

DANGERS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF BORDERLANDS: THE CASE OF THE WARMIA AND MAZURY REGION (SELECTED ISSUES)

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with the issue of dangers and opportunities in the development of the Warmia and Mazury region in the context of being in the neighbourhood of the Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation. The aim of the article is to present selected conditions of functioning of the Warmia and Mazury region as a border region neighbouring the Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation, as well threats related to the military potential of the Kaliningrad region. The border location of the Warmia and Mazury region deepens its peripherality both from the point of view of economic development and its influence on the policy of the Polish central authorities. A significant barrier to the development of the region was the introduction of the visa regime on the Polish-Russian border before Poland's accession to the European Union. Another factor in cross-border relations was the introduction of the local border traffic mechanism, which facilitated border crossings from 2012 to 2016. Since 2014, Polish-Russian relations have been deteriorating at the political level. This has made it necessary to treat the Kaliningrad region as a potential source of danger to Poland. The Russian invasion of Ukraine, launched in February 2022, further aggravated this trend.

KEY WORDS: *Warmia and Mazury region, Kaliningrad region, regional development, cross-border relations, military threats.*

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Introduction

The subject of the analysis is the conditions for the development of the Warmia and Mazury region as a Polish border area. Its neighbour and natural partner in cross-border relations is the Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation. The Polish-Russian neighbourhood, cross-border cooperation (especially between the Warmia and Mazury region and the Kaliningrad region), as well as the challenges and problems in their centuries-old history, have made bilateral relations an important element of the political life of both countries (Mironyuk, Żęgota 2017). The ties between the Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation and Poland's Warmia and Mazury region have always depended on foreign policy factors. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the Kaliningrad region has been open to external contact, and Poland's border Warmia and Mazury region became its principal partner. A significant event was Poland's accession to the EU, which created new institutional and programme conditions for transboundary cooperation with Russia's Kaliningrad region.

It should be emphasised that the Polish-Russian borderland includes two regions: the Warmia and Mazury region (voivodeship) on the Polish side, and the Kaliningrad region (oblast) on the Russian side, which before the Second World War were part of German East Prussia. The period after the Second World War brought a new legal, political and social order to the territory of the former East Prussia. The political, demographic and economic area was divided between Poland and the Soviet Union as a result of a decision made by the world powers. On the Polish side, the Warmia and Mazury region was established, which, despite its peripheral nature (geographic, social and

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economic), developed quite intensively. The basis for the functioning of the region within the borders of postwar Poland was the reference to the historical affiliation of these lands to Poland until the 17th century, and the presence of a large Polish minority before the Second World War. On the other hand, the Kaliningrad region, an area which did not have significant historical ties with Russia or the Soviet Union, was established on the Soviet side. No social or political structure of a similar territorial shape or national identity had existed there before. It was created as a result of decisions made by the Allied powers at the end of the Second World War, mainly for geopolitical and geostrategic, but not for historical or demographic, reasons (Kretinin, Briushkin, Galtsov 2002). A key characteristic of the Kaliningrad region is its geographic location: the region is an enclave, 'squeezed' in between Poland and Lithuania, and territorially disconnected from the main part of the Russian Federation. The peripheral nature of this region in relation to other Russian territories is accompanied by its geographical proximity to Central-East European states, which has an influence on the opportunities for establishing economic and social contacts at various levels.

The aim of the article is to present selected conditions of the functioning of the Warmia and Mazury region as a border region neighbouring the Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation. The border location of the Warmia and Mazury region deepens its peripherality both from the point of view of economic development and its influence on the policy of the Polish central authorities. From the beginning of the 1990s, there were efforts to take advantage of the region's border location by developing cross-border (social and commercial) cooperation with the Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation. A significant barrier to the development of this cooperation was the introduction of the visa regime on the Polish-Russian border before Poland's accession to the European Union. Another factor in cross-border relations was the introduction of the local border traffic mechanism, which facilitated border crossings from 2012 to 2016. Since 2014, Polish-Russian relations have been deteriorating at the political level. This has made it necessary to treat the Kaliningrad region as a potential source of threats to Poland. The Russian invasion of Ukraine, launched in February 2022, further aggravated this trend.

The following research methods have been used in the research: historical analysis (with regard to the history of cross-border relations between the Warmia and Mazury region and the Kaliningrad region), institutional and legal analysis (with regard to the legal and institutional basis of the local border traffic mechanism), and factor analysis (with regard to factors determining the military importance of the Kaliningrad region). The research hypothesis of the article is the assumption that until 2014 the Warmia and Mazury region shaped cross-border relations with the Kaliningrad region relatively independently of the 'temperature' of Polish-Russian relations at the central level. After 2014, and in particular from February 2022, cross-border relations with the northern neighbour have been influenced by the policy of the Polish central authorities in response to Russian aggression against Ukraine.

1. The development of relations since the 1990s

Relations between the Warmia and Mazury region and the Kaliningrad region have developed since the beginning of the 1990s. The principles of bilateral cooperation in the new geopolitical environment were enshrined in an agreement between the government of the Republic of Poland and the government of the Russian Federation on cooperation between the Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation and the north-east voivodeships (regions) of the Republic of Poland, which was signed on 22 May 1992. Also in 1992, an agreement between the government of the Republic of Poland and the government of the Russian Federation on border checkpoints was concluded.

In 1992, a number of Polish-Russian advisory bodies started operation. One of them was the Polish-Russian Council on Cooperation between the Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation and the regions of the Republic of Poland. Its first meeting took place in Svetlogorsk in October 1994, and the last, the 16th, in Olsztyn on 5 October 2016 (Ivanova 2016). The Council comprised 12 commissions, focusing on such issues as checkpoint operations, combating crime, environmental protection, the joint use of the Vistula Lagoon, the use of EU funds, etc. The effectiveness of the Council was ensured by the involvement of high-ranking officials: the deputy minister of foreign affairs on the Polish side, and the governor of the Kaliningrad region on the Russian side.

The rapid development of cross-border contacts between the Warmia and Mazury region and the Kaliningrad region in the 1990s laid the groundwork for programme-based cooperation developed in the next decade.

Sometimes this process was included in higher-level interactions between these two regions. One of the first interregional mechanisms was the institution of euroregions (Lepik 2009). A euroregion is a European region comprising border areas of two or more European states (Gwizdała 2015). The term dates back to the oldest European initiative, the Euroregion Transboundary Cooperation Programme, which was launched in 1958 to bring together the German and Dutch borderlands (Szymański 2011). Much later, in February 1998, Euroregion Baltic (ERB) was created. It comprised border areas of Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden and the Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation (Modzelewski 2015). ERB became somewhat of a hub for transboundary contacts between ordinary citizens, politicians, economic partners, social activists, and public and educational institutions from the Warmia and Mazury region and the Kaliningrad region. The euroregion supervised the PHARE programme. Between 1999 and 2006, according to the ERB secretariat, the PHARE programme had two major priorities: cooperation in the Baltic Sea region, and collaboration with the Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation (Magier 2009). In March 2022, the Kaliningrad region was suspended from ERB cooperation due to Russian aggression against Ukraine (Warmia and Masuria Region 2022).

Cooperation between the Warmia and Mazury region and the Kaliningrad region was developed within the framework of other euroregions; however, the activities undertaken within the framework of these euroregions, Neman, Śešupe and Łyna-Ława, were much more modest than those pursued by ERB. As a rule, the other regions focused on meetings between officials and joint socially significant projects (Mironyuk, Żęgota 2017).

Cooperation between the Warmia and Mazury region and the Kaliningrad region was maintained on the basis of programmes supporting cross-border cooperation. For instance, the INTERREG programme was implemented simultaneously with TACIS (Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States), which brought together the EU and 13 partners in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The two programmes functioned independently, but they were coordinated. After the enlargement of the European Union in May 2004, issues of European transboundary cooperation were singled out to form the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). The ENPI was a mechanism for developing the EU's external relations. Since 2006, EU regulations have not used the term INTERREG. However, it continued to exist unofficially as a kind of brand (INTERREG IV). The Warmia and Mazury region and the Kaliningrad region became part of the Lithuania-Poland-Russia trilateral cross-border cooperation programme for 2007 to 2013 (Mironyuk, Żęgota 2017).

In the next budgetary perspective of the EU for the years 2014 to 2020, financial resources were provided to support the CBC on the external borders of the EU. With regard to the Polish-Russian border, the Poland-Russia Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2014–2020 was the main programme instrument for supporting the CBC. The programme included Poland's Pomeranian, Warmian-Masurian and Podlaskie voivodeships, and Russia's Kaliningrad region. The main objective of the Poland-Russia CBC Programme 2014–2020 was to support the CBC in the social, environmental, economic and institutional spheres. Its budget totals 62.3 million euros: 41.7 million provided from EU funds, and 20.6 million by the Russian Federation. Grants were allocated for projects aimed at promoting local culture, the historical heritage, and environmental protection, as well as improving the transport and communication infrastructure (About the Programme).

2. The Local Border Traffic (LBT) mechanism

The specific mechanism supporting cross-border relations between the Warmia and Mazury region and the Kaliningrad region was the Local Border Traffic (LBT) mechanism, operating on the Polish-Russian border in the years 2012 to 2016. The need for the introduction of a visa regime for the movement of people on the external borders of the EU was one of the negative consequences of EU enlargement in terms of the development of cooperation between countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The rules directly related to local border traffic were included in the Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council 1931/2006 of 20 December 2006, which establishes the LBT rules on the external borders of the European Union. The provisions of the regulation allow EU states to enter into bilateral agreements with neighbouring countries, thus facilitating cross-border cooperation for social and economic purposes or for cultural exchange. On the basis of such agreements, citizens of neighbouring countries who live in border areas (30 or 50 kilometres

from the border) can obtain special documents allowing regular crossings of the border for a short stay in the border area of the EU member state (Regulation EC No 1931/2006).

Signing the agreement on local border traffic for the powiats (districts) of the Warmia and Mazury and Pomerania voivodeships and the Kaliningrad region was one of the key events during the Polish presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2011. The agreement was signed during a meeting between R. Sikorski and S. Lavrov held in Moscow on 14 December 2011. It came into force on 27 July 2012. In accordance with the agreement, residents of the border areas of both countries can repeatedly cross the Polish-Russian border on the basis of a special travel document. In Poland, the visa waiver programme covered some areas in the Pomeranian voivodeship, the cities of Gdynia, Gdansk and Sopot, and some powiats, namely, Puck, Gdansk, and Nowy Dwor and Malbork; in the Warmian-Mazurian voivodeship, the cities of Elblag and Olsztyn, and the powiats of Elblag, Braniewo, Lidzbark, Bartoszyce, Olsztyn, Kętrzyn, Mrągowo, Węgorzewo, Giżycko, Gołdap and Olecko.

The border area included the Kaliningrad region and the territories adjoining the border on the Polish side, most of which were within the 50-kilometre border zone, in accordance with previous agreements of the European Commission and the Council of the European Union. The border area included cities and towns with the rights of a powiat (district), i.e. Elblag, Gdansk, Gdynia, Sopot and Olsztyn. The document permitting repeated crossings of the Polish-Russian border was a special permit issued to inhabitants of the border zones, and giving the right to multiple entries, exits and stays in the border area. The fee for the permit was about 20 euros. It was issued for periods of two years and five years. The rules for local border traffic also covered third-country nationals living in the Kaliningrad region and the Polish border area. The first travel documents entitling them to cross the border without a visa were issued in August 2012 (Żęgota 2014).

The Local Border Traffic mechanism on the Polish-Russian border was suspended by a decision of the Polish government at the beginning of July 2016. As explained by government representatives, the suspension of the LBT was caused by security issues, mainly international events planned for July 2016: World Youth Day in Krakow and the Nato Summit in Warsaw. Despite the expiry of the temporary suspension of the MRG, the mechanism has not been reinstated, as the main reason for the suspension of the mechanism on the Russian border, i.e. the potential security threats, has not ceased. According to the Polish minister of internal affairs Mariusz Błaszczak, the aggressive policy of the Russian authorities in relation to countries of Central and Eastern Europe may also be aimed at Poland, and the Kaliningrad region may play an important role in these activities (Żęgota 2018).

3. The Kaliningrad region as a potential source of threats

The above-mentioned suspension of the LBT mechanism indicated that the development potential of the Warmia and Mazury region may be limited by military threats from the Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation. As early as 2014, the Kaliningrad region began to be treated as a source of military threats. The Russian aggression against Ukraine, launched in February 2022, only deepened these trends. The Kaliningrad region has also become a tool in the hands of the Russian authorities to generate threats in the Baltic Sea basin. At this point, it is worth presenting the military potential of the Kaliningrad region, and analysing the role of the region in generating military threats.

The Kaliningrad region makes up a part of the Northwest Federal District and the Western Military District of Russia. The region is also an important component of the Baltic Naval Zone, intended to protect the Russian military presence in the Baltic Sea basin. The region is characterised by a developed military infrastructure, based on a system of land, air and naval military bases (Sakson 2014). A significant part of this infrastructure is the Russian Baltic Fleet, with naval bases in Baltiysk, Primorsk and Kaliningrad. Ground forces in the area of the Kaliningrad region include infantry, missile, artillery and motor brigades stationed in Baltiysk, Kaliningrad, Gusev and Chernyakhovsk. Major air force combat units are located at bases in Chkalovsk and Chernyakhovsk, and a helicopter regiment is stationed at Donskoye and Ljubino (Żęgota 2021). To complete the picture, it should be added that the Kaliningrad region is also an area where several reconnaissance and anti-aircraft units are located. The main centres are Pereslavsckoye (radio-technical regiment), and Gvardeysk and Znamensk (missile defence regiments) (Ciechanowski 2015).

Although after the collapse of the Soviet Union the number of troops in the region was reduced, it still remains one of the largest agglomerations of military units in Russia, determining Russian military potential in the Baltic Sea basin to a significant extent. After 1991, the number of troops garrisoned in the region was estimated at 40,000 to 100,000 soldiers and sailors (Abramov 1996). Although these numbers were gradually reduced throughout the 1990s, the region still plays a significant role in Russian military strategy (Sakson 1997; Szymański 1999). After the fall of the Soviet Union, the Russian government supported the need to maintain the military nature of the region in view of its strategic importance. According to this concept, it was of vital interest to the Russian Federation to keep significant ground and naval forces in the region. Despite the clear reduction in the military potential of the region, it should be expected that the Russian side will not refrain from taking advantage of this potential, at least in terms of political rhetoric, as is shown by its repeated announcement of the deployment of short and medium-range missiles (Szeligowski 2013; Żęgota 2021).

Three major factors indicate an increase in the significance of the Kaliningrad region in Russian military doctrine. Firstly, Russian strategic documents on national security stress the importance of increasing the influence of the Russian Federation in the post-Soviet space, at the same time as identifying threats connected with Nato's military infrastructure near the borders of Russia. In the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020, passed in 2009, as well as in its amendment of December 2015, it was stressed that disturbances to the balance of military power in the neighbourhood of Russia or its allies' borders constitute a threat to state security (National Security Strategy 2009; National Security Strategy 2015). Thus, threats resulting from any possible infrastructure deployment in Nato states neighbouring Russia (Poland, the Baltic States) were indicated. In this context, the Kaliningrad region is a key area from the point of view of Russian security strategy.

Secondly, in accordance with the content of the latest security strategy, ensuring strategic stability in Russia's direct neighbourhood should be achieved by reinforcing integration actions (political and military) in the post-Soviet space (National Security Strategy 2021). The Kaliningrad region makes up a crucial element of that concept, serving as a wedge that closes the post-Soviet space from the West.

Thirdly, the practical dimension of the role played by the Kaliningrad region in Russian security strategy and war doctrine is also worth mentioning. The majority of military manoeuvres conducted in recent years in the Russian Western Military District involved Kaliningrad episodes.² As well as the military potential of the region demonstrated before, it should also be pointed out that it is located in one of the key areas of Russia from a geostrategic point of view. In the case of a hypothetical military conflict with the West, the Kaliningrad region is to form a Russian gate to the southern part of the Baltic Sea region, making it possible to territorially cut off the Baltic States (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) from other Nato member states (McLeary 2015; Sisk 2015). In the context of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the military importance of the Kaliningrad region will increase.

Conclusions

The article presents selected conditions for the functioning of the Warmia and Mazury region as a borderland. One of the important factors in the development and security of the region was the proximity to the Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation. In 1991–2014, the neighbourhood with the Kaliningrad region was an important factor in stimulating Polish-Russian relations: cross-border cooperation was developed between local governments, non-governmental organisations, schools and universities, and social organisations. The Kaliningrad region was also a laboratory in relations between the European Union and Russia.

One of the results of this status of Polish-Russian cross-border relations was the implementation of the LBT mechanism that operated on the Polish-Russian border in the years 2012 to 2014. The Local Border Traffic mechanism on the Polish-Russian border was suspended by a decision of the Polish government at the beginning of July 2016. In the years 2014 to 2016, the status of cross-border relations between the Warmia and Mazury region and the Kaliningrad region changed. The increasingly aggressive foreign and security policy of the Russian Federation with regard to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe resulted in the fact that the Kaliningrad region is perceived as

² The following Russian military exercises had Kaliningrad episodes: Zapad 2009, the military exercise of the Russian Western Military District in 2012, Zapad 2013, exercises of rocket forces in 2014, Union Shield 2015 and Zapad 2017. See: Norberg 2015; Rosyjsko-białoruskie ćwiczenia 2015; Russia's Zapad 2015; Ventsel, Hansson, Madisson, Sazonov 2021.

a source of threats rather than as an area of opportunity for cooperation and development. The Russian invasion of Ukraine launched in February 2022 further deepened this trend. The Kaliningrad region has also become a tool in the hands of the Russian authorities to generate threats in the Baltic Sea basin. The article shows that until 2014, the Warmia and Mazury region shaped cross-border relations with the Kaliningrad region relatively independently of the temperature of Polish-Russian relations at the central level. After 2014, and in particular from February 2022, cross-border relations with the northern neighbour of the Warmia and Mazury region were influenced by Russian aggression against Ukraine and relations between the West and Russia.

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PASIENIŲ PLĖTROS GRĖSMĖS IR GALIMYBĖS: VARMIJOS IR MOZŪRŲ REGIONO ATVEJIS (ATRINKTI KLAUSIMAI)

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Santrauka

Straipsnyje nagrinėjamas Varmijos ir Mozūrų regiono plėtros grėsmių ir galimybių klausimas kaimynystės su Rusijos Federacijos Kaliningrado sritimi kontekste. Straipsnio tikslas – pristatyti pasirinktas Varmijos ir Mozūrų srities, kaip pasienio regiono, besiribojančio su Rusijos Federacijos Kaliningrado sritimi, funkcionavimo sąlygas bei grėsmes, susijusias su Kaliningrado srities kariniu potencialu.

Šio regiono padėtis – pasienis – gilina jo periferiškumą tiek ekonominės plėtros, tiek įtakos Lenkijos centrinės valdžios politikai požiūriu. Didelė kliūtis regiono plėtrai buvo vizų režimo įvedimas Lenkijos ir Rusijos pasienyje prieš Lenkijai įstojant į Europos Sąjungą. Kitas tarpvalstybinių santykių veiksnys buvo vietinio eismo per sieną mechanizmo įdiegimas, palengvinęs sienos kirtimą 2012–2016 m. Nuo 2014 m. Lenkijos ir Rusijos santykiai politiniu lygmeniu prastėja tad Kaliningrado sritį teko traktuoti kaip galimą grėsmių Lenkijai šaltinį. Rusijos invazija į Ukrainą, pradėta 2022 m. vasario mėnesį, šią tendenciją tik sustiprino.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: *Varmijos ir Mozūrų sritis, Kaliningrado sritis, regioninė plėtra, tarpvalstybiniai santykiai, karinės grėsmės.*

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