at a key geographical juncture in South-Western Europe.

Since December 2011, the Mossos d'Esquadra (Catalan police force) have carried out five large-scale anti-gang operations, involving the arrest of 102 alleged members.

The purpose of this paper is to briefly describe the mentioned three operations, as well as recent current policy shift following the perceived failure of the move to turn the Latin Kings and the Ñetas into legal youth associations.

Operation “Guillotina” Against the Latin Kings

On 11 March 2014, the Mossos d'Esquadra arrested 30 alleged members of the “Almighty Latin Kings Nation” (ALKN) faction of the Latin Kings, in operation “Guillotina”, supervised by Barcelona's Investigative Court Number 9. This included three of the faction’s four main leaders, the fourth being already in prison. Eight other suspects had already been arrested in earlier stages of the operation, and overall 57 people were investigated. Catalan police consider the ALKN to be among the most violent Latino gangs in the country, and, following this operation, believe this faction to have been “decapitated”.

The ALKN members charged stand accused of belonging to a criminal organization, assault, obstruction of justice, drug trafficking, arms dealing, twelve counts of burglary, and armed robbery. The operation was launched in May 2013, and centered on ascertaining the ALKN’s criminal activities in the whole of the Kingdom of Spain, managed from the Barcelona conurbation. One of the events prompting it was the arrest in Ecuador of a member of the Latin Kings, caught with 4.1 kilograms of cocaine which he intended to take to Spain. Shortly afterward, another gang member was arrested carrying 9 kilograms of cocaine, this time in Madrid's Barajas Airport. The latter was among the main suspects, and he was in charge of choosing candidates to work as couriers transporting drugs, known as “mules”. It was at that stage that the
Mossos d’Esquadra found out that they were facing “a criminal enterprise mostly made up of people of Latin American heritage, among them nationals of Ecuador, Uruguay, Bolivia, and Spain, organized in a pyramidal structure under a strict hierarchy and an allocation of roles, devoted to different criminal activities, and with an ample presence throughout Spanish territory”. The group employed the label “Latin Kings” as cover for an alleged defense of Latino culture and values, but the investigation exposed this as a pretext to engage in a wide range of crimes, including international drug trafficking, illegal possession of fire arms, and assault and robbery. In addition, the ALKN “systematically” resorted to violence “in order to keep group cohesion”, while also employing force against rival gangs.[v] The ALKN is one of three known Latin King factions active in Catalonia, together with ALKQN (Almighty Latin kings and Queen Nation), which includes women,[vi] and “Unión de Culturas” (Union of Cultures). According to Captain Jordi Bascompte, head of the Criminal Investigations Division, “the three are ruled by the same overall values and ideology” and they stand in conflict “over territorial hegemony, in connection to drug trafficking mainly”. Bascompte also believes that it is common for the three factions to engage in “caídas” (drops), that is incursions into rival territory.[vii]

The leader of the ALKN, whose formal title was “Inca supremo de la nación” (Supreme Inca of the Nation) turned to be a 32-year-old Barcelona-based Spanish national born in Catalonia, known as “Babywhite”.[viii] who quickly climbed up the gang’s ladder following his marriage to the sister of one of the leaders of the Latin Kings in Ecuador, known as King Majestic.[ix] At age 23, after marrying, he set up the ALKN faction. Babywhite's wife was also arrested on 11 March.[xi] Below him stood the so called “coronas supremas” (supreme crowns) or “bendecidos” (blessed), middle-ranking gang members who also held a management role and who employed violence to effectively control members of other Latin Kings factions, whom they labeled “torcidos” (wayward). The Mossos d’Esquadra believe that the ALKN’s ultimate goal was to achieve “supremacy” in drug trafficking, including control over the territories they were active in, and in particular a monopoly on the retail sale of narcotics in leisure districts with night clubs. The gang was also very active in Catalan prisons,[x] and took advantage of the large number of members serving long sentences to introduce drugs there. This did not prevent them from engaging in other criminal activities if they saw the potential to make a profit, though. The ALKN was present in Catalonia (Barcelona conurbation and Girona, not far from the French border) and controlled a number of “reinos” (kingdoms) in Madrid, the Balearic Islands, Valencia, Murcia (South-Eastern Spain), and Andalusia.[xii] One of the leading ALKN members arrested was Frank Koster, who lived in Salt, near Girona. The Mossos d'Esquadra found him in a flat where he had been living for two weeks, sharing a room with a couple and a girl. According to sources close to the operation, Koster was a hairdresser by training and worked in Girona. He almost never left his room, going only to a nearby bar to buy tobacco. Officers seized his laptop and some documents, which may contain evidence of his connections to the gang's top leadership.[xiii]

Concerning the cross-border movement of drugs, the ALKN did not just employ mules, but also innocent Spain-bound people who were given shoes or other objects filled with drugs, which the gang collected on arrival. These people traveled with the narcotics, unaware of what they were carrying.[xiv]

On 11 March 2014 the Mossos d’Esquadra completed the operation with a number of search and entries, seizing five handguns, long guns (including a shotgun), large knives, drugs, chemicals to cut drugs, many documents, stolen jewelry, and gang merchandise. Two of the searched homes contained marihuana plantations.[xv] These search and entries involved a large number of police officers and different specialized units of the Mossos d'Esquadra, including the elite GEI (Special Intervention Group) and dog units to look for drugs.[xvi]

Operation “Cruasán” Against the Mara Salvatrucha
On 25 March, Spain’s Civil Guard arrested 35 members of the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13). Operation “Cruasán” took place in Madrid, Alacant (Alicante), and the Catalan provinces of Barcelona, Girona, and Tarragona, involving 28 search and entries. The arrested, aged 17 to 25, were nationals of Salvador, Romania, Ecuador, Spain, Bolivia, Honduras, Pakistan, Bulgaria, and Morocco, and officers seized a large amount of knives, simulated firearms, drugs, documents, and computer equipment. 13 of the arrests took place in Catalonia, 11 in Barcelona Province, one in Girona (bordering France), and one in Tarragona (home to a major port), and sources in the Civil Guard stressed that this was the first operation against the maras in Europe. In Girona Province, the arrested was 20-year-old Keni Sosa Mandariaga, from Honduras, considered to be in charge of one of the “clicas”. He lived in Salt, a town near the city of Girona, where the Mossos d'Esquadra had arrested Frank Koster, a member of the ALKN, on 11 March of that same year.

This was the first Civil Guard operation against the MS-13, which according to this police force “is trying to settle in Spain”. It began to investigate in late 2012, following a knife attack against a South American citizen in Alacant Harbor, prompting a few arrests and the start of the mentioned operation. The 35 alleged MS-13 members stand accused of a wide range of crimes, including membership in a criminal organization, drug trafficking, robbery, and assault. They were part of a “perfectly hierarchical pyramidal structure” with a leader heading each “clica” or provincial cell, under a Spain-wide committee, with communications between the two levels taking place through intermediaries. The members of each “clica” lived in the same quarter and also had a hierarchical structure.

**Operation Magnum Against the Bloods**

On 6 March 2014, the Mossos d’Esquadra arrested 25 members of the Bloods gang, culminating Operation Magnum. The gang’s main activities were drug trafficking and robbery, and five of the arrested, believed to be its leaders, were remanded without bail. The operation was undertaken by the Kidnappings and Extortions Central Unit, part of the Central Investigation (Persons) Department.

The Mossos d’Esquadra started investigating the Bloods (a violent youth gang) in 2009, after two members killed a third, who was trying to leave the group, with a modified fire arm. Both were arrested and are currently serving time. In line with similar gangs, the Bloods were organized in smaller groups called “bloques” (blocks). In Catalonia, the largest is based in Sant Boi de Llobregat (south of Barcelona, near the capital), with others “bloques” active in towns like L’Hospitalet de Llobregat (Barcelona conurbation), which has two, in Can Serra and Torrassa quarters. Authorities consider the Bloods to be a criminal organization, since its main activities comprise drug dealing, robbery, and burglary, while also being responsible for extortion and false imprisonment. It is seen as one of the most violent gangs active in Catalonia, since a number of members have been sentenced to prison terms as authors of homicides and other blood crimes. The Bloods resort to violence both against members wishing to leave and against rival gangs, in a bid to preserve what they consider to be their territory.

Operation Magnum proceeded under the supervision of Sant Boi de Llobregat Investigative Court Number 4, until on 6 March 2014 the Mossos d’Esquadra carried out 13 search and entries in a number of towns in Baix Llobregat County (south of Barcelona, comprising the city’s main airport). 10 members were not located and the court issued arrest warrants. Police seized three handguns, a long gun, a speargun, a large amount of knives, 3.5 kilograms of marijuana, cocaine, and two plantations of cannabis (with a total of 280 plants). Following the 25 arrests, Catalan Interior Minister Ramon Espadaler considered the gang to have been effectively dismantled, while stressing the need to be “cautious”.

**Repression Versus Integration: Towards a Different Policy Mix?**

On 24 March 2014, Manel Prat, then director general for police at the Generalitat (Catalan Government),
explained that “in the last few years, we have detected an evolution in the way these groups work, meaning they have come to be more active in committing crimes, namely drug trafficking, arms dealing, extortion, assault, burglary, and robbery”. As a result, authorities have been forced to try a different tack “in order to minimize their impact on society”. In terms of police action, in December 2011 the Generalitat's Directorate General for the Police decided to put these matters in the hands of the General Department for Criminal Investigations.[xxviii] Previously, Catalan Police had focused on gathering as much information as possible about Latino gangs, following them “closely” in order to learn about their behavior.[xxix] Prat explained that up to that point, the main problems involved “anti-social behavior, the use of public spaces, and disputes among groups” over the control of territory, with police failing to detect “any move to criminal activities”. [xxx] However, Prat added, from March 2012 the Mossos d'Esquadra started to investigate Latino gangs as criminal organizations, not youth gangs, since police found out that they had gone one step up in terms of criminal activities and started to devote themselves to drug trafficking, robberies, and extortion. Operations against the Black Panthers, Bloods, and the AKLN followed.[xxxi]

**Early Gang Presence and the Original Policy of Legalization and Social Integration**

The Latin Kings were first detected in 2002, with both the Mossos d'Esquadra and Barcelona Local Police drafting reports on the group.[xxxii] In 2006, following two years of negotiations and meetings with the Catalan Government,[xxxiii] they were legalized and recognized as a cultural association, at which time they split into the above mentioned three factions. Most Latin Kings were from Ecuador, although they have gradually incorporated members from other countries, and developed some links with the United States.[xxxiv] Barcelona City Council was the driving force behind the policy, having pushed, since November 2004, for the Latin King's conversion into a legally-recognized association. After contacting their leadership, the local council sponsored the process and provided advice to the Latin Kings concerning the drafting of the association's bylaws.[xxxv] It considered that this was justified since neither the Latin Kings nor the Ñetas had committed any serious crimes in Catalonia.[xxxvi] The city council commissioned a report from anthropologist Carles Feixa, with input also from New York-based priest Luis Barrios, considered to be an international representative and spiritual guide for Latino gangs.[xxxvii] Josep Maria Lahosa, crime prevention director at Barcelona City Council, said that the “normalization” of Latino gangs contributed to lessening urban violence and preventing violent incidents. Lahosa, who was in charge of the procedure to legalize these gangs explained that “the fact that they socially integrate and that they engage in relations with our institutions makes a violent explosion less likely, although we cannot rule it out completely”. [xxxviii]

When the legal recognition of the association by the Generalitat was announced, then acting Mayor Jordi Portabella explained that the procedure had been “successful” and “with few precedents in Europe and the World”, and expressed his satisfaction at seeing a “spontaneously-born group end up getting involved in the city” while “those aspects not in accordance with its surroundings ended up being redressed”. Portabella explained that after detecting a group of young people “carrying out unknown activities, since it came from another continent”, the local council had deployed a team of sociologists and street educators in order to consider the possible incorporation of an association enabling the Latin Kings to “defend their ideas … without losing their identity” while “bringing together and providing an outlet to the young people who may feel attracted” towards them. He labeled the initiative “an excellent precedent”, making it possible to “redirect those spontaneous groups of young people who are restless and do not know how to channel those feelings”, adding that the solution was to employ “a properly constituted entity, where there is respect for their identity”. Portabella also praised the Latin Kings' leaders for their “bravery” in “taking a step forward, not self-segregating, and accepting the rules”, given that “these processes are not easy” since they “involve a long and deep conversation which can feature internal dissent”.[xxxix]
The decision by the Catalan Government to formally recognize the Latin Kings as a cultural association in 2006, inscribing them in the relevant registry, was never free from controversy. It was presented as an attempt to socially integrate the gang's members, avoiding a cycle of repression and marginalization. Under the name “Associació Organització Cultural de Reyes y Reinas Latinos de Catalunya” (Catalan Latin Kings and Queens Cultural Organization Association), they held their public presentation in September that year in Barcelona, at an event where chairwoman Melody Jaramillo (AKA “Queen Melody”), whose legal name seems to be “Erika Jaramillo” explained that all members had agreed to turn the Latin Kings community into an association. In her address, she stressed that the birth of the association proved that “there is a willingness on the part of Latino youngsters to build a future” and “spread human rights and favor the integration of all immigrants.” Jaramillo underlined that “we have never considered ourselves to be a gang”, complaining that “in society's eyes, our name has constantly been discriminated against”, forcing them to give up the name “Latin Kings” and resort instead to “Catalan Latin Kings and Queens Organization”. According to Jaramillo, the association had some 200 members, with no splinter groups refusing to join. With regard to entry criteria, she emphasized that there were no restrictions concerning age or national origin, and that members included some native Catalans, although the largest portion was from Ecuador.

The Legalization of the Ñetas, in the Wake of the Latin Kings

A similar decision was taken months later with the “Ñetas” under the name “Asociación Sociocultural, Deportiva y Musical de Ñetas” (Socio-Cultural, Sports, and Musical Ñetas Association). Using the nom de guerre “Sagat Torres”, the Ñetas leader in Catalonia and chairman of the association explained in February 2007 that its purpose was to improve the standards of living of young Latin Americans in Catalonia, fighting exclusion, and organizing training courses to bring them into the skilled labor market. He added “we would also like to work for the benefit of those imprisoned, but this, anyway, would be further into the future. We shall try to work with the oppressed inside and outside prisons”.

At that time the Ñetas were considered to have some 500 members in Catalonia, according to their leaders. In order to legally register their association, the Generalitat demanded details about its members, which the New York-based gang's leaders rejected. Speaking from the United States, the Ñetas' international spokesman, Jaime Rivera, explained “we support the process in Barcelona, but we do not agree at all to provide details about our boys. We do not consider it prudent at all to have the Catalan Government hold information about some Ñetas who may currently be undocumented immigrants or may have committed mistakes in the past”. On the other hand, “Sagat Torres” stated that he considered it unlikely that street fights would take place between Ñetas and Latin Kings, saying “this will not happen again, at least in Catalonia, although I do not know whether it will not happen in Madrid either. What may take place are fights with Spanish skinheads”.

Nightlife and Parks and Other Public Spaces as the Most Likely Venues for Violence

When the legalization of the Ñetas was announced, gang expert Carles Feixa explained that most fights used to erupt when leaving night clubs and at parks and squares, being “regular components in almost all clashes among these young people”. He added that alcohol was usually the “fatal ingredient” in such fights.

Concerning the use of public spaces, in 2007 “Sagat Torres” said “we are now informing the Mossos d'Esquadra of which square we will be in”. He explained that previously police had been able to pursue Ñetas simply because they belonged to the gang, complaining that they were harassed when meeting in public squares, adding that “now relations have significantly improved. Before, they arrived without any
qualm, pushed us against a wall, and persecuted us simply because of the way we dressed. After this normalization process we tell the Mossos d'Esquadra which square we will be in, so that they do not bother us”.[xliv]

The Failure of Legalization

Despite the significant political capital invested by both Barcelona City Council and the Catalan Government, subsequent developments, including some incidents, prompted a reconsideration of this policy of legalization and engagement. In November 2007, for example, the chairwoman of the “Catalan Latin Kings and Queens Cultural Organization” denied before the media that members of the association had threatened Sergi Xavier Martín, a young man who had threatened and assaulted an Ecuador-born minor in a train, in an attack recorded by security cameras.[li] On 10 June 2008 representatives of both the Latin Kings and the Ñetas testified for the first time in hearings before the Catalan Parliament's Youth Affairs Committee, denying that they were criminal enterprises and defending their work in the social and cultural arenas since their legalization. At those hearings, Erika Jaramillo explained that the “Catalan Latin Kings and Queens Cultural Organization” had some 200 members, not all of them Latin Kings, and denied that their activities were “criminal”, adding “we cannot provide details about all the trouble involving Latino young people in the world. We can answer for our young members”. [lii] 2008 was the year when Latino gangs gained the most notoriety and featured for the first time in newspaper frontpages, following the murder on 28 October of Ronny Tapia.[lii]

By 2012, experts and associations considered the Catalan Government and the Barcelona City Council to have left behind this attempt to formally recognize and engage some gangs. In April that year, a newspaper report noted that both the Latin Kings and the Ñetas associations still appeared in the Generalitat's registry of associations, but that the contact details in that registry were no longer current. A call to the Ñetas' cell phone was answered by a “Spanish national” who was “shocked when asked about that gang”. [liii] On the other hand, the Latin King’s “alleged” telephone number was that of Fedelatina[liv], an umbrella organization bringing together Latin-American associations in Catalonia. Fedelatina admitted that it was “difficult to locate the representatives” of the Latin Kings.[lv] The article considered that these difficulties in contacting them proved how “step by step, the cultural associations into which, sponsored by Barcelona City Council, the two big Latino gangs were converted, have gradually ended up as an empty shell”. This view was confirmed by Carles Feixa, a social anthropology professor at Lleida University, who carried out the study on which the procedure to convert the gangs into associations was based. Feixa explained that “although they remain in existence, their role is no longer hegemonic”, adding that “at first, this legalization was useful to cut down conflict leanings a lot. However, it was later abandoned. Public administrations believed that legalization was the goal, whereas it was actually nothing more than the first step. It was necessary to keep working. However, from that moment on no further research is being conducted”. This professor believes that a social approach is necessary, and that “we cannot allow this issue to be approached only by the Mossos d'Esquadra. We are talking about 15 or 16-year old boys. There is a great deal of social work that one can do with them. A prevention and mediation work. However, the amount done is not enough. Having said that, the prevention work carried out to date by the Mossos d'Esquadra has worked out”. Feixa also warned that the current financial crisis made this social work more important than ever, since “the families of many of these boys have seen their situation become even more precarious due to the crisis”. [lv]

Javier Bonomi, chairman of Fedelatina, also criticized the change in policy, complaining that “the social approach towards those boys has disappeared”, which in his view “is a pity, because Barcelona was a pioneer in a social approach that was working”. Bonomi explained that many mediation projects and cultural and sports integration initiatives concerning these young people “have been abandoned”. In his
view, such initiatives, which ranged from sports events to music projects, made it possible “to have a retaining wall against violence, providing these youngsters with a road map to integration”.[lvii]

Faced with these accusations, sources in the Barcelona City Council denied that social projects had been abandoned, saying “the City Council is working as in previous years concerning these phenomena. The logic is the same: if we can act from a social perspective, we act. If what we have is a deed amounting to a crime, what must be done is to apply the criminal code”. The same sources explained that the social projects remained in place, with “on the ground mediators active in their milieus” and “sports activities”, as well as the “action protocol with the Generalitat’s Interior and Education Ministries, designed to detect conflict situations in educational centers”.[lviii]

Thus, while efforts to promote the social inclusion of existing and potential members remain in place, we can observe a hardening of attitudes, with greater stress on police operations. This is not necessarily seen as a failure of the original policy, with some voices stressing that it enabled the collection of intelligence. [lix]

Gang Presence in Catalonia Today

In the spring of 2014 the Latin Kings had 900 members in Catalonia.[lx] According to police sources, members, of different nationalities, pay a monthly fee of between 5 and 10 euros to gang leaders. Female members devote themselves to attracting new recruits, and lay down honey traps when it is necessary to beat a member as a punishment.[lxi]

Other Latino gangs present in Catalonia, against which police operations have taken place in recent years, include the “Trinitarios” (2012, 12 arrested), Black Panthers (2013, 30 arrested), and the above discussed Bloods (2014, 25 arrested).[lxii] in addition to the “Ñetas”. According to 2013 statistics, all these gangs taken together have some 2,500 members.[lxiii]

In Girona, the presence of members of Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Mara M-18 was first detected in 2008, with the appearance of some graffiti, considered to be markers of the gang's settlement. These graffiti originated after the murder of Wilson Félix Cabrera (a youngster from the Dominican Republic) by Nelson Giovanny Rivera (a youngster from Honduras) in front of a disco called “Enjoy Latino”. Rivera employed a “chilena” (home-made weapon), which his gang kept buried in one of the banks of the Ter River. This kind of weapon is typical among Latino gangs. When investigating the case, the Mossos d’Esquadra found out that at least two of the accomplices to the murder were linked to Mara M-18. Later, in 2012, more evidence of the presence of gangs was uncovered when, following a fire in a flat in the nearby town of Salt, local police found an arsenal of “chimbás” or “chilenas” (home-made weapons, typical among Latino gangs).[lxiv]

One of the police officers specialized in gangs, Lluis Paradell, explains in an interview that the decision not to use the term “Latino gang” was motivated by a wish not to taint whole immigrant communities with a negative expression, and that it has been vindicated by later experience, clear from the fact that “we have arrested people from more than 40 countries”, proving that “there are young people from almost all continents, and many native youth”. Paradell stresses that not all groups, or chapters, within a given brand or organization “what they call nations”, such as the Latin Kings, engage in criminal behavior, some merely bringing together young people. However, they are all of interest to the police, “above all from a prevention perspective, since it amounts to a significant risk factor that due to a mere change of leader of that chapter, or due to influence from surrounding people, for example the emergence of new groups … , they may move away from that posture and become a group that takes on a violent dynamic”.[lxv]
Conclusions

This paper is just an overview of the most significant police operations against Latino gangs in 2014 Catalonia, their current presence, and the policy shift away from the initial attempt at legalization and engagement, spearheaded by the Barcelona City Council and implemented by the Generalitat. It should not be taken as a comprehensive survey. Issues not dealt with here but significant for research on this topic include the social and family dynamics among immigrant communities, the impact of prison and other punitive institutions on gang members, and the possible interaction between Latino gangs and Islamist organizations.

The spring of 2014 saw three major counter-gang police operations take place in Catalonia, exposing the range of criminal activities by some Latino gangs. While this did not come as a surprise, the details to have emerged confirmed widespread views about their internal dynamics, including the most common weapons and the extensive resort to violence against their own members and those of rival groups, as well as the most significant forms of criminality they engage in. While the Catalan Government remains committed to a comprehensive approach to gang violence, featuring not only police investigations but also social and educational measures, law enforcement is likely to remain central to the public response to this form of organized violence. Catalonia's key geographical location means translates into extensive opportunities for organized crime to flourish, and therefore an additional responsibility to prevent it from taking root and having a negative impact on nearby territories.

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End Notes

[i] Increased in the wake of the Ukranian crisis by calls for the EU to diminish her dependence on Russian natural gas, which among others has prompted renewed interest in the Midcat pipeline project, connecting Spain (and her regasification plants) and France through Catalonia. The EU has recognized the Midcat as a “Project of Common Interest”, listed in “Project of Common Interest/Cluster of PCIs”, website of the European Commission, p. 48, available at http://ec.europa.eu/energy/infrastructure/pci/doc/2013_pci_projects_country.pdf

[ii] “La DGP anuncia un canvi d'estratègia en l'abordatge del fenomen de les bandes davant l'augment de l'activitat delictiva d'aquest grups”, 24 March 2014 press release by the Mossos d’Esquadra, website of the Catalan Government, available at http://www20.gencat.cat/portal/site/mossos/menuitem.b2ad9ea273248607aacf3010b0c0e1a0/?vgnextoid=a0d83ce0b5481310VgnVCM1000000b0c1e0aRCRD&vgnextfmt=detall&cod_noticia=255892&vgnextchannel=a0d83ce0b5481310VgnVCM1000000b0c1e0aRCRD

[iii] The operation involved 17 search and entries (in the following towns: Barcelona, l’Hospitalet de Llobregat, Montcada i Reixac, Sant Andreu de la Barca, Badalona, Santa Coloma de Gramenet, and Girona), and out of the 30 arrested 19 were charged by the court. “Ingressen a presó els quatre caps de la facció ALKN dels Latin Kings en el marc d'una operació que n'ha desmantellat l'estructura”, 24 March 2014 press release by the Mossos d’Esquadra, website of the Catalan Government, available at http://www20.gencat.cat/portal/site/mossos/menuitem.b2ad9ea273248607aacf3010b0c0e1a0/?vgnextoid=a0d83ce0b5481310VgnVCM1000000b0c1e0aRCRD

[iv] “Los Mossos descabezlan a los Latin Kings en Catalunya”, La Vanguardia, 11 March 2014,

[v] “Ingressen a presó els quatre caps de la fació ALKN dels Latin Kings en el marc d'una operació que n'ha desmantellat l'estructura”, 24 March 2014 press release by the Mossos d’Esquadra, website of the Catalan Government, available at http://www20.gencat.cat/portal/site/mossos/menuitem.b2ad9ea273248607aacf3010b0c0e1a0/?vgnextoid=a0d83ce0b5481310VgnVCM1000000b0c1e0aRCRD&vgnextfmt=detall&cod_noticia=255775&vgnextchannel=a0d83ce0b5481310VgnVCM1000000b0c1e0aRCRD


[vii] “La DGP anuncia un canvi d'estratègia en l'abordatge del fenomen de les bandes davant l'augment de l'activitat delictiva d'aquest grups”, 24 March 2014 press release by the Mossos d’Esquadra, website of the Catalan Government, available at http://www20.gencat.cat/portal/site/mossos/menuitem.b2ad9ea273248607aacf3010b0c0e1a0/?vgnextoid=a0d83ce0b5481310VgnVCM1000000b0c1e0aRCRD&vgnextfmt=detall&cod_noticia=255892&vgnextchannel=a0d83ce0b5481310VgnVCM1000000b0c1e0aRCRD

[viii] “Ingressen a presó els quatre caps de la fació ALKN dels Latin Kings en el marc d'una operació que n'ha desmantellat l'estructura”, 24 March 2014 press release by the Mossos d’Esquadra, website of the Catalan Government, available at http://www20.gencat.cat/portal/site/mossos/menuitem.b2ad9ea273248607aacf3010b0c0e1a0/?vgnextoid=a0d83ce0b5481310VgnVCM1000000b0c1e0aRCRD&vgnextfmt=detall&cod_noticia=255775&vgnextchannel=a0d83ce0b5481310VgnVCM1000000b0c1e0aRCRD

[ix] “La DGP anuncia un canvi d'estratègia en l'abordatge del fenomen de les bandes davant l'augment de l'activitat delictiva d'aquest grups”, 24 March 2014 press release by the Mossos d’Esquadra, website of the Catalan Government, available at http://www20.gencat.cat/portal/site/mossos/menuitem.b2ad9ea273248607aacf3010b0c0e1a0/?vgnextoid=a0d83ce0b5481310VgnVCM1000000b0c1e0aRCRD&vgnextfmt=detall&cod_noticia=255892&vgnextchannel=a0d83ce0b5481310VgnVCM1000000b0c1e0aRCRD


[xi] The Catalan Government manages prisons, being the only autonomous region in Spain to do so.

[xii] “Ingressen a presó els quatre caps de la fació ALKN dels Latin Kings en el marc d'una operació que n'ha desmantellat l'estructura”, 24 March 2014 press release by the Mossos d’Esquadra, website of the Catalan Government, available at http://www20.gencat.cat/portal/site/mossos/menuitem.b2ad9ea273248607aacf3010b0c0e1a0/?vgnextoid=a0d83ce0b5481310VgnVCM1000000b0c1e0aRCRD&vgnextfmt=detall&cod_noticia=255775&vgnextchannel=a0d83ce0b5481310VgnVCM1000000b0c1e0aRCRD


[xiv] “Ingressen a presó els quatre caps de la fació ALKN dels Latin Kings en el marc d'una operació que n'ha desmantellat l'estructura”, 24 March 2014 press release by the Mossos d’Esquadra, website of the Catalan Government, available at http://www20.gencat.cat/portal/site/mossos/menuitem.b2ad9ea273248607aacf3010b0c0e1a0/?vgnextoid=a0d83ce0b5481310VgnVCM1000000b0c1e0aRCRD&vgnextfmt=detall&cod_noticia=255775&vgnextchannel=a0d83ce0b5481310VgnVCM1000000b0c1e0aRCRD
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A number of police forces currently operate in Catalonia. The Mossos d'Esquadra (founded in the early XVIII Century and the oldest civilian police force in the Old Continent), under the Catalan Government, are responsible for the bulk of public security functions, including investigation of most crimes and street patrols, although Spain’s Civil Guard and National Police retain a presence in Catalonia and some very significant functions like the issuing of passports, identity cards and gun licenses, plus border controls. The current tensions between the Catalan and the Spanish Governments do not seem to be impeding cooperation on the ground, according to most observers, although some have also noted how Madrid may be trying to recover some of the areas of responsibility currently in the hands of the Mossos d’Esquadra. It should also be noted that the Spanish Government has not ruled out resorting to force, and therefore the risk of an armed clash remains. For more details on the latter, see "Alex Calvo: 'Spain will be strongly, very strongly, tempted to resort to force against Catalonia'", Vilaweb, 12 March 2013, available at http://www.vilaweb.cat/noticia/4094081/20130312/alex-calvo-spain-will-be-strongly-very-strongly-tempted-to-resort-to-force-against-catalonia.html


“La DGP anuncia un canvi d’estratègia en l’abordatge del fenomen de les bandes davant l’augment de l’activitat delictiva d’aquest grups”, 24 March 2014 press release by the Mossos d’Esquadra, website of the Catalan Government, available at http://www20.gencat.cat/portal/site/mossos/menuitem.b2ad9ea273248607aacf3010b0c0e1a0/?vgnextoid=a0d83ce0b5481310VgnVCM1000000b0c1e0aRCRD&vgnextfmt=detall&cod_noticia=255892&vgnextchannel=a0d83ce0b5481310VgnVCM1000000b0c1e0aRCRD

“Desarticulada la banda anomenada Bloods a Catalunya”, 10 April 2014 press release by the Mossos d’Esquadra, website of the Catalan Government, available at http://www20.gencat.cat/portal/site/mossos/menuitem.b2ad9ea273248607aacf3010b0c0e1a0/?vgnextoid=a0d83ce0b5481310VgnVCM1000000b0c1e0aRCRD

To be precise, 10 at Sant Boi de Llobregat, two at L’Hospitalet de Llobregat, and one in Vallirana. “Desarticulada la banda anomenada Bloods a Catalunya”, 10 April 2014 press release by the Mossos d’Esquadra, website of the Catalan Government, available at http://www20.gencat.cat/portal/site/mossos/menuitem.b2ad9ea273248607aacf3010b0c0e1a0/?vgnextoid=a0d83ce0b5481310VgnVCM1000000b0c1e0aRCRD

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“Comisaría General d’Investigació Criminal”

Intelligence gathering remains one of the most important aspects of police work concerning gangs.

“La DGP anuncia un canvi d'estratègia en l'abordatge del fenomen de les bandes davant l'augment de l'activitat delictiva d'aquest grups”, 24 March 2014 press release by the Mossos d’Esquadra, website of the Catalan Government, available at http://www20.gencat.cat/portal/site/mossos/menuitem.b2ad9ea273248607aacf3010b0c0e1a0/?vgnextoid=a0d83ce0b5481310VgnVCM1000000b0c1e0aRCRD


The association was formally registered on 31 July 2006, with number 32929 - J / 1. Registry of Entities, website of the Justice Ministry of Catalonia, available at http://justicia.gencat.cat/ca/serveis/guia_d_entitats/?accion=detalle&pag=1&identitat=61763&idtipus=2&v_tipent=&v_classif=


The association was formally registered on 15 March 2007, with number 34114 - J / 1. Registry of Entities, website of the Justice Ministry of Catalonia, available at http://justicia.gencat.cat/ca/serveis/guia_d_entitats/?accion=detalle&pag=1&identitat=63387&idtipus=2&v_tipent=&v_classif=2


Website available at http://www.fedelatina.org/


In a personal communication to the author a person familiar with security policy, and close to one of the parties in office at the time of the early legalization proposals, stressed that by legalizing the
Latin Kings and the Ñetas, police had been able to amass a wealth of information on these organizations and their members. This same source also stressed that “95 percent” of gang members were teenagers who did not commit crimes, and that by 2014 most gang members involved in criminal activities were not teenagers. In support of this last point he cited a June 2014 interview with Catalan Interior Minister Espadaler, where he said that the average age of those arrested was around 30. The interview is “Espadaler reforça que la línia dura contra les bandes juvenils llatines està funcionant”, Agència Catalana de Notícies, 19 June 2014, available at http://www.acn.cat/acn/755305/General/audio/Es padaler-bandes-juvenils-llatines-Latin-Kings-Mossos.html


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