

Dialogue of the borderland: from Euro Regions to Local Border Traffic. Political and geographical aspects

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses the evolution of the main forms of inter-regional cooperation of Kaliningrad oblast of the Russian Federation with the regions of Lithuania and Poland in the period from 1992 to 2014. The aim of the work is to identify the main results of cooperation between Russia and the EU. A brief analysis and an assessment of the current state of affairs in the sphere of external relations is made from the standpoint of the functional approach. Particular attention is paid to the institute of Euroregions and local border traffic as the most significant and actually existing forms of cooperation under consideration.

KEYWORDS

Baltic region, Kaliningrad oblast, local border traffic, Euroregion, Russia, Poland

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Introduction

Throughout its history, the Kaliningrad oblast is a clear indication of changes in the geopolitical map of the world that have occurred as a result of the Second World War. In Europe, most large-scale geo-political changes have taken place in the center of the continent, associated with territorial liquidation of the Third Reich and the formation of new political systems, which have become one of the theaters of the period of global confrontation of superpowers during “Cold War”. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Kaliningrad exclave has gradually become an integral part of long-term strategy, to build Russia in the Baltic Sea, not only in the military and political, but also in social and economic spheres.

The phenomenon of cross-border cooperation of the Kaliningrad oblast of Russia and north-eastern provinces of Poland lies in a number of objective conditions, based on the features of the historical, economic and political

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development of the border areas of the two states. The centuries-old economic unity determines their similar appearance and landscape. At the same time, social proximities of the ethnically close nations formed in different political circumstances.

Regional aspects of Russian-Polish interstate cooperation

Cross-border contacts of the Kaliningrad oblast, as elements of international relations, have their periodization. Kuzmin (1991) has identified the following three stages while exploring the Soviet period of the region's development within the framework of interstate relations:

— First period (1946-1956) was characterized by the beginning of the formation of a system of different types of cooperation with Eastern European countries;

— Second period (1956-1985) was marked by the first attempts to democratize the relationships between Eastern European countries and avoidance of the hard following command-bureaucratic system; the first theoretical forms were developed and delivered the very problem of cross-border cooperation was set;

— Third period (1985-1992) was associated with the course on the renovation and the fundamental changes in the political system of the USSR that led to the transition to a market economy and, as a result, new forms of international cooperation.

Such periodization characterize relationships within the Soviet bloc during the formation, existence and collapse of global bipolarity. During the Soviet period, cross-border contacts of the Kaliningrad oblast with the poviats of Poland evolved in a fairly limited range, in spite of the existence of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) and the declared cooperation. Direct contacts were not encouraged and, in the main, were limited to the exchange of official delegations from a number of party functionaries and representatives of the productive sectors. A significant imbalance in organization of cross-border cooperation processes would not allow to achieve a high degree of economic integration and cooperation in bordering regions. It should be noted that the principles of economic zoning in the USSR often ignored limological factors, except, perhaps, the development of transport infrastructure (Davidov, 2009).

In principle, the situation began to change in 1992 (we believe that this date is the starting point for the fourth stage of Russian-Polish cooperation, especially concerning the Kaliningrad oblast), when the leadership of the region against the backdrop of a lack of clear economic outlook, decided on the establishment of socio-economic relations with the regions of newly formed European countries in part of the foreign policy of Russia. Primarily, this was due to the need for economic survival in the territorial isolation from most of Russia and break of almost all domestic production linkages. Important in this regard were the efforts of partner parties, seeking to overcome the previously existing difficulties and move to a new level of interaction. For example, the Kaliningrad oblast archive has preserved an appeal of the Minister of Trade and material resources of the Republic of Lithuania V. Zhidonis from 3 July 1992 to the Head of Administration of the Kaliningrad oblast Yuri Matochkin, in which he requests on the opening in 1992 of the Trade Representation of the Ministry of Trade and material resources of the Republic of Lithuania in Kaliningrad and

the Trade Representation of the Kaliningrad oblast of the Russian Federation in Vilnius. It should be noted that a back in 29 July 1991 the Republic of Lithuania entered into an at the international level “Agreement between the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic and the Republic of Lithuania on cooperation in the economic and socio-cultural development of the Kaliningrad oblast of the RSFSR”. Similar agreements on cooperation of the Kaliningrad oblast of the Russian Federation with the north-eastern voivodeships of Poland, and regions, ministries, bodies of state administration of the Republic of Belarus was signed on 22 May 1992 and 14 October 1999 (see the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation: www.mid.ru).

An important step in building a new format of relations with the Kaliningrad oblast with Polish voivodeships became the Russian-Polish “round table” on the issues of cooperation of the Kaliningrad oblast of the Russian Federation and regions of the Republic of Poland, which took place on September 6, 1992 in Kaliningrad (see: State Archive of the Kaliningrad region). It is an event that has become a starting point, which subsequently resulted in the creation of the Intergovernmental Russian-Polish Cooperation Council of Regions of the Republic of Poland and the Kaliningrad oblast of the Russian Federation, which operates to this day. The next meeting of the Board held on 27 May 2015 in the city of Svetlogorsk, Kaliningrad oblast (Tsukanov, 2015).

In this context, mention should be made also on the activities of representatives of the Kaliningrad oblast in Poland, Lithuania and Belarus (1992-2007), which served for the formation of an image of the new Russian region within Europe. The first and most effective was a regional office in Poland, which started its activities in Gdansk, and then in Elblag and Olsztyn. Representation agency promoted the development of trade and economic, cultural, scientific, educational, sporting, spiritual and other relations, contributed to strengthening the bilateral relations of citizens of the Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation and the voivodeships of the Republic of Poland (Turushev, 1994; Overko, 1996; Vardomsky, 2000; Smirnov, 2006; Tarasov, 2008).

Representative agency participated in all negotiations with the Polish voivodeship leaders, including ministerial unit, to change the status of the border crossing “Gusev-Goldap”, the construction of “Elblag-Kaliningrad” road and “Mamonovo-2 – Grzechotki” border crossing.

Euroregions as a form of inter-regional cooperation

Another form of interregional cooperation of the Kaliningrad oblast and the regions of neighboring states came the institute of Euroregions, whose activity assumed international integration of two or more territorial units of neighboring countries in border areas. Kaliningrad oblast began to take part in the Euroregions from the mid-1990s. The active phase came in the late 1990s – early 2000s, with the most actively involved region among all the Russian border regions was Kaliningrad oblast (Klemeshev, Fedorov & Manakov, 2015).

On February 22, 1998 on the basis of an agreement signed in Malbork (Poland) by the representatives of regional and local authorities of border areas of Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden, the Euroregion “Baltic” was established. The structure of the Euroregion included the entire territory of the Kaliningrad oblast and the administrative-territorial units of

foreign states: District of Bornholm (Denmark), Klaipeda (Lithuania), Pomerania and Warmia-Mazury (Poland), Southern Småland County, Blekinge and Kalmar (Sweden), and the districts with centers in Liepaja and Ventspils (Latvia). In 2007, Latvian districts resigned from the Euroregion, but the Euroregion is still in force. As a result of the Presidium meeting held on April 8, 2016 in Svetlogorsk, Presidency of the Euroregion "Baltic" was transferred to the Russian side.

From a geographical point of view, it is important to note that five of the seven Euroregions in Russia include the Kaliningrad oblast, one the Pskov oblast, and one – the Republic of Karelia. Other Russian regions bordering with the EU and Norway, do not participate in Euroregions (Murmansk and Leningrad oblast and the city of St. Petersburg). The active role of the Kaliningrad oblast can be attributed to the unique geo-economic positioning of the region, which has close ties with Poland and Lithuania, and through sea border with other countries of the Baltic Sea Region (Klemeshev, Fedorov & Manakov, 2015). Currently, Kaliningrad oblast, albeit formally, participates in the five Euroregions: "Baltika", "Neman", "Lyna-Lava", "Sesupe" and "Saule", including administrative-territorial units of seven countries (Russia, Belarus, Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Sweden). The legal basis of cooperation in the framework of Euroregions is predominantly the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities (Fig. 1).

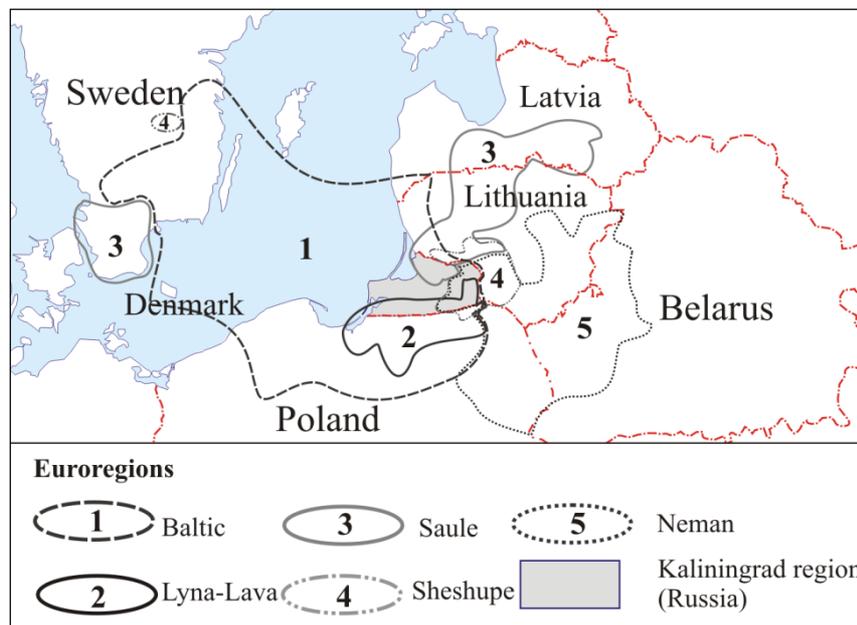


Figure 1. Euroregions with the participation of the Kaliningrad oblast

According to Koshelev (2009), the use of the experience of functioning of these Euroregions contributed and contributes to the socio-economic development of the Kaliningrad oblast. However, it should be noted the apparent stagnation of Euroregional activity emerged in recent years on the

EU's eastern borders. Thus, Lithuania and Poland, after joining the EU and the area of the Schengen Agreement, tightened the rules for issuing visas for the Kaliningrad oblast by introducing fees, requiring invitations, setting limits on the number and duration of trips, thereby reducing the intensity of contacts at the interregional level.

Local border traffic - opportunity towards visa-free regime

Meanwhile, in 1992, Kaliningradians were able to visit the Republic of Lithuania using an internal civil passport of the USSR with a supplement of a resident of the Kaliningrad oblast. Similar visa-free approach was true for Poland, which was later replaced by the introduction of free visas. From July 1, 2003 the region's residents were required to follow a simplified travel documents procedure while traveling to Lithuania. This mode during transit through the territory of Lithuania on the railways operates to this day. Since 2007, after the intergovernmental Russia-EU agreement on mutual trips, the Kaliningradians' received the possibility to obtain the Schengen visas, issued by the consular offices of Poland.

Against this background, Poland since 2010 began to actively advocate for the simplification of the visa regime. So, in April 2010, in a letter sent to the European Commission, the ministers of Russia and Poland's on Foreign Minister S. Lavrov and R. Sikorski urged the Commission to take into account the peculiarities of the Kaliningrad oblast (Deutsche, 2010). At the end of July 2010 the Minister R. Sikorski, who arrived in Kaliningrad oblast on a working visit, has once again confirmed that Poland is ready to sign an agreement on visa-free regime that would apply to the entire Kaliningrad oblast, not just the 30-kilometer border zone stipulated by the Schengen regulations (Żęgota, 2014). The Polish position was also announced in September 2010, by T. Iwiński – the deputy chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Polish Sejm (Kaliningrad.ru, 2010).

Such actions on the part of the Polish authorities were considered in the context of cross-border interest to intensify economic cooperation between Poland and the Kaliningrad oblast of the Russian Federation (Anisevich, Palmovsky & Dragileva, 2013).

The signing of an agreement on December 14, 2011 in Moscow on local border traffic regime between the Kaliningrad oblast of the Russian Federation and the northern voivodeships of Poland opened up the prospects for building a new format of cooperation not only between neighboring regions of the two countries, but in general between Russia and the EU (fig. 2). The Agreement entered into force on July 27, 2012 (Kretinin & Mirnyuk, 2014; Anisevich & Palmovsky, 2014).



Figure 2. Territory covered by the local border traffic between Poland and Russia

To date, most of the border areas are not a factor of development of cross-border links, but an obstacle to Russia's entry into the world economy: the low density of the border crossings and their poor quality, poor development of engineering infrastructure. Many difficulties delivers the low technical equipment of the most checkpoints (Gumenyuk, Kuznetsova & Osmolovskaya, 2016). The Polish side of the state border of the Russian Federation has four border crossings, the largest and most efficient of them is "Mamonovo-Grzechotki", which was built in 2001 with the EU funding. It has a capacity of 800 thousand cars per year, while in reality approx. 1.8 million cars passes, and the most modest option – "Gusev-Goldap" has an estimated capacity of 300 thousand cars, with 1 million annual crossings (Gomółka, 2014; Gomółka, 2015; Mezhevich & Zhuk, 2013).

According to the Polish cultural center in Kaliningrad, every second citizen of Kaliningrad enters Poland via the program of Small border traffic (SBT). In total from July 2012 to July 2014 the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in Kaliningrad has issued more than 200 thousand of the corresponding resolutions (NewKaliningrad.ru, 2014). According to the press service of the Warmia and Mazury Department of Border Guard Service in Ketrzyn, only for this duration of the program Kaliningradians crossed the border with Poland, using SBT cards, approx. 2.5 million times (see wm.strazgraniczna.pl).

In general, being active for several years, the agreement provides an opportunity to assess its positive and negative aspects, and to formulate proposals for the deepening of inter-regional cooperation in this area (Bolychev, Gumenyuk & Kuznetsova, 2015; Tarasov, 2016).

Conclusion

Analysis of the Kaliningrad experience shows that we should pay attention to several important aspects of the further development of cross-border cooperation of regions: the central government authorities are capable of supporting cross-border cooperation by providing local and regional authorities with the necessary empowerment and resources without fear of loss of sovereignty; Euroregions or similar structures for the development of cross-border cooperation (Mikhaylov & Bolychev, 2015) need to decide what are their main objectives and priorities – the development of projects for the members of affiliate programs, or active participation in strategic and spatial development of the region. There is a need for training, for the formation of the training programs, retraining of personnel for implementation of project activities, as well as the preparation of applications themselves. It is also necessary to promote the growth of competence and improve the quality of managerial skills of the representatives of the municipal administrations, working with cross-border cooperation projects (Kolosov, Zotov & Sebentsov, 2016). Regional and local authorities, cooperating across borders, have the ability to coordinate their priorities, taking into account national, regional and local strategic development plans. It is necessary to adapt the techniques and methods of statistical data collection and provision of information on cross-border cooperation.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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