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TWIN CITIES:
A NEW FORM
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COOPERATION
IN THE BALTIC SEA
REGION?

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The paper demonstrates the first attempt in Russian political studies to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the "twin city" movement as a form of cross-border cooperation in the Baltic region. This phenomenon emerged as a result of a global tendency towards more active involvement of municipal units in international cooperation, on the one hand, and aspirations of frontier cities and towns in the Baltic region to solve common problems together, on the other hand. This work is based on a comparative analysis method and a case study methodology. The authors consider four examples (city pairs): Tornio — Haparanda, Valga — Valka, Narva — Ivangorod and Imatra — Svetogorsk.

The article specifies the terminological framework used in this field of research. The authors analyse achievements and failures of this type of international inter-municipal cooperation and emphasise that for twin cities it served not only as a means of survival in the difficult situation of the 1990s, but also as an experimental ground for new forms of cross-border cooperation.

The authors arrive at the conclusion that this model proves to be promising for further development of integration processes in the Baltic region. This practice can be applied by Russian municipal, regional and federal authorities in promotion of cross-border cooperation not only in the Baltic region, but also in other regions of the country. Thus, influenced by the successful experience of Baltic frontier cities and towns, the Russian city of Nikel and the Norwegian city of Kirkenes decided to adopt this model for further development of their cooperation.

***Key words:** twin cities, cross-border cooperation, the Baltic region*

One of the consequences of the regionalization process sweeping post-Soviet Russia is an explosive growth of international contacts developed by both the Russian Federation's subjects, and separate cities and

towns [6; 7; 10][1]. The formation of pairs of so-called "twin cities" is one of the aspects of this tendency. The twin cities movement evolved in northern Europe (the first twin cities were Finland's Tornio and Sweden's Haparanda) in the late 1980s and spread all over eastern and central Europe in the 1990s. Some researchers view this movement not only as a new form of cross-border cooperation but also as one of the aspects of so-called paradiplomacy, i.e. involvement of non-governmental actors (regions, federal states, provinces and cities, separate companies, organizations, non-governmental bodies (public diplomacy) and others) in international relations [14; 15; 22; 23].

The notion of twin cities was first applied in the USA in relation to two cities — Minneapolis and Saint-Paul — situated on the opposite banks of the Mississippi river as they were developing as complementary economic complexes. Since then, this term has been widely used in scholarly literature (mainly in geography and economics) denoting one of the types of urban agglomeration.

Since Soviet times, Russian economic geography has used a similar term — "satellite cities". The case is that twin cities are equal actors, while satellite cities are small cities that surround and serve a major city (the 'planet' or the centre of agglomeration), and have subordinate positions [1; 5; 9].

There are many related terms in western studies — double cities, fraternal cities, sister cities, related towns, connected cities, trans-border cities, binational cities, neighboured cities, coupled towns, partner cities, friendship towns, bridge-towns and others.

The above-mentioned terms were used at random and mainly as synonyms. However, they do not match each other semantically and have different specific features. These terms used to be applied to the description of different types of intermunicipal cooperation at national and international levels, which caused confusion in conceptual vocabulary used by scholars in various sciences (along with economic geographers, the phenomenon was studied by sociologists, political scientists, anthropologists, historians, ecologists and others).

This confusion in terminology brought to life an interdisciplinary approach to the study of intercity cooperation, which was an attempt to sort out the "terminological mess". Firstly, the scholars tried to draw the line between the notion of "twin cities" in intrastate and international contexts focusing on the study of international city pairs rather than duplicate cities" like Minneapolis and Saint-Paul. Secondly, they separated the notion "twin cities" from other forms and types of international cooperation that used to be denoted by this term.

The following criteria for distinguishing twin cities from other municipal units that participate in international cooperation have been introduced [11; 14; 15; 20]:

• The cities are to be located in close proximity to the country's border, that is to be frontier cities (contrary to sister cities, for example, which can be located at a certain distance from each other and establish their contacts due to various

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[1] To study the development of international contacts of regions and cities, see [2]; to study the regionalization processes in the Baltics, see [3].

reasons other than geographical proximity; an unofficial association of "bombed cities" of Coventry, Drezden, Kaliningrad (Koenigsberg), Volgograd (Stalingrad) and others is an example of sister cities).

• They are to have common history in the past when they were a single entity or were opposed to each other on the contrary. For example, the Finnish city of Enso was divided by a new Soviet-Finnish border into two parts after the World War II (nowadays — Imatra and Svetogorsk).

A Livonian settlement of Walk founded in the XIII century was granted city rights in 1584. It had been under the rule of Poland, Sweden and Russia successively. Having mixed Estonian and Latvian population, in 1920 after the proclamation of independency it was divided into Estonia's Valga and Latvia's Valka by the international arbitration.

Tornio in Finland and Haparanda in Sweden have similar history. Before coming under the Russian jurisdiction in 1809, Tornio had been a single city founded by the Swedish king in 1621. Sweden founded Haparanda in 1821 to 'compensate' for the loss of Tornio.

Another example is the case of Narva and Ivangorod, which were founded as Danish (later Swedish) and Russian outposts in the Baltics. But when both of them were under either Sweden, Russia, Estonia or the USSR, Narva and Ivangorod presented, in fact, a single social and economic formation, with only some administrative distinctions.

• Despite the preceding history of shared state frontiers, at the present stage the cities are to seek cooperation.

• As a rule (but not necessarily) the twins are located on the opposite banks of one river that historically served as a border between them (Narva — Ivangorod, Valga — Valka, Tornio — Haparanda and others). Due to this fact such cities are called bridge-towns to symbolize a link between countries and people.

• The population of twin cities has mixed ethnic composition and is often bilingual (as in the case of the three above-mentioned city pairs).

• The cooperation of twin cities should have a certain legal and institutional basis (international agreements, common governing and coordinating bodies, etc.).

Theoretically, when the nature of international relations allows it, the cooperation of twin cities can result in state borders elimination and in the merging of the cities into one common city-entity with nominal administrative division — as it was in the case of Tornio and Haparanda.

It is obvious that most of other city pairs, due to various reasons (mainly troubled international relations), do not have these ambitious goals; however, cooperation between twin cities contributes to rapprochement and diminishes a separating impact of state frontiers. The borderlines which promote the sovereignty of the territories and the differences between the peoples gradually turn into territories of cooperation that contribute to elimination of historical conflicts and stereotypes. The twin cities model was institutionally legalized in December 2006 by the establishment of the City Twins Association (CTA). As it follows from CTA regulations, its aim is to promote cooperation between city pairs in such spheres as collaboration of city administrations and civic institutions, development of regional industries, formation of

common labour market, cooperation in social security and healthcare, organization and maintenance of border crossing posts (if they are present), implementation of educational and cultural projects, and promotion of twin cities' interests at national and international levels [12]. From the beginning, CTA got financial backing from the EU and national administrations, which was very effective at the initial stage of its foundation.

In the rest of the paper, a number of case studies on twin cities in the Baltic region are presented.

Tornio — Haparanda

Cooperation between Tornio and Haparanda started in the 1960s with joint construction of a swimming pool. In 1987, the municipal administrations reached an agreement on further development of the cities according to a joint plan.

The accession of Finland and Sweden in the EU and the Schengen area defeated the purpose of state frontier between these countries that in the case of Tornio and Haparanda had already been very conventional for a long time. As a result, these two cities developed common transport and post services, ambulance service, a shopping centre (centred around an IKEA retail park), a recreational area, an employment centre, educational institutions (comprehensive and linguistic schools, Eurocollege, etc.), a library and a landfill [14—16; 20; 25].

Both cities claim that their aim is to create a Eurocity. The implementation of this plan is not hindered by the fact that these cities belong to different countries and currency systems (the euro in Tornio and the Swedish krone in Sweden). However, there are opponents to a Eurocity in these municipal entities. Some manifestations of Swedish nationalism have been registered there including the ones among the youngsters [17; 19], but most of them are marginal and do not affect the twin cities integration development vector.

Cooperation between Tornio and Haparanda is considered to be the most successful case of cross-border cooperation of twin cities.

Valga — Valka

A tendency for developing cooperation between these cities emerged not in one stroke. In the early years after the break-up of the USSR and the appearance of the state border separating the once-single city unit, both parts were preoccupied with development of their own infrastructures. They were interested mainly in forging relations with their countries' capitals to get some assistance rather than cultivating cooperation with their counterpart right across the state border. Another obstacle to establishing cooperation at the time was the fact that both cities belonged to the backwards regions of Estonia and Latvia. Finally, large Russian-speaking communities (35 % of Valga's population and 25 % of Valka's population) became a major barrier in developing relations between them: members of these communities were non-citizens and could not cross the border without restrains [24].

This situation started changing only in the middle of 1990s when, firstly, the cities resolved some essential problems and improved their social and economic situation; secondly, national governments and the EU in particular started to encourage cross-border cooperation.

The intermunicipal cooperation between Valga and Valka was greatly influenced by the case of Tornio and Haparanda. This model was copied to a large extent. Thus, cooperation between the cities started with permission to visit sport facilities in Valga (including the swimming pool) given to the citizens of Valka. Both cities founded institutions for studying Latvian and Estonian cultures [20, c. 59]. A special trans-border bus tour was organized but turned out to be unprofitable later on.

By 2005 cooperation between the twin cities had matured, which resulted in formalization of intercity relations by signing an agreement based on the "one city — two countries" concept. The twin cities founded a single front office to coordinate development plans and to promote development of business, tourism, healthcare, education, culture and sport. The accession of Estonia and Latvia to the Schengen area in 2007 facilitated the implementation of joint projects substantially. The Eurocity concept tested in Tornio and Haparanda is gaining growing acceptance in Valga and Valka.

At the same time, according to international experts, the problems related to an issue of national identity still exist in both cities. Local authorities, encouraged by the national governments, pursue a hard line of 'estonization' and 'latvization' of local communities (the Russian-speaking communities in particular) [18, c. 148; 24]. This approach does not contribute to promotion of all-European values among the population of the twin cities. As these values generally form a basis for integration processes, the Eurocity project is still on the books.

Narva — Ivangorod

A need for developing cooperation between these two cities arose from their common history. In Soviet times, most of Ivangorod's citizens worked at factories in Narva. Both cities had common systems of transportation, power supply, telephone communication, and sewerage and water purification (with purification plants in Narva). The overwhelming majority of Narva's population was (and is now) Russian-speaking. In fact, Ivangorod was a typical satellite city of Narva, though in terms of administrative division the former was part of the Leningrad region (the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) and the latter — the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic.

The break-up of the USSR and separation of the two cities by a state border (a border is still not determined de jure) had a negative effect on the social and economic situation in both cities (they became depressed regions) and damaged relations between people that had been developing for decades. Until 1994, residents of the border zone could cross the border without any restraints (there was a simplified border crossing procedure for local residents) but later a full-scale visa regime was introduced.

An aspiration to resolve common problems of the cities led to closer cooperation between them. Since the late 1990s, Narva and Ivangorod started negotiations on joint projects in tourism, transportation system and border

crossing infrastructure. The projects were aimed at improving the Narva river embankments in both cities, organising a sightseeing tour of a fortress in Narva and a fortress in Ivangorod, constructing a marina in the Narva estuary, elaborating a boat tour along the Narva river, building an aqua park in the border zone, and upgrading the facilities of the border crossing point and the neighbouring territory.

Unfortunately, most of these projects have not been implemented due to a number of reasons: lack of municipal funds, unwillingness of higher authorities to support these initiatives, lack of involvement of international financial organizations, and the financial and economic crisis which started in 2008. Moreover, the cities failed to resolve such a basic issue as common water use. Things came to such a pitch that Ivangorod had not been paying for many years for the use of the Soviet-times sewerage and water supply system. The incident was settled only after Ivangorod built its own water supply and water purification system in the late 1990s (with the help of regional authorities) [21].

Strained relations between Russia and Estonia complicated the situation. The countries still cannot complete the legal arrangements of their state border and constantly get involved in the disputes like the one they had over the Bronze Soldier monument. Moscow and Tallinn are not averse to turn the twin cities to their account in their political games. Thus, Russia encouraged 'autonomist' (if not separatist) attitudes in Narva and the neighbouring Russian-speaking territory. Tallinn, in its turn, torpedoed most of Narva's incentives in cross-border cooperation with the neighbouring Russian regions and tended to present the local elite as the pro-Russian "fifth column" in Estonia.

It is assumed that cooperation between Narva and Ivangorod is not a successful case of the twin cities movement. This is rather a case of twin cities that became victims of big-time politics and poor local management.

Imatra — Svetogorsk

Cooperation between these cities had some other grounds compared to the case of Narva and Ivangorod. In fact, it started in the 1970s-1980s when the USSR turned to Finland for technical assistance in modernization of a pulp and paper mill in Svetogorsk. As a matter of fact, no proper cooperation developed between the cities at that time as the project was run at the state level. However, the cities gained some experience in joint initiatives.

Close cooperation at the intermunicipal level started only in the 1990s, with projects on scheduled modernization of the pulp and paper mill. A number of joint projects were launched: power supply efficiency upgrading, enhancement of water purification quality in Svetogorsk, joint water quality monitoring, joint monitoring of the Vuoksa river fishery resources, tourist infrastructure development, training of Svetogorsk municipal servants in Imatra, exchange of school students and annual cultural festivals held by the cities [13].

The construction of a border crossing point between the cities in 2002 played an important role in their cooperation. This costly project (6.75m euros) was financed by the EU under TACIS programme.

The cities also drafted a project on creation of a technological park in the border zone. However, Russia's new law on Special Economic Zones (2006) caused a number of legislative and technical obstacles to its implementation. According to the new legislation, only federal and local authorities, but not municipal ones, were empowered to establish a special economic zone (SEZ). Russian and foreign investors were given equal rights in tax exemptions and customs privileges, which deprived foreign companies of motivation to enter a SEZ. More than that, the global economic crisis soon afterwards postpone the project implementation till the things go better.

A legal and institutional framework was developed in the course of cooperation between Imatra and Svetogorsk. The first agreement on cross-border cooperation between the cities was signed in 1993. In 2001, a new agreement stemming from the twin cities model was signed. It outlined particular vectors of joint planning of the cities' development [4]. A joint committee on planning and development made up of senior municipal officials from the two cities was set up. Also, centres for small and medium-size enterprises were established.

Cooperation between Imatra and Svetogorsk can be regarded as a more successful case of the twin cities model than cooperation between Narva and Ivangorod.

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In conclusion, it is worth mentioning that despite several failures the twin cities model turned out to be rather successful as a form of cross-border cooperation. This model seems to be not only a means of getting through difficult social and economic conditions and solving local problems (which is rather important in itself), but also a testing ground for new forms of international cooperation. The decision of Kirkenes in Norway and Nikel in Russia (the Murmansk region) — the twin cities from another European region — to develop their further cooperation on the basis of this model counts in favour of the twin cities model [8].

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