

Lithuanian itinerant gangs in the Netherlands

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Abstract. Since the end of the 1990s, the police in the Netherlands has regularly reported on the criminal activities of Lithuanian itinerant groups as part of the mobile banditry phenomenon. According to the reports, these groups commit crimes against property, they are highly professional and well-organized. In particular, they are involved in vehicle, shop, and cargo theft and burglaries.

The present article is based on the research conducted in 2013 and aims to provide explanations and analyses of the historical, socio-economic, and political backgrounds of the 'itinerant criminal gangs' phenomenon. The focus is on the gangs from Lithuania. The analysis is done from different perspectives: lessons from the past (historical analysis of banditry); the rise of organized crime as a consequence of the collapse of the socialist economy (economic analysis of new markets and clients); the context of globalization, and particularly enlargement of the European Union, the irresistible attraction of the West and the gap between the wealthy West (the Netherlands) and the poor East (Lithuania) (cultural criminological analysis of the push and pull factors).

The precise and detailed description of the modus operandi, structure, leadership, and targets of the Lithuanian groups are illustrated by various quotes of the 'intern' respondents, from police and justice experts in specific areas in Lithuania and the Netherlands to Lithuanian detainees in Dutch prisons. Where are the stolen goods, are they brought back to the Lithuanian market, or further on to the former Soviet republic, or perhaps they are sold to the local Dutch merchants in the local settings? How the contacts between Lithuanian and Dutch (or Afghan, Russian, etc.) criminals are created? These questions are answered on the basis of numerous interviews, observations and comparative literature analysis.

The last part of the article focuses on the questions how to tackle and combat this relatively new form of organized crime and what are the responsibilities of different institutions and organizations in this context (in the EU, in the Netherlands, and in Lithuania).

Key words: Organized crime, mobile banditry, Lithuanian criminal gangs, car-theft

INTRODUCTION

During the years of the Cold War, the 'Russian threat' used to mean the threat of a Soviet invasion and occupation of Western Europe. The term has acquired a new meaning since the opening of the Soviet borders: it became the threat of the 'Russian Mafia'. Outside the former Soviet Union, it was usually believed that in the Soviet period the Russian organized crime would be contained by the Iron Curtain. Indeed, according to the Soviet authorities, there was no organized crime in the Soviet Union at all. Undisputable facts pertaining to the support of terrorist organisations, the supply of weapons and operations of the *spetssluzhbi* (special services) with the aim of liquidating potential enemies were overlooked or ignored (Konstantinov and Dikselius, 1997: 431, 432). They were conducted by the authorities and not by private organisations, but these were criminal activities all the same, state-organized crime, and they took place outside the former Soviet Union. After the official opening of the gates in 1987, the 'Russian' criminal activities abroad were reported almost in all European countries, in the USA, Canada, Israel, Australia, and Latin America. The question which became acute in the 1990s was whether a criminal Diaspora was developed and whether the Russian-speaking immigrant communities were connected to the criminal organisations.

Sensational stories made headlines all over the world. The first sources of information were the United States police investigations and criminological reports (cf. Finckenauer and Waring, 1997) referring to a large networks of criminal immigrants. They were followed by warnings from Germany, France, and Belgium: the Russian Mafia was coming! Russians were allegedly buying the most luxury property on the French Cote d'Azur, they appeared in Rome and Budapest, they settled in Israel (Siegel, 2005; Varese, 2011). The nodal points became Tel Aviv, Berlin, Antwerp, Vienna, which provided the first criminal export model pertaining to how the Mafia establishes criminal posts around the world.

The image of a mythical and extremely dangerous Russian Mafioso was established and spread to all immigrants from the former Soviet Union, treating Russian-speaking women as harlots and avoiding some 'dangerous places' where former Soviet citizens were trying to establish their communities. According to Rosner (1995), the American public, fascinated with godfathers and violence,

has discovered a new hero: the criminal Russian. The 'sexy Russian Mafia' provided the public with a relative innocuous image of a sophisticated and well-educated criminal, involved not only in traditional activities such as racketeering, extortion, gambling and prostitution, but also on a much higher level in hi-tech fraud, cybercrime, and other non-conventional Mafia activities.

In the years 1999–2004, the Dutch Ministry of Justice commissioned my research on the post-Soviet organized crime in the Netherlands (Siegel, 2005). Following the alarming reports from the neighbouring countries and from post-Soviet criminalists, Dutch authorities wanted to know whether organized crime from the former Soviet Union presented a real threat to the Netherlands, similarly to the rest of Europe.

The conclusion of my research in 2004 was that there was no evidence of a single Russian criminal organisation, either emerging from the Russian-speaking community or immigrated to the Netherlands, which could be identified by my informants as connected to the infamous Russian Mafia. The post-Soviet organised crime in the Netherlands could be characterised by small groups (2–10), in some cases representing criminal groups in the former Soviet Union, who were showing up in the country to visit family members or to settle quarrels (Siegel, 2005). The main paradox was that the Netherlands was perceived by immigrants from the former Soviet Union as a 'Mafia-free' country. There was a great discrepancy between the fears and official presentation of post-Soviet organized crime in the Netherlands and the image among the immigrants. One of such perceptions was that petty crimes (such as car-theft, burglaries, etc.), especially where no apparent violence or blood is involved, were not connected to organized crime (*ibid.*).

In the same period, in the Netherlands there appeared different reports on the activities of the so-called 'mobile bandits' (amongst others, Weenink & Huisman, 2003; Weenink, Huisman & van der Laan, 2004; van der Laan & Weenink, 2005). These 'mobile bands' were primarily associated with Polish and Lithuanian gangs consisting of relatively young people (20–30 years). The groups were arriving to the Netherlands by personal cars or mini buses and appeared to be well informed and prepared in advance for shoplifting and/or vehicle-thefts in many Dutch cities. These operations took several hours (up to 24 hours), after which they drove home, taking the booty back with them to the country of origin where the stolen goods were sold on the black market or

even in legal shops (KLPD, 2005). The size of these gangs differed: the largest consisted of 25 people, while most groups included 3–5 persons (mainly men, but sometimes also women) (KLPD, 2005).

Since the phenomenon did not disappear and in the recent years the increase in the number of gangs has been reported by the Dutch police and Retail Sector (2009), the academic research on this phenomenon became important, with the specific goal to provide an insight into the phenomenon of ‘mobile banditry’, its nature, the profile of the offenders and their criminals’ networks around East, Central, and West Europe, the opportunities’ structures and markets. It was also aimed at analysing the existing preventive and repressive measures in all the involved countries.

The research was conducted in 2012–2013, in the core of which the ‘why questions’ were central: why do they come to the Netherlands, why do they steal specific goods, why do they commit these specific kinds of criminality, why is the Netherlands attractive for these itinerant gangs, and why the co-operation between police and justice systems does not stop this phenomenon (Siegel, 2014)?

Perhaps the most interesting question for criminological analysis was whether these mobile bands form a new variant of transnational organized crime, and the perpetrators are not just fortune seekers or groups of friends who spend their free time stealing a BMW or some mascaras in the Dutch shops, but professional, well-trained criminals, members of big criminal organisations in search of new markets, opportunities and clients outside their own countries. Police information that the perpetrators plan in advance which type of goods they are going to steal (goods which are valuable in their own countries and are easy to sell) have strengthen this presumption.

In addition, a historical analysis of the period from the ‘golden time’ for post-socialist criminals (the ’90s with their economic chaos and political instability), which has slowly come to an end, and the growing expansion of their markets to West Europe, facilitated by the enlargement of the European Union, can provide a useful theoretical explanation of the emergence of new activities and forms of organized crime in the 21st century. Therefore, in the present research, we made use of literature about mobile banditry from the historical perspective, recent developments within organised crime, the expansion of the European Union, and the approach towards mobile banditry both at home and abroad.

Our research focused on four specific countries, with Lithuania as one of them. The choice of the countries was due to the Dutch police data in which specific criminal cases which included citizens from these countries were over-represented. We used qualitative ethnographic research methods which combined a literature and media study; interviews with police and justice representatives both in the Netherlands and in Lithuania, but also with investigative journalists, criminologists, and lawyers, perpetrators, Lithuanian detainees in Dutch prisons, and car-dealers, observations and analysis of court files. The first visit to Lithuania took place in June 2012 and the second in November 2012. Interviews were conducted with representatives of the police and the Public Prosecutor in Vilnius and Kaunas, and with other experts. Nearly all the interviews were carried out in Russian (with one exception when the interview was carried out in English) by the author. In general, 23 interviews were conducted (including a group interview with police in Vilnius), and 4 Lithuanian detainees were interviewed in Dutch prisons (Siegel, 2014).

In this article, the focus will be put on the data collected and analyzed in regard to Lithuanian mobile bands operating in the Netherlands. It is mainly based on our report published in 2013 (in Dutch) and later translated into English (Siegel, 2014). The data and analysis of the research are here supplemented with an in-depth analysis of literature on the Lithuanian organized crime since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

THE LITHUANIAN ORGANIZED CRIME

*'First everybody talked about the scary
"Russian Mafia", now it is "Lithuanian Mafia". Funny!'
(Lithuanian detainee in a Dutch prison)*

Near the end of the 1980s, radical changes took place in the Soviet Union. The first private enterprises or 'cooperatives' in the Soviet Union were set up in the late 1980s during the period of reform. In 1992, the government announced the policy of privatization, the first step in the transition from a socialist to a market economy. Those who had accumulated funds were in position to buy state enterprises for relatively little money. They 'privatized' economic enterprises in their sector and removed them from government control. The tran-

sition from a socialist to a market economy is based on the property right, which “is in fact a “bundle of nested rights”, including the clear definition of the title of property, the possibility to derive income (or pleasure) from goods owned and an apparatus for deterring crime” (Varese, 2001:24). The younger generation realized the opportunities to make money without specialized education or business experience. The old *nomanklatura* was joined by new young entrepreneurs who had no government money or contacts, but a lot of motivation and talent. Among them there were also persons connected to organized crime. According to Ledeneva, “organized crime in the 1990s should be viewed as an expanding network of recruits who did not inherit anything from the Soviet past: no money, no power, no connections; they were forced to use violence to make money” (1998:190).

Also in Lithuania this situation of privatization, economic chaos, and political instability was seized upon by new groups of criminals. These new bandits were people with few prospects, who were able to quickly and efficiently build contacts with politicians, the police, and even the church. The dominant view is that the economic chaos and the situation of lawlessness in the transition period in post-Soviet republics made it difficult for any business to survive without state protection. The government was unable to provide the economic order. As everywhere in the former Soviet Union, also in Lithuania the business came under the *krysha* (lit. roof), protection by a criminal organization. This protection acts not only against petty criminals, but also against competitors and ‘unprofessional racketeers’. Varese gave in his book examples in which businessmen were advised to obtain a safe *krysha* which could guarantee their success in the business world (Varese, 2001: 59). This *krysha* could be provided either by criminal organizations or by the police.

According to Lithuanian respondents, criminal gangs started their *krysha*-business activities in Lithuania earlier than in the other republics (Siegel, 2014: 42). In the summer of 1988, two criminal groups were arrested in Kaunas for extortion against Roma. The Roma, who had been one of the first small groups of entrepreneurs to successfully make use of the reforms, had reported this to the police. Criminal groups around Lithuania, as everywhere in the former Soviet Union, functioned on the *stogas* principle (the same as the *krysha*-model) when the fees were fixed by criminal organizations in return for the right to run business. Those who were refusing to pay the fee were threatened and their

properties were destroyed, and the owners were physically damaged (Gutauskas et al., 2004: 207).

The most important criminal groups in Lithuania after the fall of communism were *Daktarai* (in Kaunas), and *Vilniuskaya Brigada* and *Centurioni* (in Vilnius). Also, *Tulpinai* and *Zemaitukai* in Panevezys (also called the 'Lithuanian Chicago'), a group of Gaidjurgis in Klaipeda and *Princai* in Siauliai were well armed criminal organizations who did not hesitate to use violence in the process of redistribution of state-owned property (Gutauskas et al., 2004: 201, 202). The peak of their power was reached in 1993: the number of killings was 1194 in that specific year. High-ranking police officers, judges, journalists, and businessmen were among the murdered (Juska, Johnstone and Pozzuto, 2004: 164). The whole country seemed to be divided into spheres of influences, controlling all business forms, from the large corporations to street kiosks.

These first criminal groups acquired an important position on the criminal market. Some managed to infiltrate the army, government, and the banking sector. The criminal world of the former Soviet Union can be seen as a mosaic, each part representing a different criminal gang with its own military system, sphere of influence and business structure (Siegel, 2005: 82). These criminal groups were structured hierarchically, with a leader at the top, followed by the leaders of various divisions, the brigadiers and the soldiers. They hired 'specialists', such as lawyers and financial advisors, to work exclusively for the organization. They also had a communal fund (*obshchak*). Many wrestlers, boxers, weight lifters, ice hockey players, and unemployed members of the KGB or the special forces of the Soviet army joined these first criminal organizations (ibid.).

By 1993, there were four major criminal organizations operating in Kaunas: the *Daktarai* (doctors, physicians), named after their leader Henrikas Daktaras (alias Henyte) from Vilijampole, a notorious criminal suburb of the city. The second group was known as the *Zhaliakalnis* (from the Green Mountain district) named after a neighborhood in the city, or *Dashkiniai*, under the leadership of the Dashkevitchiai brothers. One of them was the president of the Lithuanian Boxing Federation. The third group was known as *Senamiestis* (the Old City), and the fourth as *Kauliniai* (also called *Shanchiai*). All these groups consisted of family members, such as uncles and cousins, or of childhood friends from school or the neighborhood. Mutual trust among members

was based on a shared past in the streets and neighborhoods where the recruits had grown up. Most members were Lithuanians, and the few Russians who joined were never included in the top of the organization. This, however, did not prevent the *Daktarai* and *Dashkiniai* from seeking to cooperate with Russian criminal groups (Siegel, 2014: 43, 44).

In Lithuania, a distinction is usually made between organized crime groups from Kaunas and those from Vilnius. The differences do not so much concern the geographical location (the cities are no more than 60 km apart), but rather the composition of the gangs. Organized crime in Vilnius is multicultural, while in Kaunas it is more nationalistic Lithuanian (Siegel, 2014: 43). One example of the cosmopolitan nature of the underworld in Vilnius is the *Vilniususkaya brigada*, which consisted of Lithuanians and Russians. Their leader was Boris Dekanidze, who was convicted in 1994 for the murder of the Lithuanian journalist Vitas Lingys. Dekanidze was the last person to be executed before the death penalty was abolished in Lithuania in 1998. Organized crime in Vilnius worked together with former KGB officers and drug barons from Central Asia.

Although organized crime groups were different, most of their activities and spheres of influence were coordinated and communicated also with international criminal groups (Johnstone, 2004: 368).

In the early 1990s, extortion was still not a punishable offence in Lithuania. A law on 'preventive prison sentencing' was adopted and made it possible to hold individuals for 60 days without charging them or allowing them contact with the outer world or legal assistance. According to the representative of the Public Prosecutor Office, "*this law provided 60 days to collect "kompromat"(incriminating evidence), which led to the arrest of 1384 members of criminal organizations between 1993 and 1997. This dealt a significant blow to organised crime, including the leaders of the Kaunas mafia such as Daktaras*" (Siegel, 2014: 43). Henrikas Daktaras, who was considered to be a godfather of Lithuanian underworld and who organized a group in Viliampole, was tried and imprisoned. He was arrested again shortly after his release, but managed to escape to Bulgaria. He was eventually tracked down there and extradited to Lithuania. For all these years, he had been at the top of a strictly hierarchical organization of approximately 200 people, with a 'Board of Directors', brigadiers, *torpedos* (soldiers) and a communal fund. Despite his high position in the criminal world, Daktaras has never managed to attain the status of '*vor v zakone*'.

After Daktaras's arrest in Bulgaria, other top criminals in his group were apprehended, some while trying to escape. Young criminals used Daktaras's name and 'brand' to reorganize, but these young criminals were much more violent. According to the police informants, the *Desantininkai* gang became particularly notorious for brutal liquidations and torture. They used the services of contract killers from Russia or Belarus. The *Dashkiniai* maintained relationships with the *Shkilevskie* gang in Kaliningrad, which committed murders for them in Lithuania, while Lithuanians returned the favor (an exchange of services) in Kaliningrad (Siegel, 2014: 43). These young criminals, who operated throughout the entire country and later moved to Germany, specialized in car theft and *peregon* (transport) from West Europe via Lithuania to Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (ibid.). One of the influential criminal organizations in Klaipeda was specializing in training juvenile car thieves (Gutauskas, 2004: 207).

Since the beginning of privatization, the criminal organizations controlled a significant part of the Lithuanian economy, and their members succeeded to penetrate the political and financial institutions. The first groups of racketeers or, in Volkov's term, 'violent entrepreneurs' (2002) emerged in virtually all post-Soviet cities and gained a foothold in the extortion market. Later, some of them achieved a higher level of sophistication and managed to penetrate the military, the government, the tax department, and banks (Wilson and Donaldson, 1996: 115).

By the mid 1990s, the police succeeded to dismantle, arrest, and prosecute many members of large criminal organizations in different cities (Gutauskas, 2004: 210). Perhaps it was the main reason for the transformations inside the Lithuanian criminal world. In 1995–1997, the large criminal organizations split into smaller groups of 10 to 30 people. In 1990, the police knew 90 criminal organizations in Lithuania, and by 1997–1998 there were 100 of such groups. In 2010, police estimated that there were 17 to 23 criminal groups in the country according to various sources (Siegel, 2014: 44). Many of the other groups had been disbanded: their leaders were murdered, imprisoned, or had emigrated.

In his report in 2011, Gutauskas mentioned specifically the following seven major organized crime groups which still operated on the Lithuanian territory: the *Agurkas* (*Agurkiniai*), *Beglikas* (*Beglikiai*), *Šmikiniai*, *Žemaičiai*, *Miliai*,

Buduliai and *Švinius* (Gutauskas, 2011: 66–68). These criminal groups are large organizations with a broad range of activities. All these groups were involved in extortion and drugs trafficking, but some focused on specific activities such as cigarette smuggling, prostitution, robberies, vehicle theft, and other crimes.

In 1997, 33 groups were operating only in Kaunas, but in 2013 only three remained: the *Agurkiniai*, the *Kamuoliniai* (who meet up at football matches) and a third group consisting of the remnants of the *Daktarai* organization. These groups have specialized in producing and smuggling drugs (especially cocaine and ecstasy) whereby the Lithuanians work together with criminal groups from Latin America, in particular Venezuela, and smuggling oil, cigarettes, petrol, and arms. Other activities include counterfeiting euro banknotes (in 2009 alone, 9 million false euros were put into the European market) and car theft, which is still the most important activity for all the groups from Kaunas. Also, fraud and falsification of documents are important activities of criminal groups in Lithuania.

The stable criminal hierarchical structures are replaced nowadays by flexible networks. Criminal operations are usually conducted by small groups, in a framework of supplier–consumer or a temporary employer–employee relationship (Pullat, 2009: 24). There is an accent on specialization and the distribution of labor, especially as regards cross-border operations (ibid.: 26).

There is also a tendency of small provincial criminal groups to join the larger and more influential organizations in big cities (Gutauskas, 2011: 82). Nowadays, there is much less mention of extortion or ‘protection’, as other methods are being used to infiltrate and control the business community. For example, our informants have mentioned that legal companies are sometimes forced to employ criminals. These ‘employees’ are on the payroll, even though they actually do not do anything. Criminal organizations also ‘invest’ in legal companies and then demand repayment of their investment – at double the original amount. Criminal proceeds are mainly invested in real estate and luxury goods and services (Siegel, 2014: 44).

The most striking development in the Lithuanian organized crime is that with the disappearance of the old generation, the young generation has become more business-oriented and mainly operates across national borders looking for new markets and clients. They do not feel bound by the traditions and habits of the old bandits. According to Algirdas Matonis, chief of the Lithuanian

criminal police bureau: “Gangmen’s intelligence is different from what it was 15 or 20 years ago, there’s been a change in mentality”¹ (www.15min.lt). One of the main changes is much less usage of violence which was typical of the operation of the ‘old-style’ gangs. According to Matonis, these groups, such as *Vyšniauskas* and *Baranauska*, and a group led by Taraškevičius were disbanded in the last years (*ibid.*). Business-crimes become prominent in the priorities of the new-style criminal groups. Some groups are now focusing exclusively on money laundering, tax evasion, and other fiscal and economic crimes (Gutauskas, 2011: 211).

Nowadays, the chaos caused by rapid privatisation has almost disappeared. The former Soviet Union became too small a territory for the activities of post-Soviet criminal groups. Large criminal organisations from the post-Soviet republics, including Lithuania, send their members to establish new contacts and search for new opportunities. Many criminals prefer to live abroad. The Dutch criminologist Frank Bovenkerk analysed different links when organized crime follows the ‘normal’ patterns of migration and is embedded in migrant community (Bovenkerk, 2001).² Every Diaspora country plays its own role for criminal organizations, which develop different ‘specializations’ in each country where the Lithuanian criminal groups have operated since the beginning of the emigration at the end of 1980s.

ORGANIZED CRIME AND MOBILITY

The Lithuanian criminal groups are considered nowadays as the most influential mafia, both in the Baltic countries and elsewhere in East Europe. They cooperate with each other and with the local criminal groups outside Lithuania. It is striking how quickly and easily criminals from different countries and diverse ethnic groups manage to connect with each other. Cooperative relationships have developed between Polish criminals and members of the

1 Vaitkevičius, A. The new generation of organized criminals – more cunning and cautious, 2 January, 2013, on: <http://www.15min.lt/en/article/in-lithuania/the-new-generation-of-organized-criminals-more-cunning-and-cautious-525-292678#ixzz2xAA6Lo1p>

2 Between 1990 and 2011, more than 650,000 Lithuanian citizens emigrated, only 110,000 of whom returned. In 2010, Lithuanian emigrants living abroad sent around 1 billion euros home (Veidas, 8 February 2012).

Russian mafia, between Lithuanians and *grupirovki* from Belarus, and between Lithuanian, Turkish, and Afghan criminals, especially in smuggling activities and the illegal trade in drugs, cigarettes, women and oil (already in the former Soviet Union, the Baltic republics were known as transit areas for Russian oil, metals, raw and military materials). These relationships illustrate the high degree of flexibility and mobility of the contemporary transnational organized crime.

There is a consensus among criminologists that post-Soviet criminal organizations today have a clear transnational character. The major Lithuanian criminal organization, which operated internationally, is the *Agurkiniai*, named after the nickname of its leader, Saulius Veletchka (Agurkas). This group focuses on car thefts, robberies, extortion, fraud, women trafficking and counterfeiting. The *Agurkiniai* operate in Russia, the other

Baltic states, and in almost all of West Europe, including the Netherlands. Two other internationally operating criminal organizations that are relevant to the Netherlands are also the *Shiliniai* from Žemaitiya (North-west part of Lithuania) (involved in fraud, robberies, stealing cars, motorcycles and agricultural machinery, the illegal arms trade and drug smuggling) and the *Gaidjurginiai gang* (property crime and drug smuggling) (Siegel, 2014). According to Gutauskas, there are also other transnational groups, which include *Kamuliniai*, *Shmikiniai*, *Beglikiniai*, *Shvininiai*, and *Buduliai* (2011: 66–68). These organizations operate in the Baltic states and in countries such as Germany, the United Kingdom, and Spain. They are primarily involved in smuggling drugs and cigarettes, and in counterfeiting (*ibid.*).

In his book “*Mafias on the Move*”, Federico Varese states that, contrary to the prevailing conviction that organized crime has spread its activities across the globe as a result of open borders, criminals are often forced to move and do not always do so of their own free will. They flee from prosecution by the justice system and / or rivalry with other criminal groups in their own countries, but these relocations are not always successful. “What might appear the product of globalization is in fact the consequence of state repression exporting the problem to other countries” (Varese, 2011: 8). The choice of a new location is usually influenced by the presence of reliable contacts, friends or family.

Research into the post-Soviet Mafia in the Netherlands (Siegel, 2005) has shown, indeed, that the criminals were extremely mobile. In the 1990s, they

used to come to the Netherlands for a temporary respite from the gang wars in the former Soviet Union, or to settle their family in a peaceful environment, but they did not remain in the Netherlands to do real business.

The stealing and smuggling of cars from West Europe to the former Soviet Union was usually considered the main activity of the post-Soviet Mafia. These activities reached their peak in the year 1994 when the demand for second-hand German and Japanese cars in the former Soviet republics was high. Since then, however, the dynamics of the inner market and the overflow of European cars (imported legally or illegally) in the former Soviet Union seemed to lead to a decrease in demand. There was, however, still a deficit in car parts, or these parts were too expensive, which became a real obstacle in developing a stable market for European cars in the former Soviet Union in the 1990s. For the 'rich clients' there were also convenient possibilities inside the former Soviet Union, since the large carmakers such as BMW, Mercedes and Audi had established distribution companies of their own (Siegel, 2005: 211).

Since the restoration of independence in Lithuania in 1991, police reported on a strong relationship and cooperation between Lithuanian car-thieves and their counterparts in other countries, including the neighboring countries such as Russia, Poland, and Latvia, and later with criminal groups in Germany, Belgium and other West European countries (Johnstone, 2004: 364).

After 1994 when the car trade (including the trade in stolen cars) in East Europe and the former Soviet Union reached a peak, a surplus began to accumulate, and the demand for European cars started to wane. It was also at this time that many East Europeans discovered that they could travel to the Netherlands, Germany or France and buy a cheap second-hand car on a local market themselves, without the help of criminal dealers (Siegel, 2005: 213; Siegel, 2014: 85). In the years 1994–96, buses with East European clients arrived on Tuesdays early in the morning to the Veemarkt in Utrecht. Hundreds of Russian-speaking brokers (immigrants from different former Soviet republics) were already waiting for them and offered their services as translators and advisors. These mediators received provisions from the Dutch garage-owners that were selling cars at the Veemarkt. Those clients who had not been able to find the right car then crowded the mediators, offering them all the money they had to take them to near-by garages. These clients could not afford to stay another week and wait for the next Tuesday, because that was too expensive.

Garage-owners knew that these clients were in a hurry, and increased their prices. There were many *kydali* (cheaters) among the Russian-speaking mediators who were receiving money in advance, bringing clients to a garage and disappearing, leaving them either at a closed door late in the evening or without an agreement with the owner of the garage, who would then charge the full amount to someone who was desperately trying to tell him that he had already paid to a mediator (Siegel, 2005: 214). At the end of 1990s, there were fewer car buyers coming to the Netherlands, especially when more and more second-hand cars appeared at the local car-markets in the former Soviet Union.

Stealing and transporting cars from the Netherlands was considered to be a risky enterprise at the end of the 90s due to the dangers en route through Germany and Poland, where Russian and Polish criminal gangs kept a watchful eye. These gangs were capable of stopping cars and ‘confiscating’ them, sometimes under the threat of violence (Siegel, 2005: 211, 212). Later, when the car trade became less popular, a surplus of cars came to exist, and the demand for them dwindled; a number of criminal groups subsequently turned their attention to more profitable matters.

All these developments raise the question why the image of Lithuanian (and Polish) car-thieves remains so tenacious also in the 2000s. In addition, Lithuania was used to legalize stolen cars and as a transit point further to the East (Johnstone, 2004: 364).

Among other criminal activities connected to the Lithuanian organized crime groups in the Netherlands, our informants mentioned burglaries, robberies, shoplifting, synthetic drugs smuggling, and women trafficking. Lithuanian criminal groups are also often involved in burglaries of jewellers. The Lithuanian police referred to these criminal activities as a ‘rapidly increasing’ activity by criminals abroad (Siegel, 2014: 71). The Dutch criminologist Ben Rovers states: “In about half of the cases the burglars use some form of physical violence towards those present in the shop. In other cases, this is only threatened” (Rovers, 2011: 25).

The illicit import of alcohol, drugs, weapons, cigarettes, petrol and food, produced in Poland, Russia, Germany and the Netherlands, takes place in Lithuania, with the furth transported to Central Asia (Gutauskas, 2011: 213). The Lithuanian drug traffickers have directed their activities towards Scandinavian countries (Pullat, 2009: 27) and further to other West European countries.

In the Netherlands, however, car theft appears to be the number one activity of the Lithuanian organized crime, a criminal activity which was earlier associated with Polish criminal groups but now has become a synonym of the Lithuanian mafia.

LITHUANIAN PERPETRATOR GROUPS IN THE NETHERLANDS

Lithuanian criminal groups are mobile bands consisting of members of organised criminal networks in their own country. The commissioners do not travel to West Europe but are in charge of criminal activities and markets at a distance. According to Lithuanian criminologists, individual criminals cannot steal cars in the Netherlands for their own gain. This market is strictly monitored by the organised crime (particularly that from Kaunas). Equipment (such as burglary tools and laptops), flights, accommodation and rental cars are also financed by these organisations and are directed from abroad (Siegel, 2014: 43).

The Lithuanian groups that are active in the Netherlands are characterised by a close organisation and a hierarchical structure. These perpetrators operating in the Netherlands primarily belong to two major organisations, the *Augurkiniai* and the *Kamuoliniai*. These groups operate in the Netherlands in varying sizes and composition. They are directed from Lithuania and focus specifically on housebreakings and car crime. The composition of the groups can change when groups divide up and create new formations.

Members of the criminal groups are recruited in Lithuania. Many perpetrators appear to be young and have large debts in Lithuania. According to the Dutch police, *“there are known cases where within the criminal organisations violence is used and the young people are ill-treated if they were apprehended in the Netherlands”* (Siegel, 2014: 43). People with debts are sometimes forced to go abroad to steal vehicles. The reward for driving a car from the Netherlands to Lithuania amounts to 1000 Litas (about 290 Euros). Some of the arrested Lithuanians argued that they were not aware of the fact that they were working for an organisation, and thought that they were being directed by a small group. However, this group was part of a major criminal organisation well known both in Lithuania and in the Netherlands.

In the recent research (De Miranda & Van der Mark, 2012; Ferwerda, Van Ham & Bremmers, 2013), it was also ascertained that increasingly more often organised crime groups are behind car theft. The Police and the Public Prosecutor in the source countries confirmed this situation. However, criminal groups are judged according to different criteria than in the Netherlands, and car-theft is not considered as an organized crime activity.

According to Lithuanian respondents, it is impossible that the groups operating in the Netherlands are not part of the Lithuanian organised crime. The trade in cars, oil, gold and jewellery, flowers and art have always been connected to the black or criminal markets and organized crime activities (Siegel, 2014: 54).

Due to the dramatic changes in the character of organised crime in Lithuania in the last decennia, important 'old-school' crime bosses such as Daktaras are in prison; others have been liquidated or have in the meanwhile become less active; the criminals are young and wit. According to our Lithuanian informants, the Lithuanian thieves who operate in the Netherlands are not able or do not want to work, they are technically trained but not well educated. They are sent and instructed by specialists (ibid.: 55).

Also, the structure of organisation is different than in the 1990s. An allocation of tasks and positions exists, a chain in which the first and the last links do not know each other, so that the organisation can continue to exist when someone is eliminated. According to Ferwerda et al. (2013), Lithuanian criminal groups operate in 'cells' under strict control from their homeland. One such example of cell structure is 'the inventory of a target car through open sources (Google Street View), technical research how to steal a specific car, stealing a car, document fraud, manipulating (changing) the vehicle identification number, transportation, sale' (Ferwerda et al., 2013: 36).

When perpetrators are caught, they all tell the same story which indicates that they are well instructed by their bosses (ibid.). Sometimes it looks like some 'suckers' are offered by the organisation in order to give the Dutch law enforcement of an impression that they are successful in combating organized crime, while the real 'specialists' are well protected by their accomplices (ibid.: 37).

CAR THEFTS

Modus operandi

The perpetrator groups in our research primarily focus on personal cars. In the recent years, considerable knowledge has been gathered by the police about the groups occupied with car theft. In the meanwhile, the Lithuanian police have become considerably knowledgeable about the larger perpetrator groups who are guilty of vehicular criminality in West Europe. As a consequence of improved checks and insight into the working methods of these groups in Germany and Spain (Gounev, 2011), it would appear that they have transferred their working area to the Netherlands.

As a consequence of the introduction of advanced security methods and the registration of cars, car theft has become such a complex enterprise that it requires the perpetrators to have both a high level of organisation and specific knowledge and skills (Gounev, 2011).

The couriers and thieves are usually young perpetrators aged between 20 and 25 years, who are sometimes forced to cooperate. A number of the arrested couriers appeared not to know that they were part of an organised crime group; they were allegedly only following the instructions to take a stolen car from the Netherlands to Lithuania.

Besides Lithuanian groups, there are also other mobile perpetrator groups active in stealing cars. From the research it emerged that the *groopirovki* from Bulgaria have also become specialised in car criminality (Gounev & Bezlov, 2008). For a long time, in Bulgaria only domestic car thefts could be said to exist, but since the expansion of the EU these numbers have decreased, and cars are stolen abroad and taken to Bulgaria or farther eastwards. Ferwerda et al. (2013) have reported that in the cell-construction of criminal networks many different nationalities are cooperating in specific criminal operations, but all are directed and controlled by the Lithuanian organised crime bosses (2013: 36).

The cars which are stolen are primarily luxury cars or saloons with four-wheel drive. In the recent years, in the Netherlands, it has primarily concerned the brands of Honda, Toyota, BMW, and Audi. According to police information, Lithuanian car-thieves choose vehicles which are easy to steal and they have to be four-wheel drives and rather sizeable. The types and brands which are stolen most often are also mentioned in the research by Gounev (2011) into

illegal car markets in Bulgaria and Spain. Ferwerda et al. (2013) also mention the BMW X5 and X6, Honda CR-V and hybrid cars such as the Toyota Prius as being stolen most often as the most favourite cars in East Europe (2013: 37).

However, also cheaper cars are stolen: these are mainly second-hand or older cars for personal use as temporary transport during the stay in the Netherlands. In addition, it appears that many car keys and car documents are stolen from homes. This is in accordance with the findings of the KLPD (2012: 65). The prices and the fluctuating supply of legal cars play an important role in the demand for illegal cars and the frequency of car theft.

Thieves are also interested in navigation systems, car radios, head lights and airbags for specific types of cars. These are removed from the car on location or a stolen car will be taken apart and its separate components sold. There is primarily a demand for new products, both in the Netherlands and in East Europe. As an example, in one specific police case it appeared that many head lights from Porsches were stolen in a short period of time.

Within the entire operation of car thefts, the goal should first be clear and the groups have to be aware of the location of the cars. Such popular cars as BMWs and Hondas will be kept under surveillance by the perpetrators for a period of time. Sometimes surveillance takes place using a hired car. In other cases it became evident that the perpetrators observed the neighbourhood and cars by means of *Google Street View*. In this way, neighbourhoods with the right sort of cars are scanned. This is in keeping with the findings of the German police about the reconnaissance by Lithuanian and Polish groups in Berlin, and also with the findings of a research conducted by Ferwerda et al. (2013). According to Lithuanian respondents, Lithuanian immigrants and students played the role of '*navodchik*' ('spotter'): they look for the desired cars and pass the precise details and addresses on to the thieves.

After a specific car has been selected, the doors can be opened by breaking the windows or with the help of other tools. The police in the Netherlands, however, say that professional Lithuanian and Polish perpetrator groups open the locks with the help of professional equipment such as the *On Board Diagnosis Connector* (OBD) which disables the alarm installation and manipulates the immobiliser. In this way, there is often no trace of the break-in from the outside of the car, and when the car is sold it is less easy to ascertain that it has been stolen. With the resources which have been used in the recent years, cars

can be opened more and more easily and be stolen. So, for a long time there has been a talk of the 'Polish key', a key of hardened steel, which can open a car easily. The police are currently seeing new equipment which can block the signal of the car key (Siegel, 2014: 70, 71).

According to software experts, criminals use computer programs which allow the electronics of the car to be re-configured so that it is possible to make a contact with another key and in this manner to drive the car away. However, often the perpetrators open the car and disable the alarm without using anything. They later return with equipment to actually start up the car. According to our informant from the German police, this phenomenon is frequently observed, in particular by Lithuanian groups, because they know that if someone does not have equipment with them, they can be arrested for breaking in only and not for car theft.

Up until a number of years ago, small chips were used, which could reset the security system in the car and enable the car to start. When the chip's connector is removed, however, the car cannot be restarted, which means that the motor cannot be turned off until the car has reached its destination. The consequence of this was that the couriers had to leave the motor on for the entire journey. Police could easily recognise the stolen cars at petrol stations, because the perpetrators were leaving the motor on when filling up.

Nowadays, there are also keys which operate electronically and can also be used to start a car. In this way, the car can be simply turned off and started up again after the break-in. With an advanced equipment, the information can be placed on a new key. All these keys, the equipment to start up the car and other accessories can be ordered on the Internet (for legal professional purposes). The accessories used by Lithuanians can be bought everywhere and often originate from Lithuania, or are purchased via the Internet, such as the 'Polish key' which can be bought for 150 Euros. The demonstration of how a locked car can be opened could be downloaded from legal websites.

For the newest cars with advanced security equipment and special car keys, criminal groups use a very expensive equipment. Such equipment is available on the black market for about 20,000 or even 30,000–40,000 Euros (Ferwerda et al., 2013:39). It appears that by using such equipment it is very simple for specialised groups to open and start a car, even when a newest car has an advanced alarming system.

In 1990s, special 'master-classes' were organized in Germany, where 'specialists' in car theft could meet and exchange ideas. One workshop was devoted to a demonstration of methods to bypass car security systems.

According to the Dutch and the German police, the stolen cars are taken out of the country as quickly as possible. Transportation of cars is the task for couriers who are brought to the Netherlands only with the purpose of driving the cars to Poland, Lithuania or farther to the East.

The task division is obvious here: the thieves are exclusively occupied with opening and removing the cars, after which the couriers transport them to a further destination. The stolen cars are first driven to a place where they are handed over to the couriers, sometimes only a few meters further on, at the next street. Sometimes the cars are parked for a few hours or even days in car parks or in lorries until a courier is available. In some cases, intermediaries were driving cars from the crime place to a meeting place with a courier, avoiding contact between the couriers and the thieves. However, according to the police informants, in most cases couriers knew that the cars were stolen (Siegel, 2014: 70, 71).

In some cases, the navigation systems were programmed in advance to the final destination of the car, and the couriers received instructions to follow the navigation system (TomTom) or received text messages. In other cases, a number of cars are driven onto a lorry or an articulated vehicle and taken out of the country in this way.

In most cases, the couriers are instructed to drive the cars to just beyond the German–Polish or Lithuanian border. The cars stolen in the Netherlands have been found at various places along these borders, amongst others in the Lithuanian cities of Marijampole and the Polish city of Suwalki.

When Lithuania joined the European Union in 2004, it has become a border state with non-EU countries, with a border of 1733 km with Russia (Kaliningrad oblast), Belarus, Latvia, Poland and the Baltic Sea (Ceccato, 2007: 132). Klaipėda, Lithuania's main port, was used by organized crime for different smuggling activities, while Kaunas has become not only a headquarter for vehicle thieves but also an important drug production centre. The border regions Klaipėda, Vilnius and Marijampole are still considered the most important centres for organized crime activities (ibid.: 141). For vehicle theft, also Palanga was mentioned as a region where organized crime is active (ibid.: 156).

Markets for stolen cars

In criminology, different authors distinguish among various types and variations of markets, ranging from legal, semi-legal or 'grey' markets to 'black', illegal and criminal markets, depending on the nature of the traded goods (legal or criminalised) and / or the manner in which they are traded (formally or 'underground'). A lot of criminological research has been carried out on the economic actors operating on illegal markets as well as on the dynamics of these markets (Simis, 1982; Ruggiero, 1996; Ledeneva, 1999). The organisation of these markets varies. From the network analysis perspective, illegal markets are often described in terms of criminal cooperatives and instrumental relationships.

Much has also been written about the ties between legal and illegal markets (Passas, 2002; Ruggiero, 2000). Ruggiero emphasizes that the boundary between legal and illegal markets is often unclear and that the two can combine to form an *urban bazaar* where legal and illegal goods and dealings merge and intertwine (Ruggiero, 2000). There are, however, also major differences between legal and illegal markets. Naylor notes that criminals sometimes resort to corruption in order to have the market regulated by law enforcement agencies, for example by selling out a competitor to the authorities (Naylor, 2004). Criminals, ordinary citizens, and unscrupulous entrepreneurs ensure that there is a constant demand for cheap goods. All enterprises (legal or illegal) strive to survive and to generate a profit.

According to Lithuanian informants, the commissioning parties are car dealers belonging to, or cooperating with, large criminal organisations. The commissioning parties are usually located in Kaunas and near the borders with Belarus and Poland. Around 200 stolen cars are annually recovered at the border, of which an estimated 10 percent have been stolen in the Netherlands (especially Toyotas and Hondas) (Siegel, 2014: 82)). The customers arrive from the Ukraine, Latvia, Estonia, Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan to these markets. Relatively new customers are Tajiks. In criminological research, the nexus drug lords and government officials in Tajikistan are emphasized (Paoli, Greenfield & Reuter, 2009: 197). Tajikistan's border with the former Soviet republics is poorly controlled by corrupt custom officers. This has enormous consequences not only for a rapid integration of Tajikistan into the world heroin market and the booming drugs export, but also for the emerging of a

‘narco-elite’, a relatively small group of extremely wealthy criminals who enjoy the protection of high-ranking government officials (ibid.) and an excessively luxurious lifestyle. When a stolen car is bought by Tajiks, according to a car-dealer at one of the Lithuanian car-markets, it will be almost impossible to find it back (Siegel, 2014: 82). There are also no written contracts made, and the sum is paid in cash.

In the former Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries, stolen cars are generally sold on three different illegal markets: the market for used cars, the market for car parts, and the market for scrap metal (Gounev, 2011). According to one of the police respondents, the customers of these markets are ordinary people from all parts of the former Soviet Union, often busy businessmen, who have no time to deal with the formalities and are used to have contacts at the car-branch to whom they give their order. As soon as an order comes in, the dealer, for example in Kaunas (the commissioning party), recruits other people for his ‘operation’. There is a clear division of roles and responsibilities. As the first and the last person in the chain do not know each other, the organisation continues functioning when an individual member is arrested (Siegel, 2014: 83, 84).

Gounev asked in his research whether the demand for stolen cars has its own dynamics and concluded that both the demand and the distribution channels for stolen cars coincide with those of used cars (2011: 74). Gounev’s conclusion is consistent with our findings regarding the Lithuanian market.

There are several open air car markets in Lithuania. Most cars are brought in from Germany, Spain, Switzerland, and France. The influence of organised crime on these markets goes back a long time and is well known to the police. Car markets such as these first emerged in East and Central Europe at the beginning of the 1990s. Until then, only Russian cars, such as *Zhiguli*, *Moskvich* and a more comfortable *Volga* had been accessible to consumers in Lithuania; the more expensive German and Italian models were reserved for *nomenklatura*. In the 1990s, large luxury cars became available also to businessmen and the lease market. These luxury cars became status symbols, similar to mistresses (usually models and actresses), gold and diamonds, real estate and yachts. In the mid 1990s, also less wealthy citizens began purchasing expensive cars. The prices were so high that there were cases that people sold their apartment to be able to buy a Mercedes (Siegel, 2014: 85).

The shortage of family cars, the long waiting periods (in the 1970s and '80s often more than 10 years), and the high prices of cars (for some people the equivalent of two years' salary) contributed to a rapidly growing demand in the 1990s for cheap second-hand and / or stolen cars (Gounev and Bezlov, 2008: 414).

In the 18th and 19th centuries, mobility was provided by horses, the Lithuanian farmers' most cherished possession, and the theft of a horse could plunge a household into serious economic problems (Worobec, 1987: 283–284). Horse theft was perceived by the village community not just as individual bad luck, but as a threat to the safety and productivity of the entire group (ibid.: 290). Whereas in the past, horses were the main target of theft, these days it is all about cars. Cars are also a matter of prestige: driving a BMW is considered more prestigious than driving a *Lada* or *Skoda*. Nice cars form the object of a massive Lithuanian addiction. Also thieves "claim that they are in a way addicted and cannot resist cars of outstanding quality" (Gounev and Bezlov, 2008: 421).

From the early 1990s onwards, the profitable car market was controlled by the local organised crime. Some groups became actively involved in stealing and smuggling cars, especially in Lithuania, while others began to extort protection money from car dealers (Gounev, 2011: 113). Criminal groups were also engaged in car-theft with the purpose to demand from the owner a cash payment in exchange for its return (Gutauskas, 2011: 214).

Gounev described the situation in Bulgaria: the 'insurance stickers' were used to 'warn' thieves that a car was under protection, the so-called 'theft-free' cars. When such a car was nevertheless stolen, this was sometimes done by rival 'insurance companies' (Gounev, 2011: 114). A similar mechanism was in force in Lithuania. A sticker issued by the 'sports club Titanus' on a car meant that the owner was connected to and / or enjoyed *krysha* (protection, lit. 'roof') by organised crime. In some other former Soviet republics, a certain *klyaksa* ('spot', 'stain') on the roof of a car was sufficient to send a clear signal that the car was protected by the mafia (Siegel, 2005).

The traditional criminal 'insurance' market of the 1990s has since been replaced by networks consisting of various actors: thieves, experts in forgery, couriers, car dealers and other intermediaries, technical experts, lawyers, and police officers. Some organisations specialised in more expensive cars such

as Mercedes and BMW, while other groups focused on hybrid cars such as Toyota Prius or Honda Civic, or on 'general' brands such as Opel or Volkswagen (Siegel, 2014: 85). Paradoxically, in Lithuania, brands such as BMW and Mercedes are associated with the mafia, particularly the Russian mafia, which has been active in Lithuania for many years. Wealthy customers often choose brands with a better reputation as they do not want to be associated with criminal organisations (Siegel, 2014: 85).

Gounev's research into the Bulgarian markets similarly shows that when it comes to stolen cars, a distinction is made between, on the one hand, luxury cars such as BMW, Mercedes and Audi and, on the other, commercial vehicles such as small trucks and vans. The most expensive luxury cars are hardly ever stolen, firstly because there are not many of them available and secondly because they can easily be tracked by the police (Gounev, 2011: 102).

Gounev distinguishes among various categories within the 'industry' of car theft: a) illegal enterprises primarily focused on theft (*'theft enterprises'*); b) illegal enterprises involved primarily in the distribution of stolen vehicles (*'sales enterprises'*); c) specialists (thieves, document forgers, couriers, and spotters) who offer their services on demand; d) legal enterprises (second-hand car dealers, service shops, scrap yards, transport companies, and insurance companies); e) corrupt civil servants who facilitate all these activities (2011: 131). According to Gounev, it is often the case that car theft is just one of the many criminal activities of groups who are also engaged in burglaries, raids, drug trafficking, etc. (ibid.: 133).

Criminal organisations play an important role in commissioning the theft of vehicles in the Netherlands. Lithuanian crime groups operate quickly and efficiently and control the entire car theft chain. They follow the trends and developments in the demand for cars not just in their own country (Lithuania is still mainly a transit country), but also in other former Soviet republics. In regard to the suggested by Gounev categorization of car-theft activities, all five categories could be applied to the modus operandi, network structure, and market in the Lithuanian case.

Any individual 'adventurers' travelling to the Netherlands with the aim of stealing cars on their own initiative are monitored and followed by criminal organisations. If criminal groups discover that these individuals are stealing cars for purposes other than private use, they are 'warned' or even punished.

Sometimes they 'get offer they cannot refuse' to work for the criminal organisations. These adventurers are often students from Lithuania studying abroad within the framework of exchange programmes or other studies. They play the role of *navodchik* ('spotter'): they spot the cars, carry out observations, and pass on their information to thieves (Siegel, 2014: 87).

According to Lithuanian respondents, there are well-established ties between criminals and immigrants, and thieves can always find an address to hide their stolen goods or to stay for some time in the Netherlands. These contacts are based on trust and a shared history (the persons in question were childhood friends, attended the same school, know the same people, etc.). During our interviews, Lithuanian students were often mentioned in connection with organised crime activities (not only car-theft) (Siegel, 2014). In the Lithuanian case, there appears to be an obvious link between migrants and organised crime groups, whereby the former are being used by the latter (i.e. a parasitic relationship). This situation is comparable to the ties between the Turkish mafia and Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands when the Turkish *babas* make use of Turkish and Kurdish immigrants as couriers in smuggling heroin to the Netherlands (Bovenkerk and Yesilgöz, 1998). Some Lithuanian migrants are very probably involved in car theft and in fencing stolen goods. According to Lithuanian criminologists, it should not be too difficult to 'work out' who these criminal contacts are, given that the Lithuanian community in the Netherlands is limited in size (Siegel, 2014: 87).

Other illicit markets

One of the important findings in our research is that many goods stolen by mobile bands are not taken back to their countries but are sold on different black markets in the Netherlands and in the neighboring countries. One of these markets is the bazaar in Beverwijk, the largest covered black market in Europe. In addition to a wide licit trade, Beverwijk has become also a major destination for stolen goods (Van Oers & Scholtes, 1990), in particular stolen cosmetics, electronic equipment, gardening tools, bicycles, clothes, and shoes.

Today, the Beverwijk bazaar is dominated by Afghan traders who maintain good contacts with East European intermediaries – many of them speak Russian. Lithuanians at the Beverwijk bazaar are considered as suppliers of stolen garden equipment and electronics. The thieves or their contacts deliver also

sport bags full of cosmetics, cameras, telephones and watches to these traders who pay them for entire batches of stolen goods in cash (Siegel, 2014: 88–90).

The relationships are based on mutual trust. In some cases, thieves bring their bags to traders at their private addresses. Also, in these activities the role of Lithuanian immigrants and students is important, especially in providing information on specific ‘meeting points’ where the contacts between thieves and receivers take place. Belgian criminologists identified the same patterns where criminals meet each other and agree upon specific operations during their research in Belgium (Van Daele & Vander Beken, 2010).

MOBILE THIEVES OR MOBILE BANDITS?

In his book *Violent Entrepreneurs* (2002), Vadim Volkov discusses differences in the meaning of the Russian terms *bandit* and *vor* (thief). According to Volkov, the current interpretation of the first one refers to an urban bandit in a post-Soviet society, who is active in commercial activities, in particular provision of certain services; he is well connected with the authorities and celebrities, but he does not exclude the possibility of using violence to protect his and his clients’ interests (Volkov, 2002: 59). This interpretation of the term “bandit” is similar in other East and Central European countries. According to the author, this meaning is different from the historical connotation of the classical Hobsbawm’s ‘social bandit’ (ibid.).

In Lithuania, the increase in banditry in the first half of the 19th century was associated with peasant revolts. The most common crimes involved stealing cattle or grain, smuggling, and robberies. Horse theft was considered by the local population as a serious crime, and in many instances thieves that had been caught were hanged on the spot. The thieves were often gypsies, Jews, or local farmers. Christine Worobec describes how rich farmers and members of the lower nobility were also involved in these crimes and who maintained contacts with corrupt police officers who facilitated trade in stolen horses (Worobec, 1987: 282–83). Gangs of horse thieves and smugglers operated throughout the countryside. These gangs usually consisted of loosely organised networks, sometimes comprising hundreds of people.

Just as in other European countries, there were also urban criminals active in Lithuania. Cities were considered dangerous and violent places which

required special measures from the local authorities. In towns and cities, other types of criminals were operating: pickpockets, swindlers, forgers, and con-men. They employed their skills in the streets, at markets and later at railway stations. Urban criminals also engaged in theft from houses and shops, counterfeiting money and jewellery, and cheating at card games. Ethnic aspects definitely played a role here: it was mainly gypsies who were associated with these types of 'petty crimes.' According to Shelley, administrative responses to these skilled and crafty crime patterns only led to professionalization of the perpetrator (Shelley, 1981: 17, 18). As a consequence, there emerged a new criminal sub-culture of professional thieves.

In his classic work *The Professional Thief*, published in 1937, Edwin Sutherland writes: "The professional thief is one who steals professionally. This means, first, he makes a regular business of stealing. ... Second, every act is carefully planned. ... Third, the professional thief has technical skills and methods which are different from those of other professional criminals. ... Fourth, the professional thief is generally migratory ..." (ibid.: 3).

The term *thief* is, however, even more complicated because of a specific meaning in the former Soviet Union. It is connected to the title *vor*, a member of *vorovskoi mir* (thieves' world), an informal society or fraternity of professional *vory*, with the elite of *vory v zakone* at the top. *Vory* are expected to live according to the *ponyatiya* (lit. 'notions' or 'understandings'), the rules of conduct (or code of honor). The Code is an oral law which regulates all material and emotional aspects of the thieves' world. This *vorovskoi zakon* (thieves' law) is passed down from generation to generation, although some rules have been changing during *skhodki* (meetings). (Siegel, 2012: 32).

This difference between the professional title of *vor v zakone*, the highest authority in the (post-) Soviet underworld, and the profession thief, based on skills and experience, became somehow intertwined in the case of mobile banditry. Professional thieves are employed and controlled by Lithuanian criminal organizations; however, they do not possess the title of *vor v zakone*, the leader of the criminal world. The majority of *vory v zakone* are Georgians and Armenians (during *perestroika* there were about 600 *vory v zakone* in the former Soviet Union, 400 of whom were Georgians and Armenians) (Dyshev, 1998: 28). In 2008, Cheloukhine estimated that two-thirds of the *vory v zakone* were Russians and Georgians, and the other one-third included Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Ukrainians, Kazakhs, Kurds, and Abkhazians (2008: 368).

When the traditional *vorovskoi mir* began to change, the new role of *vory v zakone* nowadays became directly connected to the emergence of a new market situation. Some of them became involved in providing *krysha* and faced competition with young and strong new criminals. In the beginning, these new criminals worked together with the *vory*, who were experienced in arbitrating the criminal conflicts. On the other hand, the new criminals criticized the old-fashioned ascetic lifestyle of the traditional *vory* (Cheloukhine, 2008: 367). Criminal bosses from both sides, *vory* and new bandits, were being killed all around the former Soviet Union in a continuous conflict between two generations of criminals (Siegel, 2012: 44). According to Shelley, the survivors and victors are those criminal leaders who started to operate internationally (Shelley, 2004: 571).

Different informants stressed that there were no big leaders in Lithuania, no *vory v zakone* ('thieves in law'), and that this means that the Lithuanian criminals are subordinate to the traditional Russian or Georgian mafia (Siegel, 2012: 45). However, the image in the 2000s is that transnational Lithuanian Mafia conquers its position as the most influential and violent organized crime in the Baltic states and elsewhere in East Europe. Violence and leadership are two important elements in their definition of crime. In my study of Russian-speaking immigrants in the Netherlands, similar ideas were voiced. These criminal groups were not only engaged in traditional forms of cross-border organized crime activities such as trafficking and smuggling, but also taking care of business, investing in the legal economy and maintaining contacts with politicians (Siegel, 2005: 191).

In criminological critical studies, diverse cases of attempts of organised crime to establish itself in other countries or capture new criminal markets are described (Finckenauer & Waring, 1998; Siegel, 2005; Varese, 2011). The mobility of criminal groups in all cases appears to be strongly dependent on the local setting and on their international contacts.

‘NAÏVE DUTCH VICTIMS’, SOFT SENTENCES, AND COMFORTABLE PRISONS

One of our research questions was why do Lithuanian criminal groups come to the Netherlands, what makes it attractive for them, and how do they consider their chances to commit crimes in the Netherlands?

Almost all the respondents have emphasised that it is very easy to steal in the Netherlands, easier than in other West European countries. According to some respondents, this lies primarily in the fact that the Dutch are quicker to trust other people and have had little experience with the sharp-witted criminals from East Europe, in other words, they are simply 'naïve'. This aspect of 'naivety' was often mentioned in connection with potential Dutch victims. Dutch allegedly park their cars in dark alleyways, leaving their valuables inside; they leave the curtains open in the evening, which allows criminals to see their possessions because homes are well lit; they leave their bags and telephones unwatched in cafes and supermarkets (Siegel, 2014: 108–110). Dutch are viewed as kind but goofy people who know nothing about differences among East Europeans, considering them all as one homogeneous mass, the so-called 'MOE-landers' (lit. Middle and East Europeans). Reports in various Dutch media do not provide more nuances or detailed information about different groups. Journalists usually play an active role in the process of calling attention to problems and re-defining them, as indicated by Rasinger who analysed the representation of Lithuanian migrants in the United Kingdom, similar to the Dutch situation, the headlines of the newspapers showed themes with negative connotations regarding how the Lithuanians (migrants) are presented (2010: 1028). As one of our respondents, a policeman, mentioned: "For West Europeans they are all the same: all mafia" (Siegel, 2014: 109).

The low sentences and good conditions in Dutch prisons are often mentioned as two important factors that make the Netherlands attractive to transnational organized crime. Our respondents from the police and criminal justice system in the Netherlands as well as in Lithuania had the impression that criminals imagine Dutch prisons as a place where they can have a rest in the conditions that are similar to better hotels in their own country, with a television and microwave in their own cell, room service with fresh, healthy meals based on recommendations of nutritionists, mental health care, sports facilities and the latest fitness equipment (Siegel, 2014: 110). Our interviews with detainees and former detainees in Dutch penitential institutions revealed a more nuanced picture. In some prisons, inmates were allowed a lot of exercise and time spent outdoors (up to four hours per day) as well as good food (fresh, hot meals). In other prisons, Lithuanian informants complained about the poor food (they received half a loaf of bread, a packet of cheese and an

apple once a day), little time outdoors (one hour per day), few working hours (4 hours per day), low wages (12 euro per week), and high prices for renting television or buying cigarettes (*ibid.*: 110).

Also the medical care was often a subject for complaints: they had to wait a long time for a visit from the doctor, poor medical advice: "Even if you are writhing in agony, they have just one medicine for every medical complaint: paracetamol" (*ibid.*). Some respondents also had a lot of criticism of the Dutch system of 'one prisoner per cell', considering it inhuman to be alone in a cell, a psychological torture. One respondent even preferred the conditions of a Soviet prison with 18 people in a cell than being alone (*ibid.*).

However, in comparison with Lithuanian prisons, in the Netherlands the conditions are considerably better. One respondent saw a Dutch prison as a 'health spa' where not only could he kick his drug addiction, but also follow various correspondence courses (languages, playing a music instrument).

Another respondent was surprised that the rumours about comfortable Dutch prisons he heard in Lithuania did not correspond to reality, especially as regards the level of medical care. In Eastern Europe, people are generally used to going to the doctor with complaints such as headache or stomach ache. In the socialist period, medical aid was free, and many people still believe in the 'right to quick and efficient medical care'. Consequently, they had expected more attention and treatment from the medical staff. Police representatives from Lithuania, visiting the Netherlands, were very much impressed by the conditions in Dutch penitentiary institutions and the possibilities for prisoners to study, work, and take exercise (Siegel, 2014: 111).

Also the popular image of tolerant, kind and humane judges and low sentences appeared to be far from reality. The judges' decisions were described as a "lottery": some received a six-month prison sentence, while others walked free for the same crime (*ibid.*).

Our research shows that the often cited argument that low sentences and good conditions in Dutch prisons are an important consideration for criminals when deciding to commit crimes in the Netherlands does not always hold. Only some hard criminals experienced Dutch prisons as being more humane and comfortable in comparison with Russian, Italian or British penitentiary systems, and the sentences imposed were considered to be disproportionately high or arbitrary, a kind of 'lottery' in which the judge's personal opinions play a decisive role (Siegel, 2014: 112).

COMBATING LITHUANIAN MOBILE BANDS

A relatively large number of various measures have been taken to combat organized crime in general and mobile banditry in particular. These measures were taken on three different levels: the EU, in the Netherlands, and in Lithuania.

The first EU initiative, such as the Asset Recovery Office (ARO), was established in 2007 with the purpose of recovering the proceeds of crime as part of a more intensive cooperation among different institutions in the EU member states, which are charged with seizing illegally obtained assets (European Commission, 2013). International initiatives, such as two Council of Europe Conventions on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime, some serious obstacles were indicated concerning the regulations that delay the granting of assistance, but also operational and communication problems (Mitchell, 2012: 2, 3). The information gathering methodology used by the Europol in their 2009 and 2011 analyses (Organized Crime Threat Assessment, OCTA) was evaluated as not very clear and too broad (European Parliament, 2011: 22). Especially in regard to the exchange of information among member states in a framework of the Europol's EIS (European Information System) it is still unclear which criteria are used to gather information in the member states (*ibid.*: 22).

In 2010, the European definition of the mobile banditry phenomenon was formulated

(Council of the European Union, 2010), however, there is still no uniform interpretation of this definition within various member states, and the priority of tackling the phenomenon differs from one state to another. Countries where itinerant gangs are a common problem (such as Belgium, Germany, Denmark, France, and the Netherlands) have placed this problem higher up their list of priorities and are adapting their definitions and regulations. In Eastern and Central Europe, the phenomenon has no name and is viewed as a variation on vehicle crime or theft and robbery and not directly associated with 'organized crime'. According to the Lithuanian Public Prosecution Service, the most important joint problem of Lithuania and the Netherlands is not mobile banditry, but human trafficking for sexual exploitation, followed by drugs trafficking (Siegel, 2014: 114). In Lithuania, human trafficking, the drugs trade, people smuggling and the illegal arms trade are considered to be activities of

organized crime, and not car-thefts or burglaries. Some respondents also rejected the possibility that in Lithuania any itinerant gangs or “mobile bandits” exist, and if they do exist, their activities take place only outside Lithuania (Siegel, 2014: 112). Such differences in opinion and definition among various EU countries regarding organized crime are the obstacle to setting up a joint European approach, because national priorities do not correspond to those of the EU.

On the other hand, the National Police Services Agency (KLPD) emphasized the outstanding contact between Germany and Lithuania and that the German and Lithuanian police work well together (KLPD, 2012: 74). Even as to the fact that Lithuania is mentioned 24 times in the Europol report “Organized Crime Threat Assessment 2011”, the main reason, according to the Lithuanian police, is because the Lithuanian authorities have an excellent cooperation with their foreign colleagues and therefore Lithuanian criminal groups are rounded up more often than groups from other countries (*The Baltic Course*, 13 May 2011). “We know the local crime groups, and the information is sent to our foreign colleagues ... it is not easy for criminals to commit crimes in Lithuania, and therefore they go abroad” (Ramunas Matonis, quoted in *The Baltic Course*, 13 May 2011).

Lithuania is part of the ‘North-East Criminal Hub’ (OCTA, 2009: 29). The concept ‘criminal hub’, incidentally, has been criticized for being too vague (European Parliament, 2011: 23). Lithuanian organized crime groups are viewed as the main actors in a region where criminals from other Baltic states and Poland are active as well. According to the Lithuanian police, regional forums such as the Baltic Sea Conference on Combating International Crime function more effectively and purposefully than large-scale EU meetings.

In the Netherlands, considerable efforts are being made to tackle itinerant gangs from Lithuania and other Eastern and Central European countries, including both repressive and preventive measures such as new laws and operational, administrative, and technological innovations. The Netherlands even made combating and preventing mobile banditry a priority in 2011–2012. Other West European countries that have been struggling with this problem for some time had already made it their priority even earlier.

On the other hand, the problem of itinerant criminals receives almost no attention in the source countries in East and Central Europe, in which the

local authorities have other concerns with regard to organized crime. In this way, mobile banditry remains primarily a West European problem. However, this does not mean that the police and the justice system in Lithuania do not provide assistance in the fight against the criminal gangs that operate in the Netherlands, even if only as a proof of their loyalty to the European Union.

There remain, however, significant policy-related differences between the Netherlands and Lithuania not only due to capacity problems but also as a result of differences in working methods and still prevailing mutual stereotyping. Dutch police and justice officers are sometimes viewed as slow, lazy bureaucrats, and East and Central European police are perceived as corrupt officials.

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Mobilios lietuvių nusikaltėlių grupės Nyderlanduose

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S a n t r a u k a

Nuo praėjusio amžiaus paskutinio dešimtmečio pabaigos Nyderlandų policija reguliariai praneša apie keliaujančių lietuvių grupių nusikalstamas veikas kaip apie mobilaus banditizmo fenomeno dalį. Ataskaitose teigiama, kad šios grupės vykdo turtinius nusikaltimus, yra labai profesionalios ir gerai organizuotos. Jos ypač dažnai atlieka transporto priemonių, parduotuvių, krovinių vagystes ir įsilaužimus.

Šiame straipsnyje remiamasi 2013 m. atliktu tyrimu, siekiant pateikti ir išanalizuoti istorines, socialines-ekonominės ir politines mobilių nusikalstamų gaujų fenomeno priežastis. Daugiausia dėmesio skiriama gaujoms iš Lietuvos. Analizė atlikta įvairiomis perspektyvomis: analizuojamos praeities pamokos (istorinė banditizmo analizė), organizuoto nusikalstamumo augimas kaip socialistinės ekonomikos žlugimo pasekmė (ekonominė naujų rinkų ir klientų analizė), globalizacijos kontekstas ir ypač Europos Sąjungos plėtra, nenugalima Vakarų trauka ir atotrūkis tarp pasiturinčių Vakarų (Nyderlandai) ir skurdžių Rytų (Lietuva) (kultūrinė ir kriminologinė traukos ir atstumties veiksnų analizė).

Tikslus ir detalus lietuvių grupuočių *modus operandi* (veikimo būdo), struktūros, vadovavimo ir tikslų aprašymas grindžiamas įvairiais respondentų pasisakymais, Lietuvos ir Nyderlandų policijos ir specialių sričių teisės specialistų pokalbiais su sulaikytaisiais Olandijos kalėjimuose. Kur dedami vogti daiktai, ar jie patenka į Lietuvos rinką, ar toliau – į buvusias sovietines respublikas, o gal jie parduodami olandų prekybininkams vietiniuose prekybos taškuose? Kaip mezgami ryšiai tarp Lietuvos ir Olandijos (arba Afganistano, Rusijos ir pan.) nusikaltėlių? Atsakymai į šiuos klausimus paremti gausiais interviu, pastebėjimais bei lyginamąja literatūros analize.