



Mobile banditry

East and Central -European itinerant
criminal bands in the Netherlands

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Content:

- Background of this project
- Itinerant criminal bands: lessons from the past
- Mobile banditry as a new form of organized crime
- Criminal markets
- Why in the Netherlands
- Prevention and repression
- Conclusions



Introduction:

- Since 2000 - East- and Central European bands in the EU: damage in the NL: annually about 250 million euro (Kamerstukken, 2009-2010, 28648, nr. 273).
- Letter from the Minister of Security and Justice to the Parliament (17 January 2011): it is difficult for the police to determine whether an increase in mobile banditry is occurring or even whether mobile banditry could be said to exist in the Netherlands (Parliamentary proceedings, 2010-2011, 28648, no. 301).



Definition:

- European definition of mobile banditry:

‘A mobile (itinerant) group of perpetrators is an association of criminals who systematically enrich themselves by perpetrating crimes against property or fraud (in particular shop and cargo theft, break-ins of homes and companies, fraud, skimming and pickpocketing), within a wide-spread area in which they carry out activities and are internationally active’ (Council of the European Union, 5 November 2010).

Our addition: car theft and theft from cars.



Previous research

- Police reports (selection):

IRT (Inter-Regional Investigation Team) North and East Netherlands: 'East European organised crime is a serious, sometimes a major problem in the Kingdom' (IRT, 1996).

'Mobile banditry from Poland and Lithuania' (KLPD), based on Polaris Project (Weenink et al, 2005) - 2005-2006 – Dutch Parliament/questions and priorities.

The annual report 2007 by the *Bovenregionale Recherche Overleg* (BRO) concerned *Polaris II*.

Recent KLPD report (2012): 'the problem has increased'



Other studies:

- In 2009 – Retail sector (Detailhandel Nederland, 2009)
- Sociological research: about social conditions, labour market position and migration patterns of the MOE-landers (Boom et al, 2008; Weltevrede, 2009; Engbersen et al, 2011) or specific groups (Korf, 2009; Korf and Wesselink, 2011).
- Research in Belgium – Van Daele and Vander Beken (2010)
- Not much scientific research in the Netherlands and elsewhere/Universiteit Utrecht /Politie en Wetenschap in 2012-2013/reports in Dutch and English



Research team:

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Focus on Lithuania, Poland, Bulgaria and Romania



Research aims:

- a) provide insight into mobile banditry as it manifested itself in the Netherlands in the years 2008-2012;
- b) analyse the nature of the phenomenon, the profile of the perpetrators and their criminal networks in their countries of origin and in West Europe;
- c) analyse the opportunity structures and markets in the Netherlands and in East and Central Europe;
- d) analyse the preventive and repressive measures by the police and judiciary in recent years in the Netherlands and East and Central Europe.



Research questions:

- What can be learned from the historical analysis of mobile banditry about today?
- Which factors have facilitated the development of mobile banditry within the EU?
- Where do the itinerant perpetrators operate? Where do they go and where are the stolen goods taken?
- Are the perpetrators experienced criminals or amateurs?
- Who are the clients and what are the backgrounds of the criminal groups in the countries involved?
- Do the perpetrators have local contacts; where does their information and local knowledge come from?
- What are the most favourite goals of the itinerant groups of perpetrators?
- Which measures are being taken to combat the phenomenon and how is the cooperation progressing between the police in West and East Europe?



Theoretical perspectives:

- The historical comparison and the lessons learned from comparable situations in the past and the inevitable (negative) effects of globalisation;
- The power of attraction of the West in general and of the Netherlands in particular;
- The gulf between the rich and poor and between West and East Europe.



Research methods:

- Literature (in different languages)
- Media analysis
- Interviews in the Netherlands and in Poland, Lithuania, Bulgaria and Romania (n=127)
- Observations (car)-markets in the Netherlands and abroad, Roma neighborhoods in Romania and Bulgaria, etc.
- File research/checklist
- Interviews with the detainees (n=12)



Old phenomenon

- Egmond, Florike, 1994, *Op het verkeerde pad; georganiseerde misdaad in de Noordelijke Nederlanden 1650-1800*. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker
- Blok, A., 1992, *De bokkerijders. Roversbenden en geheime genootschappen in de landen van Overmaas (1730-1774)*. Amsterdam: Prometheus
- Thuijs, F., 2007, *Op zoek naar de ware Jaco*. Ph.D. Amsterdam





What can we learn from these historical studies?

1. that itinerant gangs committed the same crimes in the past as today: theft, robbery and burglary, using the same modus operandi;
2. that there has always been a link between ethnic marginality, poverty and crime, certain ethnic minorities were always over-represented in police registrations;
3. that border regions were considered in the past to be 'natural' areas for criminality, as well as the 'criminal lifestyle' of mobile bandits;
4. that some gangs departed from the cities and brought the booty back to their residence, others were continually travelling around from village to village;
5. that travelling around from one place to another was a manner of evading repression, discrimination and economic suffering.



Fall of communism and transition

- The political and economic reforms in the beginning of the '90s led to an escalation of criminal activities.
- The four countries in this research (Bulgaria, Romania, Poland and Lithuania) have a long and rich tradition of organised crime.
- Most criminal leaders had (and still have) good contacts in politics and the business world; corruption in these sectors facilitates their activities
- Esteem for the leaders of criminal organisations is determined by their successes in international business, their cooperation with the legitimate world and their position in the political arena.



Organized Crime



- In the 1990s, organised crime took the form of an ‘unholy trinity’: members of the old state apparatus (the *nomenklatura*), professional criminals and black market traders/a new class of ‘entrepreneurs’.
- In the 2000s the large criminal organisations were replaced by dozens of smaller networks of professional criminals.
- “*Other countries have a Mafia. In Bulgaria the Mafia has its own country!*” (Bulgarian lawyer)
- “*Romania is a mafia state*” (former chief of Romanian police)
- Polish mafia: Pruszków and Wolomin
- Lithuania: Vilniuska brigada and Daktaras (Kaunas)



Residence of Hendrikas Daktaras





EU expansion – policy and consequences

- There was no serious analysis of the crime situation by the European Commission in these countries (including on corruption and violence)
- Despite many signals from local law enforcement and academic researchers - no preventive measures and no international agreements were made

Consequencies:

- Less crime in these countries because of criminal emigration
- Criminal import into West Europe
- EU enlargement has facilitated new forms of cross-border crime, including mobile banditry.



Organized crime or adventurers?

- The concept **MOE-landers** (CEE-nians)
- **‘Survival criminals’:**
 - Migrants, who are dissatisfied with their income, they are unable to find work or retain their jobs. Some are addicted to alcohol or drugs
 - Stay in the Netherlands because they don’t want to return as ‘losers’
 - Street-crimes, nuisance. The stolen goods – for own consumption (or selling them to other migrants).
 - Poles, Lithunians, Latvians, Russians, Ukranians, Romanians and Bulgarians
 - No organisation, no control (except of beggars)
 - Indirect link to mobile bandits



Professional criminals

- Operate always in group, strict division of tasks: from gathering information about markets, objects and potential targets to stealing, transporting and concealing the stolen goods.
- Organized crime groups commission, finance, facilitate and control all phases of criminal activities and markets (including remote control).
- Three sub-categories of professional criminals:



First category

- **Members of organised criminal networks** in their own countries. The commissioners do not travel to West Europe but are in charge of criminal activities and markets at a distance.

Example: Lithuanian organized crime groups in the Netherlands:

Agurkas focus on car theft, robberies, fraud and counterfeiting.

Zemaiciai are involved in fraud, robberies, car theft, stealing motorcycles and agricultural machinery and drug smuggling.

Kamolintis primarily involved in car theft, smuggling drugs and cigarettes and in counterfeiting



Second category

- **Groups of 'specialists'** (in thefts, burglaries or shoplifting) originated from all studied countries.

Some groups are supervised by criminal organisations in their own countries; other groups consist of criminals who temporarily stay in West Europe.

The leaders of these groups live in various West European countries, amongst which the Netherlands



Third category:

- **Romanian and Bulgarian criminal networks, many of whom are Roma.**
 - The leaders of large clans recruit poor people from the ghettos with the promise that they can earn money quickly.
 - Pickpocketing, fraud, begging, fast-change tricks, prostitution and selling counterfeit gold.
 - Roma beggars are temporarily employed by criminal organisations, their money taken off them and they are regularly relocated from country to country.



Where do they come from?



Observations: Bucharest July 2012

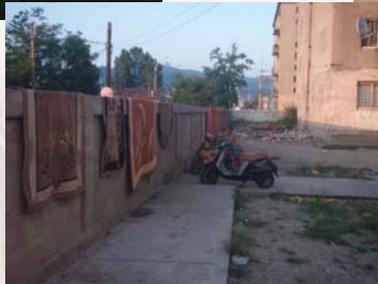
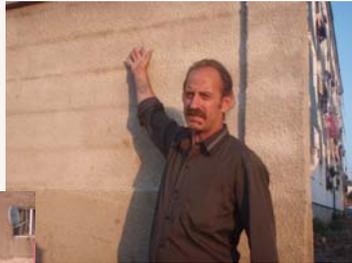
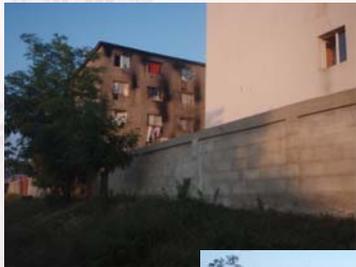




Bucharest



Baia Mare, Romania, July 2012





Vidin and Stolipinovo, Bulgaria July-August 2012



Where are the stolen goods?



Criminal markets

- The markets for stolen cars in all four countries
- Obsession with cars: *'Some people don't own a home, but they drive a Mercedes. They sleep, eat and live in their cars'*
- Commissioning party are car dealers, who work with (and for) criminal groups
- Customers are from the Ukraine, Latvia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and recently Tajikistan: *'Those guys pay for their cars with opium money'*



Stolen from Dutch shops and houses

- Stolen goods (cosmetics, electronics, clothes) are sold mainly in the Netherlands
- The role of Dutch markets: Beverwijk: *'Without stolen goods Beverwijk would have gone bankrupt a long time ago'*
- Business links between Afghan merchants and Polish, Bulgarian and Lithuanian 'specialists'
- Other markets in:

Netherlands

Belgium

France

Germany





Where are the stolen goods?

Observations: Huedin, Romania, July 2012



Huedin, Romania, July 2012





Levski, Bulgaria, August 2012



Cemetery in Liaskovetz, Bulgaria, July 2012





Why do they come to the Netherlands?



Is this Europe?

- Escape from poverty
- not only to the Netherlands



Corruption





Why in the Netherlands?

- **‘naive nice Dutch victims’:**

‘People always leave their curtains open in the evening, and it is even easier to see any valuable possessions they may have because their homes are so well lit’

‘The Dutch have a good heart, they want to help the Roma and send money to Romania. But if you send money to the Roma, you are actually killing them, because that money goes to politicians who discriminate against and harm the Roma. So what do they do? They move to the country where the ‘good Dutch people’ live’



Why?

- Dutch prisons and sentencing

‘For a Romanian gypsy, a stay in a Dutch prison is a holiday...’

‘The judge said to me: “you will never get into my country again!” before she even knew what it was about...’

- The often cited argument that low sentences and good conditions in Dutch prisons are an important consideration when deciding to commit crimes in the Netherlands does not hold.
- However: ‘Other countries have harsher approach’ (South Europe, France, Germany)



Combating mobile banditry- obstacles and perceptions

Large number of measures have been already taken to combat/prevent mobile banditry

However:

- Complaints about Dutch police and justice: slow handling of requests for legal assistance, “lack of knowledge” and a “too soft approach”
- The priorities of Central and East European law enforcement do not lie with mobile gangs operating in West Europe, negative perception of police there



Conclusions

- The fall of communism and the expansion of the EU facilitated mobile banditry
- Social inequality, (extreme) poverty, low wages, discrimination and xenophobia - these countries have little to offer to their citizens, who travel to West Europe, looking for opportunities to improve their economic position.
- In the Netherlands mobile bandits are:
 - members of a large criminal organisation in their own country or who are recruited by these organisations for specific operations
 - organise themselves into gangs while abroad and who remain abroad for longer periods in order to commit crimes;
 - Roma families who travel from country to country to commit crimes before returning to Romania or Bulgaria to invest the proceeds of their crimes.



Conclusions

- Many stolen in the NI cars end up in the former soviet republics and Asia
- Goods stolen from shops, homes and companies are mainly sold in West Europe
- Criminal proceeds are invested in houses and land, luxury cars and other status symbols, and used to recruit and train new members
- Netherlands becomes more popular for mobile bandits
- low sentences and pleasant conditions in Dutch prisons are not the decisive factor for mobile bandits to choose for the Netherlands as a target
- There continue to be significant differences between West and East Europe regarding policy and practice concerning mobile banditry, due to capacity problems, structural obstacles, different working methods and mutual prejudices.



Thank you!