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The "Forgotten Border" between Poland and Kaliningrad Oblast. De- and Re-Boundarization of the Russian-EU Neighborhood

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Introduction

The dynamics of Central European border transformations are marked by several tendencies that primarily result from the process of European integration. The erosion and/or political and social de-emphasis of borders is a landmark in the growing unity of states and changing nature of statehood within the European Union. Ideas and solutions originating from the western part of the continent have easily penetrated central and eastern areas, particularly with the 2004 enlargements. This has also be the case with the analysis of borders and cross-border relations in the region – a situation that is perhaps most visible with regard to German-Polish, German-Czech or Slovak-Hungarian relations, where old territorial disputes marked by long-lasting border separation were finally (partly or entirely) closed and replaced with permeable border regimes operating under the new normative scheme of reconciliation and integration. Against this background, the border with Kaliningrad Oblast – a part of the Russian Federation sandwiched between Poland and Lithuania in the middle of the enlarged EU space – manifested for a long time the old legacies of separation, even strengthened by the new external Schengen border regime after 2007. This border experienced changes much later than others in the region and became a sort of "forgotten border", with its own problems and limitations.

The aim of this paper is to test the border dynamics of the Polish-Kaliningrad Oblast border by relating them to the context of European integration. The conceptual framework of *boundarization* and *frontierization* is used, as well as the theoretical tools of European integration studies. It is claimed that the *de-boundarization* visible after 2012 is fueled by local motives of a neo-functional nature. This is sometimes in line, but sometimes collides, with the intergovernmental game of the supranational and national centers on this border, who use it instrumentally for achieving their own goals.

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Conceptual framework

To debate the abovementioned issues a theoretical concept needs to be introduced, framing further interpretation of empirical developments. The ever-evolving field of border studies already offers several interesting propositions for theoretical-explanatory mechanisms. However, none of them has been widely recognized as a fully-fledged "border theory". On the other hand, dozens of models explaining specific border developments contribute to understanding border-related processes. This investigation takes into account both these processes and conceptually explores the changes on the Kaliningrad Oblast border in a dual way: on the one hand, seeing it as a phenomenon belonging to the sphere of international relations identifies the European integration process as the main factor framing current developments there. On the other, the phenomena in the field are conceptually related closer to border studies and border related processes. Consequently a dual theoretical approach is proposed here. On the one hand, there are grand European integration theories, for example neo-functionalism, (liberal) intergovernmentalism and (social) constructivism, that are considered to have significant explanatory potential for analyzing interactions between the EU and Russia. On the other, there are border-related concepts that help in exploring the issue, for example (de-) boundarization, the down-scaling mechanism and the metaphor of the laboratory.

Border relations in the light of grand European integration theories

Early post-Second World War integration theories focused on the reasons for integration (Diez, Wiener 2004, 7), the question of how to avoid war (Beichelt 2006, 163) and practically-oriented propositions, as in the case of the communication theory of integration (Deutsch 1964) and the federalism/functionalism debate (Mitrany 1944). These theories were soon partly marginalized by so-called "grand theories" that tried to explain and understand the reasons for and the mechanisms of integration. While referring to Europe, they aspired to be universal both in terms of geography and content. Here, three concepts have dominated within a multiplicity of theories and approaches: neo-functionalism, intergovernmentalism and constructivism (Nugent 1999). Due to their universalism, these theories can be described as the most promising in explaining border relations in present-day Europe.

Neo-functionalism is based on a (neo-)liberal approach to comprehending reality, and concentrates on the elimination of barriers and consequently the free flow of people and goods, especially free trade, leading to improvements in the satisfaction of existing needs (Haas 1964). The political aims of stability and peaceful coexistence are best achievable with economic instruments that are functionally

oriented. Initial decisions, concentrating on pooling divided resources, initiate the mechanism of "spillover," which leads to the inclusion of further areas of non-economic character to the integration basket. It "refers to a situation in which a given action, related to a specific goal, creates a situation in which the original goal can be assured only by taking further actions, which in turn create a further condition and a need for more action, and so forth" (Lindberg 1963, 123). The weakening position of nation-states is assisted by the increasing importance of the supranational level, and the gradual supplementation of national power centers with a supranational umbrella. This should be followed by changes in societies' allegiances turning towards them. This school of thought assumes, consequently, the linearity of processes and their practical orientation, as well as rationality in the formation of preferences.

The second of the schools, intergovernmentalism, is rooted in a neo-realistic approach to international relations (Waltz 1979). It considers traditional attributes of a state as crucial in international relations, and consequently approaches integration as interactions between states, both based on principles of independence and sovereignty (Hoffmann 1966). State representatives negotiate solutions, taking national interests as key indicators of their integration aims. Power remains at the national level, transfer of competences is undesirable. Liberal intergovernmentalism focuses on the instrumental transfer of competences (Moravcsik 1993; Moravcsik 1998).

The third of the grand theories, (social) constructivism, considers the integration process as being constituted by the norms and values responsible for unification and proliferation. The process is consequently socially constructed (Diez, Wiener 2004). This usually happens together with the 'windows of opportunity,' when old norms and values are undermined by their low efficiency, 'individual agency,' with key actors proposing new norms and values, and finally their internalization by the people in the collective socialization process (Wilga 2001, 48).

The three grand theories in turn indicate three different motives behind international integration. These are, respectively, functionally oriented gains in better satisfying needs, the interests of states and, finally, similarity of norms, values and identities. The question remains, though, if and to what extent the theories of regional integration are applicable to border conditions and micro-scale border investigation? The author believes that they possess, due to their declared universalism, great explanatory potential here, by framing the perspective on both the causes and mechanisms of cross-border relations. At the same time their customization to micro-circumstances by concentrating on regional and local territorial units is necessary, allowing them to become a prism for considering cross-border interactions.

The neo-functional approach is consequently highly applicable for understanding cross-border collaboration and integration, both of which are inspired by

chances created in the top-down logics but answer locally existing needs. Border regime liberalization, manifested in the elimination of obstacles to the free flow of goods and people across borders, is considered to be the starting point. Local inhabitants and local authorities, too, use this opportunity, as they are interested in overcoming their border-related handicaps resulting from peripherality and underdevelopment. Both result in the better satisfaction of locally existing needs, at the same time, however, the first, local (cross-border) policies, often also functionally oriented, appear. Initially related to trade, exchange of goods and services, gradually, however, spilling over into public policies that obtain a cross-border flavor. This is especially visible in areas with noticeable deficits, where common (cross-border) usage of previously unavailable resources leads to functionally oriented collaboration and integration of specific sectors (transportation systems, water and sewage networks, educational offers, etc.). Finally, both sides try to improve the coordination of the system by attempts at creating a common institutional level where decision-making can also be shared, with executive power on both sides of the border.

Additionally, the intergovernmental and neo-realistic approaches display a high potential for cross-border collaboration and integration. From this perspective they are seen as the central authorities' strategies in achieving national interests. The latter can vary and be differently defined, spanning from equipping peripheral and underdeveloped regions with access to an external development fund, to improving relations with a neighboring state or facilitating the path to deepen relations with the European Union. National policies are often manifested in cross-border collaboration of border territorial units, sometimes in purely symbolic ways. The latter (in practice, the local authorities) usually eagerly take this chance, considering it a window of opportunity for attracting attention and overcoming the disadvantages of a peripheral location. It happens that they take those opportunities 'too seriously' and, employing this para-diplomacy, undermine competences in foreign policy traditionally belonging to the center. This additionally undermines the Westphalian principle of exclusive and unambiguous control of national territory. That sort of situation results sometimes in tensions between national centers and local actors with regard to forms of cross-border collaboration and integration.

The social constructivist perspective considers cross-border cooperation as a process of standardization of norms and values, and a (re)construction of cross-border identities. It is based on strengthened feelings of mutual belonging that eliminates the dividing character of state boundaries.

(De-)boundarization, down-scaling and the metaphor of the laboratory

The concept of boundarization is an element of the de-bordering debate and the myth of a borderless world. The European Union is seen to embody the post-Cold War process of erosion and elimination of classically understood borders and a shift from their spatial understanding from immutable institutions towards flexible social constructs. Distinguishing two manifestations of border organization can be helpful here. Starting with the most widely recognized understanding of a border as an instrument of distinguishing "us" from "non-us", it is necessary, however, to deepen its conceptualization, by differentiating "frontiers" from "boundaries" (Kristof 1959).

A frontier is a space where the influences, cultures, values, goods, and so on of the neighboring structures mix (Walters 2004, 687-688; Browning, Joenniemi 2008, 529). Individuals living in frontiers, often display openness, diversity, multilingualism, and so on (O'Dowd, Wilson 2002, 8). Together with the Peace of Westphalia and the modern (nation) state creation in Europe, states started to look for "more or less strict territorial limits" (Evans, Newnham 1998, 185), separating exclusive sovereignties (O'Dowd, Wilson 2002, 8) and standardizing controlled spaces as well as "nationalizing their inhabitants." The post-war integration processes led to the erosion of borders in Europe and de-boundarization followed in many cases by the (re-)frontierization of state edges.

It is, however, not only the nature of the border, but also its understanding that plays a role in border processes, as well as the understanding the role of border processes themselves. Down-scaling offers an interesting opportunity here. Border processes in Europe in recent decades have often been seen as a manifestation of European integration processes in the down-scaled perspective.

Changing the scale of analysis has been considered analytically useful in border studies (Kaiser, Nikiforova 2008). As Vladimir Kolossov claims, "the scale of analysis is not naturally determined, but represents a social construct" (Kolossov 2005, 628). Down-scaling of investigation in border studies, manifested in the concentration on border territorial units, leads, among others, to the concept of an 'integration laboratory' (Bürkner 2015, 4-7, 21). Here, continental integration (and integration-related) processes are more observable, additionally following the argument, that "during history the areas involved in cross-border cooperation and those involved in European integration were practically the same" (Pasi 2007, 73).

Border scholars, in their attempts to theorize twinning in Europe, have suggested two main explanations behind this process. Firstly, it has been indicated that border units collaborate across borders, illustrating European-wide processes of integration, or more precisely, a down-scaled European Union. They were, consequently, to play the role of micro-scale laboratories of integration processes.

Jouni Häkli (2011, 21) stresses that "the European Union (…) can be seen as an experimentation (…) allowing for local and transnational ties to bundle and overcome Europe's all too territorial past." Collaboration usually involves experimenting (Joenniemi, Sergunin 2011, 233). Alberto Gasparini sees on the border an environment of openness and cosmopolitanism in everyday practices (Gasparini 2008), so the European project can be tested here, as whole or sectorally (Gasparini 1999-2000).

On the other hand, another explanation was proposed, stressing the instrumental approach of border regions to the EU-created environment, and considering cross-border interactions as a strategy for territorial units' self-positioning within national systems by increasing resources (through access to what was located on the other border side) and competing better than other towns in the own state (Ehlers, Buursink, Boekema 2001, 5).

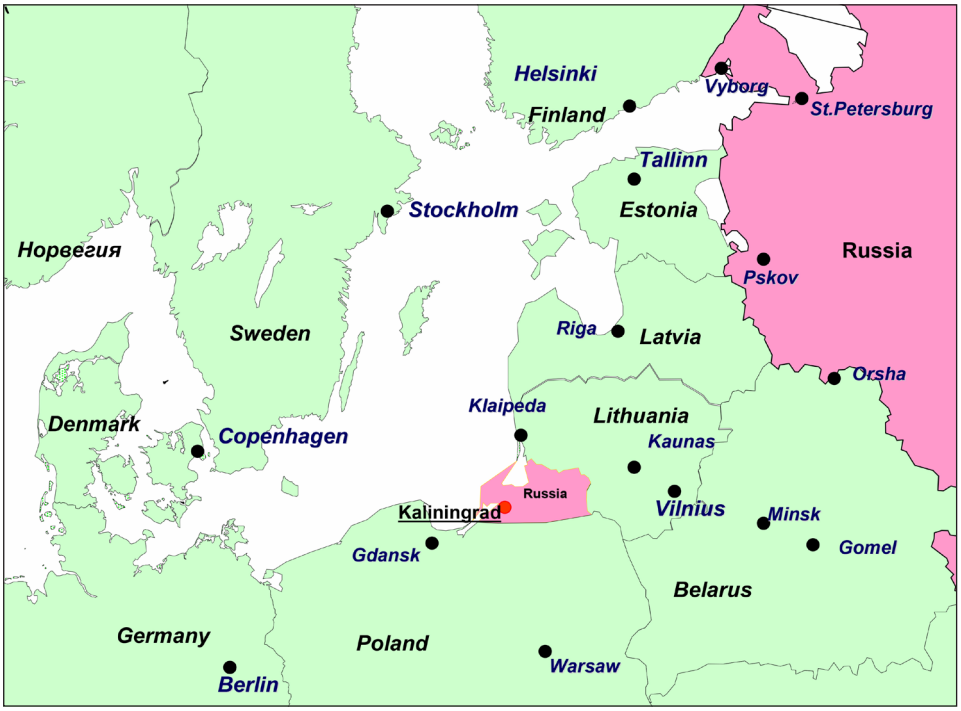
From Eastern Prussia to Kaliningrad exclave

To understand the current border processes on the Polish-Russian border in the Kaliningrad Oblast, a brief look at the geographical and structural features seems to be necessary. The region of Kaliningrad is nowadays inhabited by about one million people, almost exclusively Russians, living on an area of 15,000 square kilometers. Being a part of the Russian Federation, it forms an exclave located 600 kilometers from Russia proper, and is isolated from it by Poland and Lithuania as well as Belarus (*Figure 1*). The border between the Kaliningrad Oblast and both Poland and Lithuania is at the same time a border of the European Union and Russian Federation.

However, to further frame the context of the border processes taking place today, both on the continental and local scales, a short historical context has to be introduced. The area of the contemporary Kaliningrad Oblast was in the early middle ages inhabited by a pagan tribe of Prussians. Their conquering by the German Teutonic Order resulted on the one hand in their Germanization (assisted by a massive influx of German settlers), on the other with a long-lasting territorial and cultural conflict between the Teutonic State and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. From 1618, Prussia was in personal union with Brandenburg, soon forming the most dynamic of the German states. The two provinces were separated by Polish Pomerania, which resulted in a new set of territorial conflicts and in Prussian participation in the partitioning of Poland at the end of the eighteenth century. Prussia very soon became an initiator of the reunification of Germany in 1871 and a pillar of its political, economic and cultural system. The collapse of the German Reich in 1918 resulted in the rebirth of Poland and a new territorial conflict between both states. As a result of the Treaty of Versailles, Poland obtained the region of Pomerania (being mainly Slavic and Catholic), the province of East-

ern Prussia (mainly German and protestant, with the exception of its southern Slavic outskirts) remained an German exclave separated from Germany proper by a strip of Polish territory (Maroszek 2007). This caused constant political tensions between interwar Poland and Germany, symbolically manifested in the German claims for an exterritorial corridor to Eastern Prussia, and eventually became one of the reasons for the Second World War, as it started with the German attack on Poland in September 1939. What is, however, relevant is the first boundarization of the province after the First World War. The new Polish-German border separated spaces previously belonging for over one hundred years to the same political, legal and economic system. Now, Polonization and Germanization campaigns were internally unifying both states and politically boundarizing the previously existing internal cultural and ethnic frontiers.

Figure 1: Kaliningrad Oblast



Source: Vinokurov 2007, 1.

The Soviet victory over Nazi Germany in 1945 resulted in the flight and later expulsion of the entire German population of Eastern Prussia. Following the decision of the Yalta Conference, the eastern border of Germany was moved westwards, and eventually Eastern Prussia was liquidated as a state with no territory and no population. Its space was divided with a horizontal line into two parts, the southern part was (re)incorporated into Poland (and filled with Polish settlers),

the northern became a part of the Soviet Union as a component of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (Sakson 2014, 110). Its capital's name was changed from the German Königsberg to the Russian Kaliningrad (Mallion 2007, 531), after Mikhail Kalinin, a Soviet war hero (Nureev, Latov 2010, 82), the region became the Kaliningrad Oblast. The new border cut across existing infrastructure and communication corridors, including 10 out of 13 railways and 30 out of 32 roads (Anisiewicz 2012, 51).

The region of Kaliningrad was repopulated with new inhabitants, mainly Russians (Szegedi Aranyossyné 2014, 68) from those territories of Russia that were especially heavily affected by the destruction of the Second World War. Additionally, it became a military base, which resulted in the majority of the population being involved in the defense system, especially the army.

It is important to note that the province was boundarized at three levels in the post-war period. First, it was cut off from its historical and ethnic roots and filled with a new population, entirely alienated (which was a part of the official policy of de-Germanization) from the cultural legacies of the space. Second, it was physically isolated by the new international boundary with Poland. The new borderline was closed (Gromadzki, Wilk 2001), with – in practice – no border crossings for individuals and no possibility of building any form of cross-border interactions at any level. Third, it was also isolated by the internal administrative boundary within the Soviet Union from neighboring Soviet Lithuania. Being a closed military area, special permission was required to enter it or settle there. Consequently, it remained inaccessible to institutions and individuals on the Lithuanian side of the border (Sakson 2014, 110).

The next significant change resulted from the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Lithuanian independence. Suddenly, the Kaliningrad Oblast became an exclave of the Russian Federation, located 600 kilometers away from Russia proper (and closer to capitals like Warsaw or Vilnius). This was followed by a deep internal, political and economic crisis in Russia, resulting in the decomposition of the military structures and, consequently, the region losing its previous function. Economic depression caused further problems, and even put into question the form of Moscow's control over this territory. This was manifested in several political concepts defining the future of the exclave, spanning from "the fourth Baltic State" (where Kaliningrad was to act together with Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia for integration with the western structures, being a forerunner of Russia's integration with the West), to the concept of transforming it into a new Hong Kong (and resettling the citizens of the British colony after its transfer to China in 1997).

At the same time, however, the region experienced a de-boundarization process for the first time in its post-war history. In 1991, the space of the Kaliningrad Oblast was opened to foreigners (Palmowski, Kondratowicz 2009, 5). The first border crossings were set up on the border with Poland and Lithuania,

which, together with a relatively liberal border regime, created visible (but not mass) cross-border movement for the first time. There have been twenty border crossing points built in the Kaliningrad Oblast until today (Fedorov, Korneevets 2011, 55) including seven with Poland, eight with Lithuania and five sea points (Szymański 2014, 96-97).

The trade volume between Poland and the Kaliningrad Oblast grew significantly, and multiplied by ten in the decade from 1996-2006 alone (Palmowski, Kondratowicz 2009, 7), with over 600 Polish companies registered in the region. In 1996 the Kaliningrad Oblast obtained the status of a free economic zone, which was to be the impetus for enhancing the economic development of the region, but also to create a "gateway to Russia" (Palmowski, Kondratowicz 2009, 7). This was settled in the strategy of recovering the regional economy that in the decade of 1990s experienced a deep depression, with the industrial and agricultural production shrinking respectively by 70 and 50% (Cichocki, Pełczyńska-Nałęcz, et al. 2001, 54). It resulted in increase of production in the following years (Usanov 2005, 124). It should be stressed, however, that the first decade after the collapse of communism was marked by relatively weak cross-border relations between local institutional actors from the Kaliningrad Oblast and northern Poland as well as relatively intensive trade contacts, also those belonging to the gray economy (Andreasen 2002, 106).

The EU accession of both Poland and Lithuania in 2004 followed by their Schengen Zone membership in 2007 (as well as their NATO membership earlier) (Sirutavièius, Stanytë– Toloèkienë 2002) complicated border relations on two levels. First, due to the new border regime, it significantly reduced cross border contacts. Alexander Sergunin (2007, 87) enumerates several obstacles affecting Kaliningrad with regard to border obstacles resulting from the EU membership of Poland and Lithuania. First of all was the visa regime, introduced in 2003 as one of the consequences of the expected eastern enlargement. It not only created difficulties in crossing the border and cross-border contacts of commercial and non-commercial character. It also complicated the circulation of Russian citizens between the exclave and Russia proper. Russian claims from 1993-94 and 2001 for a transit corridor though Belarus and Poland (Sakson 2014, 111) were associated in Polish public debate with the German exterritorial corridor postulate from the interwar period, which resulted in waking up territorial perceptions rooted in historical conflictive legacies. The agreement from 2002 partly solved the problem, introducing the so-called Facilitated Transit Document for transfer via Lithuanian territory (Oldberg 2015, 4). But, still, prior to the Polish entry to the EU, about three million visitors form Kaliningrad entered Poland annually. In 2009, it was only around one million (Studzińska 2014, 527). Consequently, one of the most pressing political aims became the elimination of the divisive nature of this newly established external EU boundary.

Second, it created a situation of the exclave being a potential source of conflict (Sergunin 2007, 86), related to both geopolitical issues as well as the perception of sovereignty and territoriality. Even earlier, the issue of military transit between Kaliningrad and Russia was a matter of problematic negotiations with Lithuania (Laurinavičius 2002). At the same time, a conflict of interests with regard to the cross-border cooperation between Moscow and local actors in Kaliningrad could be observed. For example, the central authorities favored introducing some sort of local border traffic facility testing the visa free regime between the EU and Russia based on Kaliningrad. The centre was accused by Kaliningrad and the local population of ignoring local needs where they collided with the central interests – especially geopolitical ones (Rogoża, Wierzbowska-Miazga, et al. 2012, 57).

To summarize this part, it needs to be stressed that the historical legacies of border related issues between the Kaliningrad Oblast and Poland are deeply rooted in the experience of separation and boundarization. The most recent history has been marked by territorial conflicts, population resettlements and the necessity of constantly demonstrating territorial control. This resulted in boundarization which regardless of the period (German, Soviet or European) isolated the space and people in the region from the neighboring structures. The end of the communist period brought the first signs of de-boundarization.

De-boundarization: between a laboratory for EU-Russia relations and a local development scheme

The period after 2004, however, reveals new tendencies on the investigated border. For the first time, a deep debate on the expected character of this border can be detected, with the aim of deboundarizing the separation line. This debate was conducted at two levels, continental and regional, revealing two ways of thinking about the problem.

On the one hand, the border's openness was considered to be a matter of de-scaled relations between the European Union and Russia. On the other, it was a matter of the development strategy of the local territorial units on the literal scale. The former reveals the intergovernmentally led process of structuring mutual relations, but also of negotiating in one's own interests. The latter is based on neo-functionally understood needs satisfaction that, due to cross-border exchange, was to bring benefits to the actors involved. The former represents the top-down logics of the border debate, the latter the bottom-up. In the following sections both perspectives will be debated and, additionally, the consequences of the deboundarization will be outlined.

De-boundarization as a laboratory of EU-Russian relations

Already at the beginning of the new millennium, Kaliningrad was considered "as a pilot region for enhanced co-operation between Russia and the EU in the twenty-first Century" (Holtom 2002, 36). The idea of openness between the EU and Russia implemented in the Kaliningrad Oblast was rooted in the idea of the external Europeanization of the former and the "pilot region" of the latter. The border here is one of three lines where Russia directly neighbors the EU, on its border with Finland, Estonia and Latvia. Consequently, this is a "litmus paper" of mutual relations, constituting laboratory where they can be tested. This intergovernmental approach was strongly affected by national interest, it contained, however, also some elements of a more idealistic approach to relations with the west.

The internal Russian debate on Kaliningrad's role and position seems to play a relevant role here, too. At least two camps could be identified here (Sergunin 2007, 89-91). On the one hand, geopolitical realists consider the exclave as a battlefield between the West and Russia, where the former aims at exploitation, or even cutting off the region from its state (with the historical argument of Germany playing the key role here). This approach was often visible in the official circles of the central power and has been radiating in declarations and decisions related to the remilitarization of the region (Vitunic 2003). On the other hand, liberals believed that "Kaliningrad will be further opened up for international cooperation to become a Russian Hong Kong, a <gate-way> region that could help Russia to be gradually integrated in the European multilateral institutions […]. They believe that due to its unique geo-economic location, Kaliningrad has a chance to be a <pioneer> Russian region to be included in the regional and sub-regional cooperation" (Sergunin 2007, 92).

Eventually, Kaliningrad was soon labeled as "the <pilot region> in EU-Russia relations" (Sergunin 2007, 86), which was especially visible after the turning point of the eastern enlargement and was present in political declarations of both the Kremlin and local authorities (Musiałowicz, 2006). As Alexander Sergunin points out (2007, 87), many in Russia saw "[…] Kaliningrad as a historical chance for Russia to be integrated into Western civilization. For this school, Kaliningrad is a <gateway> […], a region of cooperation rather than confrontation". Evgeny Vinokurov (2004, 1) claimed that "Kaliningrad can serve both Russia and the EU as a pilot/model region of integration as well as a booster, connecting chain, and a litmus test of cooperation within the dialogue on EU-Russian Common Spaces."

De-boundarization as a local phenomenon

De-boundarization was, however, not only a declared intergovernmental idea proposed in the EU-Russia laboratory. Its other dimension was a bottom-up process, creating a local answer to the created environment. It has manifested visibly in the Local Border Traffic agreement (LBT) and its consequences.

It is important to note here that the Kaliningrad Oblast belongs to the less developed regions in this part of Europe. At the same time it is surrounded by regions, both in Poland and Lithuania, that also belong to the poorest and the most underdeveloped regions in their respective states. In Poland, it is the Warmińsko-Mazurskie region directly neighboring Kaliningrad. This results, consequently, in a "double peripheriality" in relation to Russia and its centers, as well as to the EU and its resources (Vinokurov 2007, 13-14). Border openness and cross-border interactions were considered, consequently, at the local level on both sides as a tool for economic development, overcoming peripherality by the creation of functional contacts. The most important element seems here to be the border traffic agreement.

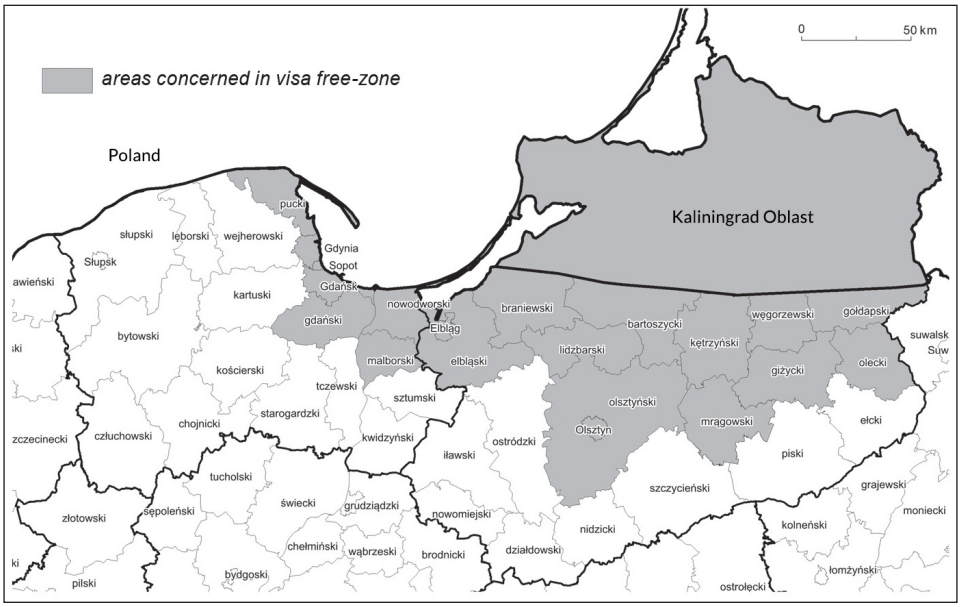
The LBT agreement was negotiated by Poland and Russia with the support of the European Commission. Lithuania was also interested in LBT, starting a debate with Russia already in 2007 (Romanovskiy, Romanovskaja 2014, 117-118). Here, however, lack of success moved the negotiation beyond 2012, and a similar scheme facilitating visa free movement of people was difficult – the conflict over Ukraine froze the further negotiations (Oldberg 2015, 4).

The LBT agreement entered into force on July 27, 2012 (Voynikov, Malinina 2014, 131) (Mały). The area covered by it contains the whole territory of the Kaliningrad Oblast and several counties in two Polish regions: in the Pomorskie region, they are Puck and Gdynia municipality, Sopot municipality, Gdańsk municipality and Gdańsk, Nowy Dwór and Malbork counties. In the Warmińsko-Mazurskie region: Elbląg municipality and Elbląg, Braniewo, Lidzbark and Bartoszyce counties, Olsztyn municipality and Olsztyn, Kętrzyn, Mrągów, Węgorzewo, Giżycko, Gołdap and Olecko counties (CPRDU 2013, 5). The area on the Polish side, consequently, covers a population of almost two million people (CPRDU 2013, 5) in two regions of different character (the economically dynamic and highly developed metropolitan areas of the Pomorskie region and the rural, underdeveloped territories of Warmińsko-Mazurskie). Together with the population of the Kaliningrad Oblast, there are about three million people entitled to cross the border without a visa (*Figure 2*).

The visa free regime for local inhabitants automatically contributed to a massive increase of the traffic volume of individuals crossing the border, especially with shopping as the main aim. Within the next 12 months the number of visitors jumped to over six million. However, it was already expected earlier that not only

the numbers but also the quality of mutual contacts should be altered. "The change in mental attitude means that the Kaliningrad Partnership should not follow the current state of EU-Russia relations, but should develop a dynamics of its own" (Medvedev 2005, 26). This was so, especially as there were already other institutional forms of cross-border cooperation that could be used under the new circumstances, for example the Euroregions (Baltic, Neman, Saule, Lyna-Lava, and Sheshupe) (Fedorov, Korneevets 2011, 50) or cross-border projects (for example the project „Warmia and Mazury – Kaliningrad Oblast. Working across borders", launched under the Lithuania-Poland-Russia ENPI Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013 (Projekt 2014) concentrating on labor market challenges on both border sides).

Figure 2: Local Border Traffic area in Kaliningrad Oblast and northern Poland



Source: Studzińska 2014, 529

The outcomes

The LTB very quickly reorganized the border relations on the Polish-Kaliningrad Oblast border, intensifying cross-border movement and creating links, mainly of functional character, but also changing (or rather creating) the mutual perception and increasing understanding among Poles and Russians.

The outcomes of the new situation have been investigated in several field studies. The qualitative and quantitative research (with a sample of over 1,000 respondents) conducted in 2013 by the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and

Understanding on Polish side of the border revealed an interesting picture of the LBT's consequences for de-boundarization processes (CPRDU 2013).

First of all, the new regime resulted in a massive influx of Russian visitors to the Polish side of the border. The opposite direction has not been significant in terms of numbers (over 70% of Poles from the LBT area declared they had never been to the Kaliningrad Oblast). The main incentives pushing the Russian visitors is the price differences, as well as the higher quality of products and, sometimes, simply their availability on the Polish side of the border. These are mainly foodstuffs (CPRDU 2014, 18). Poles mainly buy tobacco and alcohol on the Russian side (CPRDU 2013).

On the other hand, cultural and touristic attractions (especially those offered by Gdańsk, Gdynia and Sopot) tend to play a more and more important role. Poles do not see the Kaliningrad Region as offering similarly attractive magnets. Additionally, the inhabitants of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie region, being among the poorest Polish citizens, can hardly afford to execute non-commercial visits to the Russian side.

The visa free regime on the border contributed significantly to the development of border tourism on the Polish side of the border, which had been almost non-existent before 2012. The growth in numbers was assisted by the changing destinations – the metropolitan area of Gdańsk started to dominate. Additionally, the Russian visitors prefer a high standard of tourist offer, manifested by the choice of four and five star hotels. In the Warmińsko-Mazurskie region they became the second largest group of foreign visitors (after the Germans, engaged in so-called "sentimental tourism"), similar to Gdańsk (Studzińska 2014, 531-532). One or two day weekend trips to Poland dominate among visitors from Kaliningrad (Studzińska 2014, 531).

It is important to note that the predominant character of mutual contacts was trade and service. As this was the first experience of mutual relations in the border context, it constructed specific perceptions of the other side. Especially in Poland, Russian visitors were soon labeled "good customers", with relatively large financial resources (CPRDU 2013).

Another interesting consequence of the new situation was the appreciation of the Russian language on the local labor market on the Polish side of the border. Within a couple of months of the LBT's introduction it became one of the competences required by local entrepreneurs, especially in shopping and services (CPRDU 2013). The situation was supplemented with Russian being physically visible in written form (product descriptions, menus in restaurants) as well as in services available in this language in most of the shops and restaurants, as well as big brand companies, like IKEA on the Polish side of the border.

It is important to note that the counties on the Polish side of the border benefit from the situation unequally. This leads to a situation where many of the

local governments are also working on development strategies to attract Russian visitors, on the one side, and lobbying to open new border crossing points closer to their territory on the other (Studzińska, Nowicka 2014, 280). For many local inhabitants of the border counties in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie region, the border is a working place and the main source of income, so the more liberal border regime is enabling them to more intensively use border related opportunities (Studzińska, Nowicka 2014, 282).

It is important to note that Poles from the non-LBT territories are put off visiting Kaliningrad by formalities. Applying for a visa in Gdańsk contradicts the Schengen visa free regime which the Poles declare to be one of the most visible results of Polish EU membership (CPRDU 2013).

The main pattern of the Polish visits to Kaliningrad Oblast is based on shopping trips in the very narrow border strip (Studzińska 2014). Price differences play the key role here, together with the tax free mechanism being another advantage of the cross-border trade.

The LBT regime not only deboundarized the border, but for the first time in recent history opened a window of opportunity for direct, large-scale contacts of Poles and Russians, with over 70% of Poles in the region seeing the presence of Russian visitors in everyday situations (CPRDU 2013). It seems that similarly to the border processes on the German-Polish border after 1990, here, too, the initial phase of the changes is fueled by the neo-functional nature of commercial contacts using asymmetries in income and prices on both border sides. What makes this border different from the German-Polish one, however, is the political context of the national polices. If the former was strongly determined by the reconciliation process and centrally organized support for functional, but also normative contacts, here, the last element is missing. A survey by the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding conducted on over 1,000 Kaliningrad residents (CPRDU 2014) showed, however, that the Poles were perceived positively in the Russian region.

Another interesting element is how the gains from the open border are evaluated by the local border people. Almost 70% of respondents of the CPRDU survey in Poland (2013, 25) declared that, in their opinion, both sides benefited equally from mutual contacts, but the vast majority saw them, however, in the economic sphere, very few in non-economic fields. In the case of Kaliningrad inhabitants, the same proportions (45% each) believed the visa-free regime was beneficial for both sides and not only for Poland (CPRDU 2014, 18).

One of the elements reflecting the new type of problems was infrastructure. The busiest border crossing was Grzechotki-Mamonowo II and Gronowo-Mamonowo, both located on the Kaliningrad-Gdańsk route. What was noticeable was the underdeveloped border and transportation corridors, resulting in traffic jams on the border (Studzińska 2014, 529).

At the end of this section it is important to note that not all the border crossings were related to the LBT in 2013. But still, this new facility intensified border crossings significantly. However, the everyday contacts between Polish and Russian citizens have not created "in-depth" mutual understanding yet (CPRDU 2013). This is, on the other hand, a long-lasting process that also on the German-Polish borderland is only beginning to bring results after 25 years of relatively unlimited contacts.

The "new Cold War": towards re-boundarization?

The linearly developing cross-border contacts expected to spill over from economic relations to other fields were unexpectedly interrupted by the context of the international situation, namely the conflict in Ukraine. The annexation of Crimea, and the Russian separatist movement in Eastern Ukraine supported by the Russian Federation not only spoiled the newly created basic trust across the Polish-Kaliningrad border, but also brought western restrictions on Russia and its officials, as well as Russian responses in the forms of embargoes on numerous categories of products from the EU. In the case of the investigated border it meant a double re-boundarization threat, affecting both the social as well as institutional dimension. This "new Cold War" danger undermined the period of de-boundarization already experienced, albeit for a short period. It is interesting how various actors involved in cross-border interactions reacted to this new situation.

First of all, the issue of the embargoes on EU products made cross-border traffic more difficult. Kaliningrad was strongly affected by the Russian counter-embargo introduced during the Ukrainian war, especially as it had been much more closely linked to the EU markets than the rest of the state. Earlier, more than one third of the region's food imports originated from the EU, including almost all of the meat consumed there (Oldberg 2015, 5). On the other hand, it resulted in shortages of many products in Kaliningrad and a growth in individual imports. But at the same time, the legal limitations made trade more difficult, for example, the limit of 5 kg of shopping per person, or restrictions on specific categories of food products being a part of the counter-embargo. The dropping value of the rouble as a consequence of the economic crisis in Russia contributed significantly to this process, equalizing prices on both border sides and making cross-border shopping less beneficial.

A similar process affected the border with Lithuania. Already in September and October 2013, during Lithuania's presidency of the EU and under the circumstances of finalizing the Association Agreement with Ukraine, checks on the border with Lithuania were increased, especially with regard to the traffic, which was considered to be a political pressure on this state (Sakson 2014, 118-119). These central policies on Kaliningrad Oblast were also manifested in the ideas of

the remilitarization of the exclave (Simons 2014) or oppression of "aliens", visible, for example, in the denial of permission for building a mosque there by local Muslims (Arnold 14).

On the other hand, the border again started to appear in people's minds, which could result locally in re-boundarization. For example, in 2014 the new-old narration was visible in the Kaliningrad media on the Polish approach to Russian visitors. Numerous reports of physical attacks on Russians in Poland, especially in Gdańsk, were reported (rarely being based in reality). The news itself, however, was what, on the other hand, was considered in Poland to be an organized media operation to discourage the local population from cross-border visits. In 2015, similar news stories appeared, but on a smaller scale (Siegień 2015). In 2014, social media in Kaliningrad were also full of information about Polish border guards checking Russian cars with regard to technical standards, which was evaluated as a form of deliberate oppression.

As a result of the above described processes, in 2014 the number of tourists visiting Poland from Russia decreased by about 40% (Oldberg 2015, 4). This was especially visible in the first months of this year, in the autumn, the situation improved slightly. Interestingly, the number of Poles visiting the Kaliningrad Oblast has not changed, which could be explained by their more limited earlier share and their more practical orientation of earning a living.

The next phase of development of mutual cross-border contacts was marked by the events of 2015 and various attempts to overcome the situation. The more difficult things became, the more obvious was the fact that the contextual factor of the international situation was unlikely to change.

It is important here to mark that the previous research already revealed that both Poles and Russians tended to ignore the "national" and "historical" context of both states' relations, and saw them mainly in the context of consumption (CPRDU 2013). Especially in the Polish part of the border region, following neo-functional principles, it was the business logics that framed the relations with Russians (Siegień 2015). Already in 2014, Gdańsk prepared a big promotional campaign in the Russian media in Kaliningrad, trying to encourage the local inhabitants to visit Poland again.

Similar tendencies can be noted on the Kaliningrad side, however differently constructed. On the one hand, already before the Ukrainian crisis, voices that "Kaliningrad must refrain from integrating into the EU faster than the rest of Russia" were loudly heard in Russia (Malevskaya 2012, 36). On the other, however, the level of "internationalization" of the local population was high, also due to the cross-border developments of 2012 and 2013. As Andrea Szegedi Aranyossyné (2014, 70) remarks, "20% of the young people [from Kaliningrad] between 18–24 years of age have never been to the motherland, while they have travelled to foreign countries many times already." 60% of inhabitants possess

international passports (compared to 25% in Russia proper), one fourth have a Schengen visa (Oldberg 2015, 4).

The most recent data provided by border guards reveals that the number of border crossings was constantly increasing until the middle of 2015, the total level is, however, lower than in the previous years.

Conclusions

This investigation has shown the processes of the de-boundarization and re-boundarization tendencies on the border between Poland and the Russian Kaliningrad Oblast. They have been rooted in a functional and intergovernmental understanding of integration in Europe. The border changes there reflected the play of interests of the national centers, especially the de-scaled relations between the EU and Russia, making the region a laboratory for mutual interactions. On the other, however, they reflected local needs, especially related to development.

The exclave itself was placed in a very interesting context. As Grzegorz Gromadzki and Andrzej Wilk (2001, 4) pointed our "[o]n the one hand, the new political situation in Europe had led to the isolation of Kaliningrad from its <mother country>, whilst on the other hand it facilitated greater contact with the outside world. It turned out that the case of the enclave presented both a handicap to and an opportunity for the region." This led to further debate. As Artur Usanov and Alexander Kharin claim (2014, 13), "[i]n the 1990s discussions on the future of Kaliningrad were often formulated as a choice between Kaliningrad being a <fortress> vs. economic <gateway> (or Russian Hong Kong in the Baltic region). In the first decade of the 2000s, despite all the problems and difficulties, it seemed that Kaliningrad's pathway [was] much closer to the second option than the first one. However, in the last few years the direction has changed."

The LBT opened a new chapter in border relations in the region, starting a de-boundarization process. Kinga Dudzińska and Anna Maria Dyner (2013,1) claim that "[s]mall border traffic […] between the Republic of Poland and the Russian Federation has proved to be a success story in its social, economic and cultural dimensions. Issuing local residents with permits to cross the border between Russia's Kaliningrad region and several counties in Poland's Pomorskie and Warmińsko-Mazurskie regions has boosted mutual contacts, benefitted the tourism and retail sectors, and spurred scientific collaboration, youth exchanges, and cooperation among NGOs." The current political tensions at the central level undermined this process, making re-boundarization one of the possible scenarios for the future. On the other hand, counter-tendencies are visible there as well.

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