

The youth in Kaliningrad, Gdansk and Klaipeda: geopolitical vision of the world, identity and images of the other

Kolosov, V.; Vendina, O.

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Kolosov, V., & Vendina, O. (2014). The youth in Kaliningrad, Gdansk and Klaipeda: geopolitical vision of the world, identity and images of the other. *Baltic Region*, 4, 4-26. <https://doi.org/10.5922/2074-2079-8555-4-1>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Free Digital Peer Publishing Licence zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den DiPP-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:

<http://www.dipp.nrw.de/lizenzen/dppl/service/dppl/>

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a Free Digital Peer Publishing Licence. For more Information see:

<http://www.dipp.nrw.de/lizenzen/dppl/service/dppl/>

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



THE YOUTH IN KALININGRAD, GDANSK AND KLAIPEDA: GEOPOLITICAL VISION OF THE WORLD, IDENTITY AND IMAGES OF THE OTHER

V. Kolosov*
O. Vendina*



This work juxtaposes the analysis of the federal discourse on the exclave position of the Kaliningrad region in 1994—2012 based on the screening by the Nezavisimaya gazeta and the results of surveys of students at the Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University and the Universities of Gdansk and Klaipeda using a similar questionnaire.

Students of all three universities show latent dissatisfaction with employment prospects, which is manifested in the declared intention to emigrate. The orientation of young residents of Kaliningrad and their peers from Gdansk and Klaipeda towards prevailing connections with Europe is complicated by the uncertainty of the EU-Russia relations. Young residents of Gdansk and Klaipeda reproduce dated stereotypes, and their interest in the Kaliningrad region is limited. However, as the experience of the other countries suggests, local border traffic between the Kaliningrad region and the neighbouring Polish voivodeships can contribute to the improvement of mutual images.

Long-lasting efforts to diversify cooperation and promote a positive image of Kaliningrad in the neighbouring Polish regions can prove worthwhile. Apart from the measures aimed at strengthening the region's economic base, it is necessary to increase the symbolic capital of Kaliningrad to achieve harmonious development of Kaliningrad identity.

* Institute of Geography of the Russian Academy of Sciences
29 Staromonetny per., Moscow,
119017 Russia

Submitted on August 18, 2014

doi: 10.5922/2079-8555-2014-4-1

© Kolosov V., Vendina O., 2014

Key words: Kaliningrad region, geopolitical vision of the world

The Kaliningrad region and its exclave status are the focus of attention of many scholars from different countries and disciplinary backgrounds. Nevertheless, the prospects of cooperation with the neighbouring Polish voivodeships and Lithuanian counties — once an integrated socioeconomic and even political space — remain unclear. They are affected not only by physical factors — the development of functional network connections underlying the regionalisation processes — but also by the dominant political discourse in the neighbouring countries, as well as the ideas of foreign policy and economic priorities prevalent in the society, and the images of partners in the mass consciousness. A question arises as to the degree to which public opinion supports the official rhetoric and approves of the governmental policy for the region's adaptation to its exclave position. It is followed by questions about what individual strategies are developed by the region's residents in these conditions, and to what degree they affect the attitudes towards the neighbours in general and the perception of the region's position within the Baltic region, the country, Europe, and the world.

Border studies show that any formal demarcation line — between states, provinces, and even municipalities — is a complex and constantly evolving social structure that has to be considered on different scales — from the global and macroregional to the local ones (see, for instance 22; 25; 31). In the perception of people, the “scale” of the border can change depending on the nature of their everyday activities and needs. It can be perceived as a purely local phenomenon, “the sacred boundary of motherland,” a demarcation line between “civilisations”, which reinforces the differences between identities on the other side thereof or an axis of transboundary space, or both of it in different proportions [28]. In a classical study of the valley of Cerdanya on the border between the French and Spanish parts of Catalonia, the American historian P. Shalins showed how the political and economic interests of its residents affected their attitudes to the neighbouring states [29]. In its turn, the perception of the border of a neighbouring region or country is an important factor affecting the intensity of transboundary flows and the overall success of cross-border cooperation [21]. A border region is a territory, the identity of whose residents can transform rapidly under certain conditions and where the state is sometimes forced to take special efforts to win the loyalty of its citizens [13; 30].

An effective tool in studying these problems is critical geopolitics, which combines geographical, sociological, political sciences, and other methods, as well as the functional and constructive approaches [11; 27; 24]. The principal task is to compare the political discourse with the ideas of citizens and the “objective” indicators of the condition and interaction of different territories. The key concept of critical geopolitics is the *geopolitical vision of the world* interpreted as a set of

prevalent ideas of the correlations between different elements of the political space, national security and related threats, and advantages and disadvantages of a certain foreign policy strategy. The positioning of a country or a part thereof in the world in relation to its close and distant neighbours, and self-identification with a certain region of the world, country or city are the most important part of identity. When answering the question, “Where, in what country, in what region of the world do I live?” a person inevitably answers the question, “Who am I, what are my values and ideals?” Self-identification with a certain region of the world is a question of cultural and political values rather than geographical knowledge [26]. Most countries belong simultaneously to several territorial and cultural groups. For example, Russia can be considered as a Nordic, Pacific, Pontic, or Baltic country.

One can assume that in such a vast and diverse country as Russia, the geopolitical vision of the world will differ from district to district. For instance, the attitudes to foreign countries prevalent in Kaliningrad will differ from those in Moscow or the Far East. In particular, they are affected by personal experience of foreign travel. The available data suggest that such differences do indeed exist; however, they are rather insignificant, for instance, in comparison to those between large cities and the rest of the country [26].

Firstly, this work aims to examine how the official Russian political discourse affects the geopolitical visions of the Kaliningrad youth. The second objective is to compare the mutual images and geopolitical orientations of Russian, Polish, and Lithuanian students and compare them with the “objective” differences between the Kaliningrad region on the one hand and the neighbouring Lithuanian and Polish territories on the other.

The political discourse in Russia and the EU as a factor affecting the geopolitical vision among the youth populations of Kaliningrad, Gdansk, and Klaipeda

A total screening of 2000—2004 and 2008—2012 publications on the problem of interactions between Russia and the neighbouring countries in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (The Independent Newspaper)¹ shows that, since the

¹ Although having a small circulation, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* presents itself as a “high quality” daily newspaper meant for an educated audience, experts, and decision-makers. Having adopted a centrist position and being moderately critical of the acting government, the newspaper presents a wide range of opinions. This study was conducted by the Laboratory for Geopolitical Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences within the EUBORDERSCAPES project supported by the Seventh Framework Programme.

first post-Soviet years, there have been two main plotlines in the national discourse on Kaliningrad as a Russian exclave separated from the mainland by Belarus and Lithuania. One of them is the persistence of a high militarisation level and the region's transformation in "Russia's westernmost outpost" facing a potential enemy — NATO. In the 1990s, the circumstances required for a massive reduction in the number of military units and personnel stationed in the region, as well as the abandonment of many high-cost facilities — airfields, storage facilities, garrisons, etc. Since the late 1990s, the region's abrupt demilitarisation was juxtaposed to NATO's eastward expansion and development of military infrastructure².

Another alternative is the orientation to extracting maximum benefit for both Russia and the region from the latter's new geographical position. This includes economic and political openness, and the transformation of the region into a "test site" for cooperation with European countries aimed at removing barriers to transboundary exchange and developing cross-border contacts, creating a favourable climate for foreign investment, and development of foreign trade and logistics. This scenario created an opportunity to improve the welfare of regional population to the level of the neighbouring EU countries. At the same time, there emerged a risk of a weaker connection to mainland Russia, the rise of externally supported separatist movements aimed at the establishment of a fourth independent Baltic state, and a threat to national security³.

It became obvious that the optimal way was to attain a balance between the region's openness and keeping it as part of the Russian Federation. Moreover, in the current conditions, the one is not possible without the other [18; 19]. The Concept for the Federal Socioeconomic Policy towards the Kaliningrad region (2001) stresses that the key objective of safeguarding national interests and security in the Kaliningrad region is ensuring an international economic, political, and military strategic position of the territory that will eliminate the threat of the weakening of the region's role and significance as an integral part of the Russian Federation. These conditions include a sustainable socioeconomic development of the region, and improvement of standards of living to a level comparable to that of the neighbouring EU countries, which would be impossible without participating in the economic regionalisation processes in the Baltic. The experience of first post-Soviet years suggests that the region's exclave position incurs extra costs for the

² See, for instance, [1 – 3; 7; 8; 20].

³ See, for instance [4; 5].

economy and population, which have to be compensated for either from the federal budget or through creating special, preferential conditions for the inclusion of the region into the international division of labour [18].

This brings us to the second plotline of the Kaliningrad discourse generated by an objective contradiction between the need to take into account the unique position of Kaliningrad (the more so after Lithuania's and Poland's accession to the EU and NATO) and the development of a common legal framework for the whole territory of Russia and the EU.

On the one hand, Kaliningrad strived to ensure federal subsidies and privileges to compensate for the high cost of transit and higher prices for gas and power. In the 1990s, opinions were voiced that the region should not only be transformed into a special economic zone enjoying customs and tax concessions but also become autonomous up to obtaining a "status of a state" and partially or completely integrating into the EU. These ideas were not abandoned in the 2000s. Moreover, the proximity to the EU border opened new opportunities for Kaliningrad residents in the post-Soviet period and not only as a source of income from the gradually declining cross-border trade. A "demonstration effect" emerged — residents of Russian border districts got interested in the European consumption standards and social life organisation, which results in certain expectations from the regional and federal authorities as to economic and social measures based on an adequate understanding of the exclave's unique position⁴.

On the other hand, the country's leadership — especially in the early 2000s after V. Putin had been elected president — strived to strengthen the unity of the national legal and economic space and abandon the practice of contractual relations between the federal centre and regions based on different conditions. Radical mottoes voiced by some social activists in Kaliningrad raised in the Kremlin legitimate concerns over separatist trends and did not contribute to a favourable attitude to the demands for a special regime and discourse on the region as a "laboratory of cooperation" with the European Union. Moreover, the 1990s also saw discussions on "returning" Kaliningrad to Germany and populating it with Russian Germans, as well as territorial claims of Lithuania. It is worth noting that the fear of losing Russian sovereignty over the exclave and a revision of the whole system of post-war borders can be clearly traced in the Russian discourse until today.

In the course of negotiations on the visa regime and, later, transit between mainland Russia and Kaliningrad, the European Union also neglected

⁴ For examples of such discourse see [6; 17]



Russian arguments about the unique position of the region and concluded corresponding agreements. The leaders of the European Commission and individual countries stressed the inviolability and universality of the rules established by the Schengen Agreement and voiced unwavering support for the national sovereignty of Poland and Lithuania, which excluded any possibility of accepting Russian transit proposals.

The EU wanted to eliminate the possibility of the region turning into a constant source of “soft risks”, i.e. cross-border crime, illegal immigration, drug abuse, infectious diseases, etc. Security — as understood by the EU — required stricter control over transit to and from the Kaliningrad region and did contradict the interests of Russia, which counted on a simplified procedure of transit between the region and the mainland. Brussels’s policy towards the Kaliningrad region was affected by concerns over disparities in social conditions between the Russian exclave and the surrounding EU territories, which accounted for a high level of social pathologies. This was the focus of Western European mass media when covering the Kaliningrad issue.

No matter what difficulties and contradictions plagued the development of the Kaliningrad situation, it is obvious that it has changed for the better in the new century in comparison to the 1990s, which also holds true for mainland Russia. The relative transparency of border gave the neighbours a good opportunity to develop a new vision on the prospects of the Russian exclave and to rediscover it.

The challenges of neighbourhood: reality, images of each other and individual strategies

To answer the question as to what degree these opportunities were grasped, at the end of 2012, we surveyed students of the Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University (Kaliningrad), and the Universities of Gdansk and Klaipeda⁵. Almost 675 senior students in humanities were surveyed using similar questionnaires, including 252 in Kaliningrad, 217 in Gdansk, and 206

⁵ We would like to express our sincere gratitude for their contribution to the study to Prof G.M. Fedorov, Associate Prof E.S. Fidrya (IKBFU), Profs T. Palmowski and J. Wendt (University of Gdansk), as well as Dr E. Spiriajevas (Klaipeda University). Of course, the views of students differ from the general opinion. They constitute the most educated part of the young generation, which socialised after the collapse of the socialist system and the disintegration of the USSR, thus studying their opinions is of great research interest.

in Klaipeda. Alongside typical sociodemographic questions, the questionnaire contained three sections. The first one comprised questions about the personal experience of foreign travel including visits to the neighbouring countries (Poland and Lithuania for students from Kaliningrad, the Kaliningrad region and Lithuania for those from Gdansk, etc.), command of foreign languages, identity, and associations with the word “Kaliningrad.” The second section contained questions about the financial situation of the respondents’ families, the socioeconomic situation in the region and the neighbouring countries, their prospects, and intentions to migrate. The third section brought together questions aimed at identifying the geopolitical image of the world as seen by students: their assessment of the attractiveness of different countries of the world and priorities of economic ties with different countries and regions. For the purpose of an international and interregional comparison, we tried to use questions from the earlier surveys by the leading Russian polling organisations as much as possible. Of special interest is the comparison with the results of the international research project “Visions of Europe in the World” supported by the Seventh Framework programme. The project included a survey of 9,300 students from across 18 countries, which used a similar questionnaire.

We also compared the socioeconomic performance of the towns and districts of the Kaliningrad region, powiats of the Pomeranian and Warmian-Masurian voivodeships of Poland, and the Klaipeda, Tauragė, and Marijampolė counties of Lithuania. However, it was complicated by the incomparability of the region’s results before and after the 2008 administrative reform, which had redrawn the borders and changed the composition of municipalities. It was shown that the situation in these regions is comparable. For instance, an average net salary in the Kaliningrad region (PPP) is 716 USD, in the Pomeranian voivodeships 805 USD, in the Klaipeda County 762 USD. The food basket cost is 20–23 % lower in Gdansk than in Kaliningrad or Klaipeda; however, Gdansk residents have to pay twice as much as Kaliningraders for petrol, utilities, and public transportation. It is cheaper to buy a flat in Kaliningrad, and a car in Gdansk or Klaipeda. On average, the Polish are a little bit ‘richer’ than Russians and Lithuanians, but the Lithuanian regional community is less segregated by income than the Polish or Russian ones. Despite a heavy dependence on imported components and the condition of the Russian consumer market, industrial production has significantly grown in Kaliningrad in the 2000s. Its level per capita exceeds that of the Warmian-Masurian voivodeships and is almost as high as in one of the most devel-

oped Polish regions — the Pomeranian Voivodeships. The demographic situation in the Russian exclave is rather favourable in comparison to the neighbouring Polish and the more so Lithuanian regions, where the natural decrease is coupled with a massive migration outflow. Due to a positive net migration rate, the population size stabilised as early as the 1990s; however, the Kaliningrad region has a lower life expectancy and the mortality structure reflects a high level of alcoholism and other social pathologies [14].

Nevertheless, Kaliningrad students have a more pessimistic opinion of the condition and prospects of their region than their peers from Gdansk and Klaipeda. In the latter cities, 45—48 % of the respondents viewed the situation in their region as favourable or rather favourable. 24 % and 31 % respectively consider it similar to the other regions of their countries, and only 29 % in Gdansk and 15 % in Klaipeda see it as complicated or very complicated.

Moreover, young Kaliningraders do not believe in any good prospects for their region. Approximately 56 % of the respondents are convinced that the region's economic situation will not change or is likely to or will definitely deteriorate in the near future. This scepticism is rather surprising in view of that the respondents are young people in their early 20s. Moreover, they claim to be aware of the region's prospects. The percentage of students who answered this question at IKBFU was higher than at the universities of Gdansk and Klaipeda. Russians are used to rely only on themselves and do not believe that the authorities or any other power can ensure a better life for them. It is worth noting that Kaliningrad students are more optimistic of their own future than the prospect of the region's development: 58 % of the respondents expect that the living standards of their families will increase in a short-term perspective.

Unlike Kaliningraders, 48 % of Polish students are optimistic of the future of the region and only 23 % think that the situation will not change and 12 % that it will deteriorate or definitely deteriorate. In Klaipeda, young people are more optimistic. Most respondents (66 %) believe that the life in their region will definitely or is likely to become better. An absolute majority (59 %) are confident of their future. However, Polish students doubt that they will ever achieve personal success: there are only 39 % of optimists in Gdansk (a third of the respondents gave no answer).

Despite differences in estimating the development of their regions, the young people of the three bordering regions are brought together by similar individual life strategies: migration intentions are very strong among them.



More than half of the respondents (55 % in Kaliningrad, 58 % in Gdansk, and 66 % in Klaipeda) stressed that they would like to move in the next two years or after graduation. Therefore, the migration potential of Kaliningrad youth is much higher than the Russian average in people aged 18—24 (39 %). However, the reason behind it remains the same — searching for a well-paid interesting job (mentioned by 72 % in Kaliningrad, 86 % in Gdansk, and 76 % in Klaipeda). In the conditions of a limited or shrinking market, it is difficult to find a job that will meet the expectations and be adequate to the self-esteem; they do not see such opportunities in their home city. Only 10 % of Kaliningraders who are willing to move simply want to change the district of residence; 11 % want to live in large cities, mostly Moscow, which is associated with life success in Russia. Most students of all three universities opt for emigration. In Kaliningrad, such students account for two thirds. Young Kaliningraders are better acquainted with the life abroad than their peers in other Russian regions: 83 % of them have been abroad, most of them more than once. Moreover, out of 830 surveyed in Moscow, Yekaterinburg, Khabarovsk, and Stavropol two years earlier within the above-mentioned project, only 44 % had been abroad [11].

Whereas Klaipeda students still dream of an interesting and well-paid job abroad (58 % of those willing to move), the Polish respondents are less susceptible to such illusions. “Only” 34 % of students opt for emigration. Poles have a vast experience of mass labour migration — by different estimates, from 1.2 to 3 million people have left the country over the last decade. They are well acquainted with the problems of adaptation and dissatisfaction with the job that does not require their level of qualification. Twice as much Polish students as Russian and Lithuanian ones while opting for migration would prefer to stay in their country.

Despite the differences in the objective conditions and assessments of personal prospects, the willingness of the youth to leave their countries is indicative of the perception of their regions as a periphery. The answers to questions about the attractiveness of different countries give an idea of the common and different features of their geopolitical vision of the world and the image of neighbours.

The world as seen by students from Kaliningrad, Gdansk, and Klaipeda

As the results of the project “Visions of Europe in the World” suggest, the mental map of young people is dominated by unshaken Eurocentrism.

They believe that the best place to live in are the large countries of Western Europe — France, Italy, Germany — as well as Spain, the Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland, and other small European states. In comparison to the population, Russians showed maximum Europhilia. Positive attitudes to “old” Europe have been stressed by many authors [15]. The Russian respondents associate European countries with recreation, entertainment, shopping, and luxury goods and services. Tourism and consumption account for eight out of twenty most common associations. The vision of Europe by Russians is more consumption-focused than that of their international peers. However, an important factor is the rich historical and cultural heritage Russians learn about at an early age from school textbooks and TV shows. Thus, Europe is associated with the notions of “civilisation”, “history”, and “education”. Some of Russian students are attracted to Western European countries because of the values of democracy, constitutional state, a developed education system, and achievements in research and technology. However, such associations as “freedom” and “democracy” are less common in Russia [12; 23].

On the contrary, the “not to live in” list is topped by Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan that are associated with Islamic fundamentalism and military conflicts, as well as it contains most countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The reasons behind are cultural distance, the received opinion about low standards of living in these countries, and authoritarian regimes in some of them. As a rule, Russia and the other former Soviet countries (except the Baltics) have a strongly negative image. Here, personal experience does not always affect a country’s attractiveness. The image of familiar neighbouring countries is unfavourable if they are perceived as poorer or associated with conflicts of the past. Former Soviet republics are not attractive for the Russian respondents, since the living standards there are lower than in Russia; they are not associated with recreation, consumption, or exotic experience. The unattractiveness of some countries, for instance, Ukraine or Georgia, for Russian is apparently explained by their negative image promoted by the major TV channels.

Students from Kaliningrad, Gdansk, and Klaipeda were asked to name five countries where they would and where they would not like to live in the near future. Then, an “asymmetry index” — the difference between the number of positive and negative mentions divided by the total number thereof — was calculated.

Table 1

**“Asymmetry indices” calculated on the basis of the respondents’
answers about five countries they would and would not like to live in**

Region	Kaliningrad	Gdansk	Klaipeda
Russia	-0.13	-0.95	-0.81
Poland	0.23	-	-0.90
Lithuania	-0.39	-0.93	-
Latvia, Estonia	-0.68	-0.90	-0.81
Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova	-0.72	-0.98	-0.88
Germany	0.79	0.16	0.95
UK and Ireland	0.85	0.57	0.47
France, Italy, Spain, Benelux countries	0.68	0.50	0.62
Nordic countries	0.75	0.70	0.83
Central European countries	0.96	0.20	0.58
Balkan countries	-0.08	-0.39	-0.62
Turkey and Middle East	-0.94	-0.80	-0.75
USA and Canada	0.35	0.57	0.75
China	-0.74	-0.84	-0.88
Countries of Southeast Asia and Far East	0.10	-0.13	-0.11
Australia and New Zealand	0.30	1.00	-
Latin America	-0.25	-0.39	-
Countries of South Caucasus and Central Asia	-0.17	-1.00	-1.00
Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran	-1.00	-1.00	-1.00
Africa	-1.00	-1.00	-
India and Pakistan	-1.00	-1.00	-1.00

As table 1 shows, students of the Baltic region, which lies in close proximity to “old” Europe, are not an exception from the general pattern. Their European orientation is evident. The highest positive indices on the mental maps of students from all three universities are characteristic of the Nordic countries (0.75 in Kaliningrad, 0.70 in Gdansk, and 0.83 in Klaipeda), “Latin” countries of Western Europe (France, Italy, and Spain), and the Benelux countries. However, there are some slight differences. For example, the UK and Ireland are very attractive for Kaliningraders (0.85), whereas Poles and Lithuanians have a more ambivalent attitude to these countries of traditional Polish and Lithuanian immigration (0.57 and 0.47 respectively). Neighbour-

ing Germany, which is so attractive for Kaliningrad students (0.79) and Klaipeda (0.95), is perceived differently by residents of Gdansk — the city where World War II commenced (0.16).

Many students consider the leading countries of the New World — the USA and Canada — a possible place of residence. In Poland and especially Lithuania, the attitude to the USA is very positive (0.57 and 0.75 respectively). Historically, the USA has occupied a unique place in the geography of Lithuanian emigration. Among young Kaliningraders, as well as Russians in general, the attitude to the USA is more ambivalent. They value high living standards and US achievements in research and technology; however, many respondents perceive this country as a superpower that dominates NATO, strives for world hegemony, is deeply involved in international conflicts, and imposes its interests on other states. That is how the role of the USA is presented by federal TV channels.

Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, African countries, India and Pakistan, and Central Asia have the most repellent image according to both the survey respondents and the results of the project “Visions of Europe in the World.” No one wanted to live in these countries. A negative image is also characteristic of the countries of the Middle East, Latin America, and China (in the latter case, due to cultural differences). However, in all three cities including Klaipeda, neighbouring Latvia and Estonia are perceived as unattractive (-0.68 in Kaliningrad, -0.90 in Gdansk, and -0.81 in Klaipeda).

Within the “Gdansk-Kaliningrad-Klaipeda” triangle, the neighbours have a negative attitude towards each other in most cases. An exception is the largely positive image of Poland in Kaliningrad (0.23). Lithuania is not attractive for Russian and especially Lithuanian students (-0.39 and -0.93 respectively), Russia and Poland for Lithuanian ones (-0.81 and -0.90). One can assume that the negative image of Lithuania in Gdansk and of Poland in Klaipeda is a product of a common historical past. As one could expect, Russia has a strongly negative image in Gdansk (-0.95). The negative connotation of Russia emphasises the otherness of Poland, its contemporaneity, and love of freedom. The other post-Soviet European neighbours — Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova — are also unpopular in the three cities. It is evident that such geopolitical vision of the world does not contribute to regional cooperation.

The image of Baltic neighbours is developed by not only TV and other media, the education system and the political culture inherited by the younger generation, but also by personal experience of visits to the adjacent cities. Transboundary flows of young people are sharply asymmetrical. 27 % of

Kaliningrad students have never been in Poland, 56 % have visited the country at least once, and 22 % travel there every year or even several times a year. Although Lithuania is less attractive for Kaliningrad students than Poland, 63 % of the respondents have visited this country. However, 88 % of the Gdansk and 68 % of the Klaipeda respondents have never crossed the Russian border. 9 % of the Poland and 24 % of Lithuanian respondents have been there at least once. Almost all of them visited Kaliningrad rather than mainland cities⁶. The answers given by the respondents to the questions about the purpose of travel and border regime give an idea of the reasons behind these substantial differences.

Apparently, the reason is not the visa regime, although it does affect the frequency of contacts. Polish and Lithuanian students go to Kaliningrad so rarely that it was impossible to obtain their opinion about the efficiency of the border regime. As to Kaliningraders, only 14 % are content with the regime of the Russian-Polish border, whereas 31.7 % are of the opposite opinion⁷ (the same percent of respondents gave no answer). However, only 8 % mentioned difficulties with obtaining a visa. The main reasons of discontent are time losses at the border control and the insufficient number of checkpoints. Similar answers were given to the questions about the Russian-Lithuanian border.

The command of a foreign language is not an obstacle to exchange. From 77 % of the respondents in Kaliningrad to 88 % in Klaipeda, and 92 % in Gdansk said that they spoke a foreign language, in most cases, English. Moreover, in Klaipeda — one of the most “Russian” and, similar to Kaliningrad, migrant-welcoming cities of Lithuania, 57 % of students speak Russian.

Unlike “adult” Kaliningraders, students go to Poland for tourist and entertainment purposes (55 %) rather than shopping (40 %). The other pur-

⁶ Technically, the number of Polish citizens that entered the Kaliningrad region in 2013 is 56% larger than that of Russians that entered Poland; as to Lithuania, the gap is 20%. However, “tank up trips” account for most border crossings by Poles. They tank their cars with cheap Russian petrol and resell it in their country. In fact, the transboundary flow is very asymmetrical.

⁷ The survey was conducted shortly before the introduction of local border traffic between the Kaliningrad region and the neighbouring Polish voivodeships. However, it does not mean the total elimination of bureaucratic barriers. Until July 2013, those applying for a Polish visa had to prove that they had paid for at least seven (later, three) nights at a Polish hotel. Simultaneously, a new requirement was introduced – to present bills proving that a resident of the Kaliningrad region had used the services of Polish hotels during the last two years.

poses (education, workshops and conferences, professional meetings, visiting relatives and friends) are mentioned much more rarely. The motive behind visits to Lithuania are rather similar, with the major one being tourism and entertainment (39 %). Shopping in Lithuania is less popular than in Poland (16 %). Young Poles and Lithuanians visit the Kaliningrad region for tourism and entertainment and, to a lesser degree, shopping. Therefore, of importance is the symbolic capital of Kaliningrad, its brands and image.

The images of the “them,” preferred partners, and identity

Despite limited familiarity with the Kaliningrad region and a number of objective indicators, most Polish and Lithuanian students believe that the economic situation in the region is much worse than in their countries (50 % and 36 % respectively). Approximately a third of Polish and Lithuanian respondents honestly said that they could not give a definite answer to this question.

The little interest in Kaliningrad shown by the Polish and Lithuanian respondents is based on its negative image. Clichés relating to the image of Russia in general rather than Kaliningrad are rather widespread, namely *vodka, alcoholism, AIDS, Stalin, Putin, cold, lack of freedom, communism, USSR, mafia, labour camps* (mentioned by 11 % of students⁸). Following the 1990s “tradition,” many associate the city with *poverty, underdevelopment, low standards of living, a forsaken region, shadow economy, smuggling, war, and a Russian outpost* (17 %). However, neutral associations prevail: *a Russian region, a region on the map* (37 %); *a neighbour of Poland, East of Europe, border, transit, border crossing difficulties* (7 %); *cheap groceries, cheap petrol, port, Russian, excursions to Gdansk shops, Russian nouveau riche, social economic zone, a Russian exclave* (24 %). These associations reflect the vagueness of the image of Kaliningrad. Just a few respondents remembered such components of the city brand as *Kant, amber, the Amber Room, the Amber Road*. 6 % of the Gdansk respondents had no associations with the word “Kaliningrad”.

It produced no reaction in an even greater number of Klaipeda students (21 %). For 30 % of the Lithuanian respondents, it is simply a *Russian city, part of Russia* or even an *unfamiliar city*. Most students (61 %) have negative associations with Kaliningrad. Their spectrum is rather broad: *political instability, absence of freedom, corruption, unwillingness to live and go*

⁸ The percentage does not total 100 due to multiple responses.



there, dangerous place, high crime rate, lawlessness, bandits, cheap drugs, shadow economy, smuggling, cigarettes, underdeveloped infrastructure, poverty, low standards of living, a plundered city, poor marketplace, cheaper goods, petrol, social problems, unfriendly people, a city unattractive for tourists, a threat: NPP, military base, army, Soviet city, Soviet rules; border areas, transit territory, visa complications, time lost at the border; closed city, isolated city, exclave, periphery, economically backward city. The respondents that had more or less positive associations (*a historical city, Königsberg, water park, zoo, attractive big city, opportunities, commercial city, a different city, much money...; good people, relatives, friends; amber, the Curonian Spit*) accounted for only 14 %. Just a few respondents identified Kaliningrad as a neighbouring city and linked it with the idea of cooperation.

Probably the most surprising finding is the weakness of the image of Kaliningrad among its young residents. 43 % could not define their attitude to it. The romantic and nostalgic associations (*home town, the city where I live, my favourite city, the best city*), other positive associations (*an old, historical, clean, beautiful city, architecture, cobblestone roads, sightseeing*) or a poor set of traditional brands (*amber, the Curonian Spit, the Baltic Sea*) accounted for 30 %. However, there were only a few strongly negative associations (*a neglected, inharmonious city, public thoroughfare, pity for the region, poverty, enclave, outskirts*). A certain regional identity can be seen in rare (14 %) associations with a *European city, proximity to Europe, the West of Russia, not-that-much-of-Russia* and associations relating to the German past: *a German city, Königsberg, former East Prussia, Germany*.

Therefore, as to symbols, Russian students have nothing to offer to the neighbours “in exchange.” They are not interested in cooperation with the neighbours, whereas the neighbours are psychologically “repelled” by Russia as a partner. For all countries bordering on Russia, the latter is an important “friend” which makes it possible to legitimise the actions of local elites in front of the population. It shapes the rhetoric of political discourses ranging from sharply critical to moderate ones following the ideas of “national pragmatism”. Sometimes Russia seems to be a partner the relations with which are complicated but equal. Sometimes it seems to be a politically unstable country striving for domination in the region and using extralegal economic, migratory, cultural, and military and strategic mechanisms for pressurising its neighbours. People are constantly reminded that Russia is a potential overseas threat. Negative attitude to the Russian Federation is reinforced by an intensive stream on the post-Soviet states that are considered

“natural allies” in the confrontation with Russia. This symbolic policy disseminated through mass media significantly affects the emerging worldview of young people and holds regional development hostage to geopolitics.

It is not a coincidence that Russia is at the bottom of the list of promising economic and political partners as seen by Polish and Lithuanian students. They view the EU and, first of all Germany, as the chief partner. The economic and political interactions with Germany are considered the most important by 67 % of Polish students. On this list, Germany is followed by France, the UK, Italy, and the “small” countries of Western Europe, and the Nordic countries. Russia, Ukraine, and Lithuania were mentioned only by several respondents. However, the USA was named as a promising partner by just a slightly greater number of respondents. Belarus was hardly mentioned at all. Therefore, eastern neighbours do not exist for Gdansk students as partners, which is another proof of the unwavering orientation to Europe, which is identified with the EU.

Klaipeda students consider the Nordic countries (58 % of the respondents), Germany (52 %), France, Italy, and Spain (50 %) the most promising economic and political partners for Lithuania. However, they do not regard poorer EU neighbours as such. Unlike their Gdansk peers, the Klaipeda respondents understand the importance of economic ties with Russia, which accounts for most cargoes processed at the local port. It was called a promising counteragent by as many students as considered the countries of “old” Europe as such (53 %). The distant USA was mentioned as an important partner half as often (25 %). Neighbouring Belarus and Ukraine were hardly mentioned at all.

Kaliningraders, as well as their neighbours, are mostly oriented towards Europe/the EU. However, their vision of partners is more diversified. The list of promising economic and political partners is topped by Germany (47 %) followed by neighbouring Poland (34 %), Japan (25 %), and China (22 %). The “ranking” of Lithuania and the neighbouring Baltics is very low. It raises concerns that most of the respondents (70 %) see the future of the region in cooperation with the EU rather than the other Russian territories (only 11 %). This is the key difference between the geopolitical vision of young Kaliningrad residents and the official discourse.

The idea of the European vector as a guarantee of success rooted in the minds of the youth from all three regions contributes to disintegration processes rather than potential integration, since students have a largely negative image of each other. They do not consider cooperation with the immediate neighbours as promising (an exception is the attitude of Kaliningraders to



cooperation with Poland). In the case of Kaliningrad, such attitudes can result in the isolation from mainland Russia. The border between the Baltic EU state and Russia is interpreted by students from all three universities as a watershed between two worlds, one of which is ruled by “order” and the other by “chaos.” Moreover, representatives of the “world of chaos” clearly demonstrate their willingness to enter the “world of order”, which contributes to the barrier function of the border and impedes the openness necessary for modern development.

Moreover, both Lithuanian and Polish student consider the accession to the EU and the Schengen areas as a privilege that should not be extended to Russians. At the University of Gdansk, only 18 % of students deem a visa-free regime with Russia possible, 18 % only that for the residents of border districts. Approximately a third believes that this problem can be solved only in a long-term perspective, whereas 7 % are convinced that such regime should not be introduced. Klaipeda residents are more liberal: a third of them support the idea of a visa-free regime between the EU and Russia; 19 % would grant it only to the residents of border districts; 17 % believe that the visa regime should be preserved in the near future (30 % did not give a definite answer). It is not surprising in view of that young people see the Kaliningrad region and Russia in general as a source of possible threats despite the evident benefits derived from the travel of Russian neighbours. The youth interpret the border as a physical phenomenon rather than an institute that was created by people and requires modernisation.

However, more than half of young Kaliningraders supportive of intensive exchange with the EU approve of the idea of a visa-free regime; another fourth believes that a visa-free regime is possible only for the residents of border districts.

Kaliningrad students differ from their peers from Gdansk and Klaipeda in that they identify themselves with their country to a lesser degree — 22 % as compared to 30 % and 49 % respectively (table 2). For example, a 2011 national survey showed that 72 % of the respondents felt a strong connection to Russian citizens; moreover, this identity was the strongest. In comparison to 2004, the self-identification of Russians with their civic nation has increased more than twofold [9]. However, the sample included the whole population, whereas our survey examined only students. However, a manifold difference in results makes it possible to assume that young Kaliningraders are different from their peers in their feeling of affiliation with the Russian civic nation. According to the results of the Russian survey conducted within the project “Visions of Europe in the World,” Russian students

had the most pronounced national identity in all 18 countries: 62 % of them said that, first of all, they felt themselves citizens of their country.

Slightly over half of all Polish students and slightly less than half of Russian ones associate themselves primarily with their city, district, or region. Moreover, the regional identity (as shown above, not a transboundary one) is stronger in Kaliningraders than the residents of Gdansk and Klaipeda. Thus, it is possible to speak of a logical but rather complicated process of the formation of a certain regional identity, which was triggered by the region's transformation into an exclave. Apparently, in the region, whose population changed completely just 65 years ago and, for a long time, consisted of recent migrants from different districts of Russia and from across the Soviet Union, this process must be lengthy and complicated. The younger the age group, the greater is the share of those born in the region. However, almost a third of young Kaliningraders (much more than their peers in Gdansk and Klaipeda) define themselves as either people of a certain nationality or do not have a clear identity being unwilling or perplexed about associating themselves with their country, region, or city ("a world citizen", "a European", "a student", etc.). The analysis of secondary self-identification does not change these conclusions.

Table 2

Distribution of answers to the questions about primary self-identification

Region	Kaliningrad	Gdansk	Klaipeda
Resident of a city/village/district	28.2	46.1	29.1
Resident of a region	17.9	5.5	3.4
Citizen of a country	22.2	30.0	49.0

The end of the table 2

Region	Kaliningrad	Gdansk	Klaipeda
Person of a certain nationality	8.7	6.0	4.9
World citizen, a European, student, etc.	18.3	8.7	11.6
No answer	4.8	3.7	2.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0



The relative weakness of national identity is in line with the pessimistic view on the region's prospects, emigration intentions, and the belief in the cardinal importance of economic ties with the EU rather than other Russian regions and the vagueness of the Kaliningrad symbolic capital. A lack of confidence in the possibility of self-fulfilment in the region, a small area of the Russian island in "big Europe — the EU", which does not include Russia by default, a long-term denial of the Prussian-German period, a lack of significant symbols and events associated with the Soviet era, and relative isolation from mainland Russia — all these result in the complications and contradictions in the formation of a regional identity in young people. Its uniqueness lies in a combination of heterogeneous elements: Soviet legacy, German past (which is mostly a matter of appearance), cultures of different Soviet regions — homelands of the parents' generation, and experience of living in modern Russia. 18 % of the respondents have never been to other Russian regions. Most of the others have been only to Moscow (73 %) and Saint Petersburg (57 %). The other regions have been visited by just a few. Moreover, short-term excursions account for most of trips to the two Russian capitals. One can conclude that the region's integration with mainland Russia is becoming not only an economic, but also a sociocultural objective. It is indicative that only 17 % of the Kaliningrad students were convinced that they would stay in their country after graduation.

Despite the facts, most Kaliningrad students (57 %) believe that the economic situation in the Kaliningrad region is worse or much worse than in Lithuania and only 8 % think otherwise (table 3). However, young people feel close to Europe and want to think of themselves as Europeans. Nevertheless, it turns to be a myth in practice: there is no common symbolic capital with the neighbours or it is very weak; in most cases, Russia is perceived negatively. The exclave proves to be as far from Europe as mainland Russia.

Table 3

How do you think the economic situation in the Kaliningrad region differs from that in Poland and Lithuania?

Economic situation in the Kaliningrad region	Gdansk, %	Klaipeda, %	Kaliningrad, %	
			Compared to Poland	Compared to Lithuania
Much better	1.8	4.4	0.8	0.8
Slightly better	4.6	13.1	5.6	7.1

The same	7.4	9.7	9.5	10.3
Slightly worse	27.2	25.2	31.0	34.9
Much worse	23.0	12.1	32.5	22.2
No answer	33.7	34.5	20.6	13.1

The Kaliningrad symbol policy is based on both using and developing the resources of historical memory and attempts to reinforce the status of a Russian territory through monumental propaganda, i.e. constructing churches and erecting monuments. The attempts at re-coding the historical heritage contribute to the “islander” identify of Kaliningraders and contradict the interests of creating a common interregional and cultural space.

Conclusion

The analysis of the attitudes of students from the three Baltic cities has shown that the symbolic and mental barriers are harder to overcome than political and economic ones. Deep-rooted stereotypes are reproduced by the youth thus deforming their perception of modern reality. The opportunities for accelerating the economic development and modernisation through network forms of resource distribution between the border regions of Russia, Poland, and Lithuania, which will make it possible to extract accidental or ‘institutionalised’ rent, are limited by the society’s frustration and the negative collective experience of older generations. The interest of young residents of Gdansk and Klaipeda in the Kaliningrad region is rather limited. The liberalisation of transboundary travel has not affected the geopolitical vision. The aggravation of the political situation in Europe resulting from the Ukrainian crisis does not arouse hopes for a change in the near future. Students of all three cities show latent dissatisfaction over the employment prospects manifested in the declared intention to emigrate. The priority given by young Kaliningraders, as well as their peers from Gdansk and Klaipeda, to connection with Europe has little to do with the reality due to the uncertain prospects of the whole complex of Russia-EU relations.

Nevertheless, as the experience of other countries shows, the introduction of local border traffic between the Kaliningrad region and the neighbouring Polish voivodeships can improve mutual images and contribute to the development of cross-border cooperation. Long-term efforts to diversify interactions and promote the positive image of Kaliningrad in the neighbouring Polish regions can yield a certain result. Alongside the measure to strengthen the region’s economic base, the enhancement of Kaliningrad’s symbolic capital is required for a harmonious development of the Kaliningrad identity.

This study is carried out in the framework of a Russian Scientific Foundation project No. 14-18-03621 “Russian Border Areas: The Challenges of Neighbourhood”.

References

1. Baltijskij uzel [Baltic node], 2001, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, available at: http://www.ng.ru/regions/2001-03-28/4_bend.html (accessed 05.07.2014).
2. Bubenec, A. 2001, J eskadrennyj subekt "Kaliningrad" [Squadron subject "Kaliningrad"], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, available at: http://www.ng.ru/politics/2001-02-24/3_subject.html (accessed 07.07.2014).
3. Voronov, K. 2001, Bessmyslennye mechtanija [Senseless dreams], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, available at: http://www.ng.ru/polemics/2001-06-30/8_dream.html (accessed 09.07.2014).
4. Ginsburg, S. 2009, Ugrozy separatizma net [No threat of separatism], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, available at: http://www.ng.ru/scenario/2009-12-22/15_separatism.html (accessed 09.07.2014).
5. Ginsburg, S. 2010, Sem' shagov [Seven steps], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, available at: http://www.ng.ru/scenario/2010-06-22/14_7steps.html (accessed 09.07.2014).
6. Ginsburg, S. 2010, Kaliningradskij evropeec, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, available at: http://www.ng.ru/scenario/2010-03-30/14_kaliningrad.html (accessed 15.07.2014).
7. Deryabin, Yu. 2009, «Severnyj potok» — jekonomika ili voennaja politika? ["Nord Stream" — the economy or military policy?], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, available at: http://www.ng.ru/politics/2009-08-31/3_kartblansh.html (accessed 09.07.2014).
8. Deryabin, Yu. 2009, Obama smotrit na Baltiku [Obama looks to the Baltic Sea], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, available at: http://www.ng.ru/politics/2009-10-02/3_kartblansh.html (accessed 12.07.2014).
9. Drobizheva, L.M. 2012, Rossijskaja identichnost' i soglasie v mezhhjetnicheskikh otnoshenijah: opyt 20 let reform [Russian identity and harmony in inter-ethnic relations: experience of 20 years of reform], *Vestnik Rossijskoj nacii* [Bulletin of the Russian nation], no. 4—5, available at: http://rosnation.ru/?page_id=1064 (accessed 01.06.2014).
10. Kolosov, V.A. 2011, Kriticheskaja geopolitika: osnovy koncepcii i opyt ee primeneniya v Rossii [Critical geopolitics: the basis of the concept and experience of its use in Russia], *Politicheskaja nauka* [Political science], no. 4, p. 31—52.
11. Kosov, V.A., Zotova, M.V. 2011, Geopoliticheskoe videnie mira rossijskimi grazhdanami: opyt primeneniya metodov "kriticheskaj geopolitiki". "Kriticheskoe" napravlenie v geopolitike: stala li, nakonec, geopolitika naukaj? [Geopolitical vision of the world as Russian citizens: the experience of application of

"critical geopolitics." "Critical" in the direction of geopolitics: Whether became finally geopolitics science?]. In: Kaledin, N.V., Chistobaev, A.I. (eds.), *Geograficheskoe prostranstvo Rossii: obraz i modernizacija* [Geographical space of Russia: the image and modernization], St. Petersburg, p. 92—114.

12. Kolosov, V.A., Zotova, M.V. 2012, Geopoliticheskoe videnie mira rossijskimi grazhdanami: pochemu Rossija ne Evropa? [Geopolitical vision of the world as Russian citizens, why Russia is not Europe?], *Polis* [policy], no. 5, p. 170—187.

13. Krylov, M.P. 2012, Kategorija «identichnost» v kontekste problemy prigranichij [The category of "identity" in the context of the borderland], *Mir psihologii* [World of Psychology], no. 1, p.137—151.

14. Sebentsov, A., Zotova, M. 2013, Geography and economy of the Kaliningrad region: limitations and prospects of development, *Balt. Reg.*, no. 4 (18), p.81—94. DOI: 10.5922/2079-8555-2013-4-8.

15. *Obshhestvennoe mnenie — 2009* [Public Opinion — 2009], Moscow, Levada Center, 208 p.

16. *Obshhestvennoe mnenie — 2012*[Public Opinion — 2012], Moscow, Levada Center, 232 p.

17. Ryabushev, A. 2010, Zavershaetsja podgotovka k final'noj chasti akcii «Kaliningrad — uznik Evropy» [Preparation for the final part of the campaign "Kaliningrad — the prisoner of Europe"], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, available at: <http://www.ng.ru/regions/2010-10-22/5kenig.html> (accessed 14.07.2014).

18. Fedorov, G. 2010, The Kaliningrad dilemma: a 'development corridor' or a 'double periphery'? The geopolitical factor of the development of the Russian exclave on the Baltic Sea, *Balt. Reg.*, no. 2, p. 4—12. DOI: 10.5922/2079-8555-2010-2-1.

19. Fedorov, G.M., Zverev, Yu.M., Korneeets, V.S. 2013, Rossija na Baltike:1990—2012 gody [Russia on the Baltic Sea: 1990—2012 years], Kaliningrad, Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University, 252 p.

20. Tsyganok, A. 2008, Spisok ugroz rasshirjaetsja [Expands the list of threats], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, no. 42 (4283).

21. van Houtum, H. 1999, Internationalisation and Mental Borders, *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, Vol. 90(3), p.329—335.

22. van Houtum, H. 2005, The Geopolitics of Borders and Boundaries, *Geopolitics*, Vol. 10(4), p. 672—679.

23. Kolosov, V. 2013, The vision of Europe and the world from large powers: the case of BRIC, *Geografia Polonica*, no. 2, p. 89—98.

24. Konrad, V., Nicol, H.N. 2011, Border Culture, the Boundary Between Canada and the United States of America, and the Advancement of Borderlands Theory, *Geopolitics*, Vol. 16, p. 70—90.



25. Kramsch, O. 2011, Regulating European borders: a cultural perspective. In: Veggeland, N. (ed.) *Innovative regulatory approaches: coping with Scandinavian and European policies*, New York, Nova Science Publishers.
26. O'Loughlin, J., Kolossov, V., Toal, G. 2004, A Risky Westward Turn? Putin's 9—11 Script and Ordinary Russians. *Europe — Asia Studies*, Vol. 56, no. 1, p. 3—34.
27. Parker, N., Vaughan-Williams, C. 2012, Critical Border Studies: Broadening and deepening the “lines in the sand” agenda, *Geopolitics*, Vol. 17, p.727—733.
28. Rumford, C. 2011, Interventions on rethinking “the border” in border studies, *Political Geography*, Vol. 30, p. 67—68.
29. Sahlins, P. 1989, *Boundaries: The making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press.
30. Sidaway, J. D. 2001, Rebuilding bridges: a critical geopolitics of Iberian transfrontier cooperation in a European context, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, Vol. 19, p. 743—778.
31. Wastl-Walter, D. (ed.), 2011, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Border Studies* Farnham, UK, Ashgate.

About the authors

Prof. Vladimir Kolosov, Head of the Laboratory of Geopolitical Studies, Institute of Geography of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia.

Dr Olga Vendina, Leading Research Fellow, Laboratory of Geopolitical Studies, Institute of Geography of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia.