

# POLISH-RUSSIAN CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF POLISH FOREIGN POLICY. GENERAL VIEW

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## ABSTRACT

Due to geopolitical location, North-Eastern Polish regions (voivodships) have a big potential for the development of cross-border cooperation. This kind of international activity can have impact on regional development. Polish authorities on the central, regional and local levels initiate, run and co-finance cross-border projects designed to promote integration, understanding and co-operation across the border. According to the aims of the Polish foreign policy the basis of the long-term strategy of regional development of the North-Eastern Poland could be its geographical position and long-established co-operation with Kaliningrad Oblast. Institutional framework of contacts are: intergovernmental agreements, agreements establishing Euroregions, agreements between regional and local authorities. The cross-border cooperation between Warmia and Mazury Region and the Kaliningrad Oblast could be important part of the Polish foreign policy towards Russia.

**KEYWORDS:** *Cross-border cooperation, Kaliningrad Oblast, Warmia and Mazury Region, Foreign Policy of Poland, Polish-Russian Relations.*

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## Introduction

The aim of the paper is to analyze the role of Kaliningrad Oblast (Kaliningrad Region) in Polish foreign policy after 1989, with special emphasis on cross-border cooperation between Poland and the Russian Federation. The main research methods used are: method of system, institutional and political science methods.

The process of disintegration of the Soviet Union has led not only to the geopolitical changes in Europe and in the world, but also to the fact that the issue of the Kaliningrad Oblast became the subject of interest from countries and international organizations. The Russian exclave has been the subject of debate and political controversy both in Russia and in Europe. Initially it was a result of the militarization of Kaliningrad Oblast and speculation regarding the change in its status. Later, the issue of Kaliningrad Oblast appeared primarily in the context of the enlargement of the European Union and NATO to the east. The importance of

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the Russian exclave should be considered not only in terms of geopolitical location, but mainly in the context of political, economic or military conditions. It is worth to pay special attention to disputes concerning the status of Kaliningrad Oblast and its role within the Russian Federation. Disputes which took place both at the federal level in Moscow, as well as one regional level in Kaliningrad. In these debates two main visions were developed. The first one focused on maintaining the status of the Kaliningrad Oblast as a “military base” in Europe, with some structural changes and with maintaining close relations with Russia. The second one, in turn, stressed the importance of establishment of free economic zone with increasing economic independence and political of the exclave.

These two concepts were largely a result of differences in geopolitical considerations about the role of the Baltic Sea Region in Russian foreign policy. The first one has its roots in anti-Western attitude. Representatives of this option perceive Russian Baltic policy, above all, in the context of protecting the rights of Russian-speaking minority in the Baltic republics. According to their opinion, reducing the military contingent stationed in Kaliningrad Oblast could lead to loss of control by Moscow in the region of Central and Eastern Europe and weaken the security of the Russian Federation. Supporters of the second, pro-Western option, perceived Baltic region in the context of cooperation with Western states and institutions. In their view, such cooperation should become a priority of Russian foreign policy (Lichaczewski, 2000; Sergounin, 2003). They called for reducing the number of troops in the Baltic region and to intensify contacts with neighboring countries, also in the framework of the Council of Baltic Sea States. An attempt to reconcile these two options was a trend that could be for the purposes of article described as realistic. Since taking power by Vladimir Putin this trend prevailed both in Russian foreign policy in the Baltic region as well as in Moscow policy towards the Kaliningrad Oblast.

On economic determinants of the Kaliningrad Oblast undoubtedly influenced the establishment of the Free Economic Zone “Yantar” in 1991. However, despite signs of economic recovery, the project has not ultimately brought the expected economic and social results. In 1996 the Russian authorities, in place of the FEZ “Yantar”, introduced Special Economic Zone “Yantar”. The introduction of a special economic zone regime has not led to a significant increase of interest on the Kaliningrad Oblast from the side of foreign investors. The plan to use convenient location of Kaliningrad seaport failed to end. Much more funds were transferred to the development of the seaport of St. Petersburg.

After the collapse of the USSR, the Kaliningrad Oblast as a Russian exclave has been the subject of interest from Polish and other Baltic Sea states. Kaliningrad issue, however, was not the priority problem in the relations of these countries with the Russian Federation, but the most significant place it played in Lithuanian-Russian relations. This was due to the following factors: military potential gathered in Kaliningrad Oblast, a Russian transit through the territory of Lithuania or the issue of the so-called “Lithuania Minor”. German policy towards the Kaliningrad Oblast since the early 90s was characterized by caution. The position of the German authorities on the issue of Kaliningrad was consistent with the policy of the European Union. Germany supported the activities enhancing the socio-economic development of the exclave, among others through the EU aid programmes in the framework of TACIS programme. Officially, Germany declaring restraint on the policy towards the Kaliningrad Oblast conducted at the same time quite extensive cooperation with this entity of the Russian Federation. It pointed particularly to the German commitment to cooperation in the sphere of economy and trade. Germany was next to Poland and Lithuania the most important trading partner of the Kaliningrad Oblast. In the case of the Nordic countries it must be emphasized that the most active in cooperation with the exclave was Sweden and Denmark. Finland and Norway showed less activity in turn. The Nordic countries perceived the Kaliningrad Oblast primarily through the prism of cooperation in the field of environmental protection, health, civil society development and local democracy. Kaliningrad Oblast became the subject of interest also from non-state actors, primarily the EU and NATO. Baltic sub-regional organizations, e.g. The Council of the Baltic Sea played, in turn, the role of forum where interested parties put their demands in relation to the Russian exclave (See: Oldberg, 2002; Pełczyńska-Nałęcz, 2002).

## 1. New priorities of Polish Foreign Policy after 1989

Before 1989, the foreign policy of Poland was primarily subordinated to the interests of the Soviet Union as a part of the East Bloc. The geopolitical changes, brought about by the collapse of the Yalta-Potsdam order, resulted in Poland's being able to redefine the priorities of its foreign policy. Following the system transformation, the leading political parties reached a consensus concerning its main objectives. Polish political elites, including post-communists, finally agreed on the Euro-Atlantic direction; the policy was proved successful by Poland's accession to NATO in 1999 and to the European Union in 2004 (See: Zięba, 2000). As a consequence of the collapse of the USSR, Czechoslovakia and unification of Germany, Poland found itself in a completely new geopolitical situation, surrounded by new neighbours: the Russian Federation, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Germany. Of particular importance for the Polish foreign policy were the relationships with the two regional powers – Russia and Germany – and with Ukraine, which was perceived by the Polish authorities as an important stabilising factor in the region. In 1990's Poland redefined its new relationships with its eastern neighbours, especially with Russia. Polish attempts to join NATO met with fierce opposition from the Russian authorities. Moscow argued that NATO expansion eastwards would disturb the balance of power in the region, posing a threat to the Russian Federation itself. Poland's accession to the European Union did not raise such objections from its neighbour from the east. However, one should remember about the reservations raised by Russia concerning the necessity to introduce visas for the Russian citizens, inhabiting one of its regions, the Kaliningrad Oblast, which is an exclave, separated from the remaining part of Russia by the territory of Poland and Lithuania.

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century provided also challenges for Poland associated with the membership in the EU, but also in terms of creating new eastern policy. Poland supported reforms towards democracy, especially in Ukraine and also opposition movements in Belarus. Former Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski and the president of Lithuania, Valdas Adamkus, got actively involved in solving a political conflict in Ukraine during the "Orange Revolution" in late in 2004 and early 2005. President Kwaśniewski represented not only Poland, but he had the official support from the European Union. Polish participation in the "Orange Revolution" was fiercely criticised by the Russian Federation, which saw Polish involvement as interference in Ukraine's internal affairs. What is noteworthy, however, is that Russia also took active part in the events. President Vladimir Putin visited Ukraine twice before the first and second round of the vote, openly supporting one of the candidates and the camp of president Leonid Kuchma. Russia had and still has important economic and political interests in Ukraine. Ukraine is a country through which oil and gas pipelines run. One of the elements of the Polish eastern policy are its efforts aimed at strengthening the ties between Ukraine and Georgia on the one side and the EU and NATO on the other and, in the longer perspective, even the membership of those countries in the Euro-Atlantic structures. During NATO meetings Poland supported the efforts of Ukraine and Georgia to become members of the Alliance in future.

One of the most important challenges for the Polish diplomacy after 1989 was development of economic and political relationships with the Russian Federation. It is important for Poland that in contacts with Russia and cross-border cooperation should be promoted, especially that with the Kaliningrad Oblast – the only area where both countries have a common border (Chełminiak, Kotowicz, Modzelewski, 2006; Gorzelak, 2002; Palmowski, 2007). Poland doesn't have any claims to the Kaliningrad Oblast. Polish government recognizes rights of the Russian Federation to this territory. Most of Polish politicians stressed that significance reduction of Russian troops in the Kaliningrad Oblast and even demilitarization of this region would be good move from a perspective of Polish national interest. For Polish-Russian relations it's important question how to develop cross-border cooperation between North-Eastern regions of Poland, especially Warmia and Mazury Region and Kaliningrad Oblast (Modzelewski, 2004). In the last 20 years, there were several problems in Polish-Russian relations which were connected with Kaliningrad, for example: the idea of building a Russian transnational corridor from Belarus to Kaliningrad between Polish territory.

## 2. International conditions of Polish-Russian cross-border cooperation

Before 2004, in the context of the forthcoming Polish integration with the EU for the Polish-Russian borderland important issue was a introduction of visas for Russians. The consultation on the regulation of this issue began in March 2000. The Polish authorities in February 2002 announced that it will introduce visa requirement in July 2003. The Russian side referred to these announcements in a critical way. Eventually, the deadline for their introduction of visas was postponed to 1 October 2003. On this day Poland renounced the agreement on free-visa mode concerning crossing the Polish-Russian border.

The introduction of visas had important consequences for cooperation on the Polish eastern border, including the Polish-Russian border: firstly, border formalities were certainly troublesome for crossing the external border of the European Union, but did not become an obstacle to the development of cross-border cooperation; Secondly, during the first 20 months when visas were in force on the Polish eastern border there has been a significant reduction in incoming traffic to Poland.

After the Polish accession to the European structures it was important that the Polish-Russian border does not become again a barrier to cooperation (See: Kukliński, 1999).

Poland after the EU accession issues of cross-border cooperation with the Kaliningrad Oblast raised also move on the international regional forum (See: Grzelak, 2002; Mrozowska, 2005). One of such organization was the Council of Baltic Sea States. On 1 July 2004, shortly after joining the EU, Poland took over the presidency in this organizations. Representatives of the Polish government emphasized that the main priorities of the Polish presidency, among others, would be cross-border and interregional co-operation including the “new neighbors of the EU”, especially with the Kaliningrad Oblast. Poland also pointed the need for joint actions in the framework of the Union of the Baltic Cities (mainly bilateral cooperation of twin cities) and the Euroregions.

After the Polish accession to the EU still (despite the development of new Euroregions “Szeszupa” (“Šešupė”) and “Łyna – Ława” (“Lyna – Lawa”), a leading role in cross-border cooperation of the Warmia and Mazury Region (voivodship) and the Kaliningrad Oblast played a Euroregion “Baltic”. It was created primarily to increase the level of cooperation from bilateral to multilateral. Another important condition of its creation was possibility of more attraction of the European Union funds. The level of use of the EU funds reached over 90 %, and in this respect Euroregion “Baltic” was a leading Polish Euroregion. The vast majority of funds have been earmarked for projects involving the exchange of youth and children, university co-operation (e.g. the University of Gdansk and the Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University in Kaliningrad), training camps, scout camps and assistance for the disabled.

The EU has supported the development of cross-border cooperation among others through a Neighborhood Programme Poland – Lithuania – Kaliningrad (INTERREG III A / TACIS), which was implemented in years 2004–2006 (See: Russo, 2012). Funds from the European Regional Development Fund received by the Warmia and Mazury Region in the INTERREG III A / TACIS amounted to 4.8 million EUR what accounted for 14 % of national funds. For this sum, nearly 1.6 million EUR received projects for the development of tourism and tourist infrastructure and the modernization of cultural heritage objects of cross-border importance. More than 1 million EUR has been earmarked for activities at the state border, including the development of infrastructure in the seaport of Elbląg. The remaining funds earmarked for projects related to environmental protection.

In recent years, major project supporting the cooperation of the Warmia and Mazury Region and the Kaliningrad Oblast was the ENPI Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Lithuania-Poland-Russia 2007–2013. Its aim was to strengthen contacts between Poland, Russia and Lithuania by intensifying bilateral and trilateral cooperation. The program offered support for socio-economic development and increasing the quality of life of residents throughout the area covered by it. 60 projects for a total of nearly 100 million EUR were implemented, of which the largest part was implemented by entities from the Warmia and Mazury Region (26).

It is worth to mention that partnership agreements with local governments from Kaliningrad Oblast signed totally 39 local authorities from the Warmia and Mazury Region: 11 counties (out of 21) and 28 municipalities (out of 116).

The last significant adjustment is the Polish-Russian Intergovernmental Agreement on Local Border Traffic, signed in Moscow on 14 December 2011. It entered into force on 27 July 2012. It defines the principles of mutual journeys of border residents, covering an area of administration subdivisions of both countries, listed in Annex 1 of the Agreement. On the Russian side is the whole territory of the Kaliningrad Oblast, and on the Polish side – part of the Pomerania Region (4 counties and the Tri-City-Gdańsk, Sopot and Gdynia) and a part of Warmia and Mazury Region (11 counties, Olsztyn and Elbląg). Totally, the zone of Polish-Russian border traffic took about 2.8 million people, of which 1.9 million are Polish citizens and more than 0.9 million are Russian citizens.

Supporting of local border traffic is one of the most important objectives of Polish foreign policy in regard to its eastern neighbors from outside of the European Union (Dudzińska, Dwyer, 2013). The small border traffic would be a measure to overcome divisions, xenophobic attitudes, shaping the basis of mutual cooperation and thus enhancing stability and security and development, especially in the eastern Polish border regions. Diplomacy created at the lower level can play an important role than central state level, and relating directly to the cross-border cooperation which is a special kind of international cooperation, treated as part of the state's foreign activity.

The Polish-Russian local border traffic has been a success in the social, economic and cultural sphere. It may be a "litmus paper" of mutual official relations.

### 3. Political conditions of Polish-Russian cross-border cooperation

Political conditions of the cooperation of the Warmia and Mazury Region with Russian partner include Polish-Russian cooperation at the intergovernmental level and central level. In the opinion of representatives of local governments who are engaged in the cross-border cooperation any political tensions between Warsaw and Moscow affects on the local and regional levels, e.g. on rhythm and fluency checks at border crossing points. It can specify in the following way: if official international relationship are better, then it is easier for local cooperation. A counter-example of this may be events in Ukraine and Crimea in 2014 and 2015 after which Polish-Russian relations were cooled and introduction of hindrances took place (informally), e.g. for Polish transport companies in the Kaliningrad Oblast.

Analyzing the political conditions for cross-border cooperation on the Polish-Russian borderland it needs to pay attention to the system of local and regional authorities in the entities of the Russian Federation. From a legal analysis of the Constitution of Russian Federation, federal laws and the Charter of Kaliningrad Oblast shows that the highest organ of state power of the Kaliningrad Oblast is a Government. It is a constantly acting as executive authority, headed by the Governor. The Governor is a key political figure in Kaliningrad Oblast. It is believed that due to the broad authority, particularly in terms of the economy, e.g. granting of concessions to exploit natural resources, disputing tenders for import quotas, the Governor gets the main financial resources of the region, which in Russian conditions determines the impact on the internal political scene.

The cooperation between the north-eastern Polish regions, especially the Warmia and Mazury Region and the Kaliningrad Oblast had a positive impact on reconciliation of geopolitical and economic interests of both parties. However, when issues of economic cooperation are analysed, it should be noted that the Russian exclave – contrary to the hopes of the Polish side – did not become a catalyst for the entire Polish-Russian economic co-operation, or a "window" into the Russian market. The border with the Kaliningrad Oblast connects Poland, not so much with the main Russian market but with the Kaliningrad regional market (See: Zieliński, 2012).

Cooperation at the investigated borderland, despite of existing barriers, should be defined as an intense, at the same time rational, focused on the implementation of joint projects with the use of the EU funds. In this respect, natural and touring values determine activities related mainly to tourism, culture and sport. One of the identified benefits of the cooperation is taking common challenges and resolve common problems (e.g. in infrastructure).

It is worth to note that the Polish membership in the European Union and the introduction of visa regime has so far not affected essentially for the continuation of a dynamic collaboration of the Warmia and Mazury Region with the Kaliningrad Oblast. Local governments, in most, treat foreign activity as a part of their socio-economic development, and the Polish-Russian neighborhood as an important factor in this process. The joint application for the EU funds for the implementation of cross-border projects and their implementation, results for a state of economic development of a municipality or county.

According to the idea of cross-border cooperation promoted for many years in Western Europe, it is intended shaping security and building mutual confidence. It seems that, given the current not-so-good political relations between Poland and Russia, the cross-border cooperation has a special meaning and significance. At the same time an important objective of cross-border cooperation is eliminating obstacles and problems that may share border regions and making a mutual effort to neutralize the negative aspects of remoteness. For this reason, the proper use of Polish-Russian neighborhood is an opportunity that must be properly utilized.

The cross-border cooperation between Poland and Kaliningrad Oblast should be particularly important for Polish foreign policy after the last EU enlargement (See: Kawałko, 2006; Kruszewska-Gagoś, 2006). The experience of the functioning of the EU shows that the most effective is cooperation on the level of municipalities and counties. It is necessary in this case, however, financial and institutional support from the central government.

## Conclusions

The end of the “Cold War” and the formation of the new order in Europe contributed so fundamentally to change the geopolitical significance of Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation. During the “Cold War” it fulfilled only the role of a military base for the Soviet Baltic Fleet. After the collapse of the Eastern Bloc Russian exclave became a open region to cooperation with other countries, both on the regional and local levels. Attempts to create in Kaliningrad Oblast Russian “Hong Kong on the Baltic Sea” have not yielded results so far. But on the other hand, the Russian exclave is no longer seen solely through the prism of military factors. Poland and other countries in the region do not question the current political and legal status of the Kaliningrad Oblast. Increasingly they see it more through the prism of cooperation in the Baltic region, rather than as a source of danger. Changes in relations between NATO, the European Union and the Russian Federation could be affected not only on the shape of future European order, but also on changing the role of the Kaliningrad Oblast in Polish-Russian relations.

From the perspective of Polish foreign policy Kaliningrad Oblast should become an area of closer cooperation with the European Union and NATO (See: De Sousa, 2012). Important element of this cooperation should be the economy, transport infrastructure, science and cooperation in the field of soft-security and environmental protection.

It is quite often underlined that Polish foreign policy should not see Kaliningrad Oblast by prism of confrontation, fears, negative stereotypes. Such attitude would lead to the to a new “Iron Curtain” at the north-eastern border of Poland and isolation of this territory. The developing close ties with Kaliningrad Oblast by cross-border cooperation should ensure political, economic and social stability in the region (Żukowski, 2004).

The following conclusions were made after undergoing the analysis of the role of Kaliningrad Oblast in Polish foreign policy after 1989:

- Kaliningrad was not one of the main priorities of Polish diplomacy, it was not also a priority in Polish-Russian relations;
- Russian exclave in the first half of the 90s was perceived by the Polish government largely through the prism of military threats;
- Poland treated Kaliningrad Oblast as an important issue for the development of security and stability in the Baltic Sea region;
- In its relations with the Russian exclave Poland drew particular attention to the development of cross-border cooperation and introduction of local border traffic is a good example;
- Polish-Russian border cooperation has been largely conditioned by the state of political relations at the interstate;
- Kaliningrad began to play a greater role in the Polish foreign policy the time before the Polish accession to the European Union, which was caused by problems related to the introduction of visas for Russians.

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## LENKIJOS IR RUSIJOS FEDERACIJOS BENDRADARBIAVIMAS PER SIENĄ LENKIJOS UŽSIENIO POLITIKOS ATŽVILGIU

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### Santrauka

Vertinant geopolitinę situaciją, šiaurės-rytų Lenkijos regionai (vaivadijos) turi didelį potencialą plėtoti bendradarbiavimą per sieną. Šis tarptautinis aktyvumas gali turėti įtakos regiono vystymuisi. Lenkijos valdžia – centrinė, regioninė ar vietinė – inicijuoja, remia ir finansuoja pasienio bendradarbiavimo projektus, kurie skirti skatinti integraciją, geresnį kaimyninių šalių pažinimą ir bendradarbiavimą abipus sienų. Atsižvelgiant į Lenkijos užsienio politikos tikslus, tai yra ilgalaikės Šiaurės-Rytų Lenkijos regiono vystymosi strategijos pagrindas: dėl geografinės situacijos ir dėl to, kad turi patirties bendradarbiaujant su Kaliningrado sritimi (Rusijos Federacija). Be to, užmegzti instituciniai kontaktai: vykdomos tarpvyriausybines sutartys, sudarytos Euroregionų sutartys, sutartys tarp paskirų regionų ir vietinių valdžios atstovų. Tyrimu nustatyta, kad bendradarbiavimas per sieną tarp Warmijos ir Mazūrijos regiono ir Kaliningrado srities galėtų būti svarbi Lenkijos užsienio politikos dalis bendradarbiaujant su Rusijos Federacija, tačiau tam dėmesio labai trūksta.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: *bendradarbiavimas per sieną, Kaliningrado sritis, Warmijos ir Mazūrijos regionas, Lenkijos užsienio politika, Lenkijos ir Rusijos santykiai.*

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