

# INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

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## THE FOREIGN POLICY OF POLAND AND THE KALININGRAD REGION IN 1989—2012

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*This article sets out to analyse the role of the Kaliningrad region in the Polish foreign policy after 1989. The analysis focuses on the political and regional determinants, which had the greatest impact on the Poland-Kaliningrad region relations. The methodology used in the article is not unusual for political science and is based on analysing original (documents) and secondary (scholarly publications, press articles) sources. The authors also use the system and decision analysis methods. The analysis covers the period after 1989, when the geopolitical changes brought about by the collapse of the Yalta-Potsdam order resulted in Poland redefine the priorities of its foreign policy. One of the most important challenges for the Polish diplomacy after 1989 was the development of economic and political relations with the Russian Federation. Cross-border cooperation between Poland and the Kaliningrad Region is conducted, inter alia, through euroregional structures functioning in the border areas. The analysis of this issue is vital for further cooperation in the Polish-Russian borderland, especially after the conclusion of the local border traffic agreement in 2012.*

*The authors come to a conclusion that the implementation of the local border traffic agreement can improve cross-border relations but it will not significantly change the role of the Kaliningrad region in the Polish foreign policy.*

**Key words:** Polish foreign policy, cross-border cooperation, Kaliningrad region

### **Foreign Policy of Poland and Kaliningrad Region in 1989—2012**

Foreign policy at the turn of XX and XXI century has to take into account the challenges connected with the processes of globalization and international integration. Setting priorities, implementing appropriate methods and means and achieving chosen goals hinges upon numerous internal as well as external factors. How-

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ever, the politics of a country depends mostly on geopolitical changes influencing that country. Foreign policy of the modern European countries has to additionally take into consideration the character of the European Union whose characteristic is the fact that external policy of the member states takes place on both levels; namely supranational and national. Poland, which is the member state of the European Union, has limited sovereignty as far as making decisions about its political relations with other countries (and obviously with Russia) are concerned.

### **New priorities of the Polish foreign policy**

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. 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 Region., which is an enclave, separated from the remaining part of Russia by the territory of Poland and Lithuania.

Under Boris Yeltsin's presidency Soviet troops were withdrawn from Polish territory and responsibility for the massacre of Polish officers in Katyń accepted. In turn, the Polish state assumed material responsibility for estates left in the East by Polish citizens in the aftermath of post-war border shifts and attendant mass relocations. Concurrently, Poland's striving for NATO membership has led to durable tension in Polish-Russian relations. The advent of president Vladimir Putin brought further regress in mutual relations. Presumably, this is connected with the evaluation of Poland's role on the global stage—both present and future [3, p. 20].

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 Region — the only area where both countries have a common border.

### **The modification of geopolitical significance of Kaliningrad Oblast**

The Kaliningrad Region of the Russian Federation fulfils a particular role in the Baltic Sea Region, resulting first of all from its specific geopolitical conditions, which include:



- the fact that it is the western-most part of Russia;
- the existence on its territory of the only warm-water Russian Baltic ports, in which the Baltic Fleet is stationed. The Fleet has its ports also in the Finnish Gulf, but their function is rather secondary. They freeze during the winter period, their flow capacity is smaller and they are easy to block;
- the geopolitical status of an enclave, surrounded by member states of the EU and NATO [1, p. 70—76].

The Baltic Sea Region is not one of the priorities of the Russian foreign policy, but it must be noted that it plays an important role in the European dimension. The Baltic Sea is of great importance to the Russian Federation, first of all because of the protection of its economic interests, since, as in 2001 the prime minister of the Russian Federation, Mikhail Kasyanov, pointed out, half of the foreign trade transport by sea is through the Baltic. For this reason, there has been an evident activation of Moscow's policy towards the enclave and the whole Baltic Region, directed to improve the social and economic situation in the Region.

Taking into consideration the deeply rooted Russian perception of the Baltic Region as a historical gate to the west and the belief of the Russian military authorities that the Baltic Republics constitute a Russian strategic area, the necessity to withdraw from these republics was particularly unfavourable from the point of view of the strategic interests of Russia. Although many Russian politicians see risks to the security of Russia mainly in the south and the east, some analytic centres closely related to Russian military authorities pointed to the challenge which would be posed to the Russian security in north-eastern Europe as the Baltic Republics joined NATO [1, p. 70—76].

Around the Baltic Sea Basin there have been tendencies towards lesser militarization and greater co-operation, borders are less stressed and regionalization is more emphasised. Rarely has Russia in its history favoured such a direction of changes. However, in the last decade some changes in its policy have been observed. The choice of Russia — with some hesitation — is worthy of notice, although problems related directly or indirectly to the Kaliningrad Region of the RF cannot be ignored. As a result of the integration processes in central-eastern Europe, the Region has become a permanent issue and one of the priority elements in the dialog between the EU and Russia [4, p. 391].

In emphasizing the interests, dangers and opportunities of the Region, which have resulted from the admission of Poland and Lithuania into the EU, Russia takes part in the discussion concerning the future shape of Europe. In this context, the Region has become an important instrument of the European policy of Russia, and it is very likely that this importance will continue to increase.

### **The development of cross-border and euro-regional cooperation with Kaliningrad Oblast**

Poland and The Baltic Sea countries have been building up a network of cooperation since 1988. It's important that this cooperation is not limited to the national governments. Provinces, lands and cities also cooperate between

themselves. Shelwig-Holstein works with Danish regions, Estonia, Kaliningrad, southern Sweden and one finish Region. This cooperation includes: small and medium sized enterprises, cross-border cooperation, joint information centers [2, p. 226—245].

Cross-border cooperation between Poland and the Kaliningrad Region is carried on, among other ways, through the euroregional structures functioning in the border areas. These structures include the Euroregion “Baltic” (since 22 February 1998), Euroregion “Niemen” (since 6 June 1997) and Euroregion “Łyna-Ława”.

Poland participates in said euroregions through specially created communal associations bringing together actors interested in cross-border cooperation. This is connected with certain expenses, for example paying membership fees, but it also opens up the perspective of enormous benefits. One such benefit is the possibility of getting EU funds for local projects. Yet, it must be kept in mind that the projects have to involve at least one major foreign partner from the euroregion. This makes it necessary to establish cross-border contacts, which could include contacts with the neighbouring Kaliningrad Region. Euroregions by regulating the flow of information and redistributing EU funds the euroregions exert pressure on Polish local governments to search for partners abroad. They thus play an important role in stimulating cross-border cooperation. Moreover, the euroregional structure enables local administrative employees to gain experience in applying for EU grants and programming EU aid. Small euroregional projects especially, contribute to the strengthening of contacts and the formation of lasting relationships between international partners in border regions [2, p. 226—245].

Cross—border cooperation between Polish voivodships and Kaliningrad Region can develop social and economic centres through common projects which can be supported by European Union. Cross—border cooperation within the framework of the European Union and others international institutions raises questions of the transnational and multilevel governance. But this kind of cooperation has impact on regional development by building the connections between political, economic or cultural communities. This cooperation creates new possibilities in following fields of regional development:

1. promotion of urban, rural and costal development;
2. strengthening the spirit of enterprise;
3. developing small and medium-sized enterprises, including those in the tourism sector;
4. developing local employment initiatives;
5. improving transport, information and communication networks;
6. increasing human and institutional potential for cross-border cooperation [8, p. 7—12].

### **Kaliningrad Oblast and Polish national security**

In Moscow on 14th December 2011 was signed an agreement between the government of the Republic of Poland and the government of the Russian Federation about local border traffic. It stipulates that inhabitants in cer-

tain parts of Poland namely Pomerania and Masuria will no longer need visas in order to cross the border. They will only be required to possess valid passports (travel documents) and special permission entitling to local border traffic. The agreement about local border traffic solely concerns land border crossings (by road or rail)<sup>1</sup>.

So far there has been a consensus among Polish political parties in regard to Polish-Russian relations concerning Kaliningrad Region. However, exception to this rule is the issue of signing of the agreement about local border traffic. Some of the political parties like Law and Justice and Solidary Party expressed reservations to this agreement. In fact these parties voted against ratification of this agreement.

The parties raised the following objections. They pointed to the fact that the agreement institutes highly preferential principles concerning local border traffic. They also claim that Kaliningrad Region is the sole enclave in the close vicinity of European Union and Nato which is used for military purposes. That is why efforts of the Polish government aiming at establishing highly preferential terms in local border traffic and correspondingly including the whole Kaliningrad Region to this preferential conditions seem to be groundless, incompatible in the face of Russian politics which clearly tries to undermine Polish defensive system and Polish political strength. To illustrate this thesis Polish opposition points to the building of Nord Stream gas pipeline through the Baltic Sea, Polish food embargo. There are also other cases like still unresolved issue of shipping in Vistula Lagoon or shipping Polish vessels through Pilawska Strait [6, p. 38].

During voting of the ratification of the agreement it was pointed out that Russia undertakes actions which are harmful to Polish defensive system what can threaten Polish sovereignty. Polish politicians meant Russian plans of deploying in Kaliningrad Region missiles Iskander. According to "Niezawisimaja Gazeta" Russian headquarters in Moscow has approved creating jobs in the unit in the Russian Baltic Fleet where Iskander missiles are going to be deployed. It is important to say that Iskander missiles, with a range from 350km to 500 km will be targeted mainly at Poland. Iskander missiles can also carry unconventional tactical, nuclear warheads. Press Agency Interfax has informed that there are plans to deploy in Kaliningrad Region S — 400 Triumph- surface to air missile system of the fourth generation. According to Russian sources the system can track and guide at six different aims at the same time with range up to 400 km. Also, on 30<sup>th</sup> November last year a new radiolocation system was launched in Kaliningrad Region. The system is constituted of type Woroneż- DM radar. Its range is 4500km and it can be increased to 6000 km. Unlike old stations like Dniepr, Wołga the new system is capable of tracking and monitoring not only strategic missiles but also operation-tactical missiles and maneuvering missiles [6, p. 39]. According to Polish right wing parties these actions undermine Polish political and military situation. Radosław Sikorski, The Minister of Foreign

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<sup>1</sup> See. Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Poland and the Government of the Russian Federation on the Rules of Local Border Traffic.

Affairs in his expose emphasized that “We are glad that the Agreement on Local Border Traffic with the Kaliningrad Oblast is due to be implemented soon; we are all the more surprised by signals pointing to plans to deploy newgeneration offensive arms in the area” [7].

### **Local border traffic**

The Council of Ministers has adopted the priorities of Polish foreign policy for the years 2012—2016 in March 2012. Some of them have been connected with relations with Russian Federation and Kaliningrad Region. Polish government emphasized that “Poland intends to maintain good, pragmatic relations with Russia on the basis of reciprocity. Political dialogue and economic contacts can be intensified due to positive dynamics in these relations. Russia also strives for a rapprochement with Europe. This is now prompted mainly by the country’s official modernisation programme, which is focused on research and technology. For this reason Poland supports Russia’s efforts aimed at fulfilment of conditions for OECD membership. Poland’s support for Russia’s reforms should also involve, among other support, Warsaw’s stressing its vision of EU Partnership for Modernisation. This vision will not only be founded on technology transfer, but also on support for the process of building the rule of law and political pluralism. The Agreement on the Rules of Local Border Traffic with the Kaliningrad Region can become a litmus test of its practical implementation. Poland is also in favour of a speedy conclusion of negotiations leading to the signing of a New EU-Russia Agreement, a comprehensive agreement that also covers the issue of mutual protection of investments, and opts for the start of negotiations on an EU-Russia free trade agreement. Systematic efforts to liberalise visa regimes are essential to bringing Russia and the whole eastern neighbourhood closer to the European Union. However, this should be done on the basis of reciprocity and parallelism for Eastern Partnership countries and Russia, at very least” [5, p. 18].

### **Conclusions**

After the analysis of the problem of Kaliningrad Region and Polish foreign policy in 1989—2011, the following conclusions:

- Kaliningrad was not one of the main priorities of Polish diplomacy; it was not also a priority in Polish-Russian relations;
- Russian enclave in the first half of the 90s was perceived by the Polish government largely through the prism of military threats;
- Poland treated Kaliningrad Region as an important issue for the development of security and stability in the Baltic Sea region;
- In its relations with the Russian enclave Poland drew particular attention to the development of cross-border cooperation;
- 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;

— Successful negotiations on local border traffic were deemed by the authorities of the two countries as one the major successes in bilateral relations after Poland's becoming the member of the European Union;

— Implementation of the agreement about local border traffic may improve cross border relations but it will not change significantly the role of Kaliningrad Oblast in Polish foreign policy.

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