This is the published version of a paper presented at *13th Conference of the European Sociological Association, (Un)Making Europe: Capitalism, Solidarities, Subjectivities*, 29 August – 1 September 2017, Athens, Greece.

Citation for the original published paper:

Basic, G. (2017)
(Un)Making Europe: Anomie in Intelligence and Operational Police and Border Guard Work in the Baltic Sea Area.
In: (Un)Making Europe: Capitalism, Solidarities, Subjectivities, the 13th European Sociological Association Conference European Sociological Association

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

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13th Conference of the European Sociological Association, “(Un)Making Europe: Capitalism, Solidarities, Subjectivities”, 29 August – 1 September 2017, Athens, Greece

Session:
Research Stream, RS01_02a_P: (Un)Making The European States

Time: Wednesday, 30/Aug/2017: 4:00pm - 5.30pm

Location: Panteion
PANTEION University of Social & Political Sciences
136 Syggrou Avenue 17671 Athens, Greece

Title: (Un)Making Europe: Anomie in Intelligence and Operational Police and Border Guard Work in the Baltic Sea Area

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Citation for published version:
Basic, G. (2016). (Un)Making Europe: Anomie in Intelligence and Operational Police and Border Guard Work in the Baltic Sea Area. (Un)Making Europe: Capitalism, Solidarities, Subjectivities, the 13th European Sociological Association Conference, organized by Hellenic Sociological Society, Athens, Greece; Panteion University of Social & Political Sciences, Athens, Greece and Harokopio University, Athens, Greece. Available online:
Émile Durkheim’s sociological term ‘anomie,’ which indicates normlessness or a state of norm resolution, is the theme of this ethnographic study. The purpose is to analyze how intelligence and operational personnel in the various border authorities in Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania describe the category “Russian criminals” and which discursive patterns cooperate with the construction of the category “norm-dissolving Russian.”

Multiple forms of empirical material were analyzed in this study: observations and photographs taken during the field work (718 field hours), interviews (73), documents produced by intelligence and operative personnel, and media coverage concerning intelligence and operative actions. This ethnography explains how police and border guards in the Baltic Sea area reinforce in-group bonds, develop a professional identity, and come to understand the moral aims of their work: by contrasting themselves against the constructed threat of Russian criminals, spies, and military invaders.

Intelligence and operational police and border guard work is a practice in which the work from the first moment is characterized by an abstract threat, justified by considering that the stability of society can be transformed into instability if crime is not fought. Police officers and border guards in this study are constructed as key figures in the struggle to
prevent the resolution and preserve the current state of society, which is portrayed as stable and better – at least if we speak with intelligence and operative police officers and border guards. From time to time, a “criminal” from Russia has a key role in the performance of law enforcement’s fluctuating morality, with the threat of norm resolution coming from Russia and attenuation of the threat based on the representation of effective law enforcement.

The media reporting on intelligence and operations, as well as the documentation that was created by the authorities involved in the fight against crime in the Baltic Sea area, call out the “criminals” from Russia by their absence. The media report on syndicates from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania who commit crimes in Sweden and Finland. In documents created by the intelligence and operational personnel, it is reported that more than 700 individuals had been suspected or convicted of a crime in any of the European countries. Most are citizens of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

The picture presented in the interviews is different. Actors in this study produce Russians as the leading criminals in the Baltic region. Russian criminals are represented as organizers and leading figures in various types of crime. An informant’s story is constructing a symbolic reality where law-abiding and conventional actors strive to maintain stability in the normative order, in this case referring to the crime that comes from Russia. This reality is partly an expression of fear and solidarity against norm resolution in the form of crime from Russia, and expressions of social development that raise the need for a contra-group to strengthen feelings of solidarity in the norm-stable societies. The identity-based
symbolism that informants are constructing in their stories is based on the current and stable normative state of society.