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## **Social Identity of Kaliningraders in the European Context: ethnic and religious aspects**

*In the 1990s, some Russian regions found themselves involved in the process of the European region-building. Kaliningrad oblast' is one of them, being a part of the Baltic Sea region as well as Euroregions. During last decade, the Russian elites have proved to be ambiguous in their perceptions of regionalization, showing both negative and positive attitudes towards it (Sergounin 2004: 17-33). However, the value of international cooperation is being commonly recognized. At the same time, the 'dynamic development of the Russian regions is usually perceived in terms of 'growth of investments', whereas sociocultural aspects of regionalization tend to remain underestimated. There is a lack of scholarship on such issues as well. In my paper, I will turn to the patterns of ethnic and religious relations in the exclave, since such research might be helpful in prediction of potential participation of Kaliningraders in the European region-building. The methodology of social identity research will be discussed in the first part. Then, I will proceed with the brief outline of social and cultural aspects of European regionalization. In the last section, I will focus on ethnic and religious dimensions of social identity of Kaliningraders.*

### On methodology of 'social identity' studies

The term social identity refers to the identity that people derive from their memberships in social groups. Tajfel (1978: 63) defines it as 'that part of an individual self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership'. It is the identity of a person as a group member and not the identity of a group as a *sui generis* sociological entity in a Durkheimian sense. It is such a place of a person in the social world as gender, age, profession, ethnicity, life-style etc. that is shared with the other people. In modern societies, people have access to multiple shared places. Thus, there is a potential for multiple, partly overlapping and even conflicting identities.

Social identity by its nature is multiple; there are many affiliations in its structure since each individual starts off with a cultural inheritance that might well come from many sources. Not all aspects of social identity, or such multiple identifications, of a person are equally salient at the same time. Moscovici (1992: 82-96) suggests a cognitive model of consciousness as a type of identity matrix where a current flow of information, or a worldview, is determined by that dominant identity which is of the most importance for a person in a given time-period. Basic, or private features, include gender, family, age, professional identifications, and broader societal, or ethno-political features, include ethnic, subcultural, religious, and civic affiliations. For most people private, or core, identifications with small groups such as family, friends and colleagues are relatively stable and of the greater importance; and this is true for 50-70 per cent of respondents in contemporary Russia (Drobizheva 2002: 213-244). Identifications with larger groups tend to be labile and contextually dependent. Post-industrial network societies are being (re)defined and (re)created through multiple affiliations and various life-styles of their members. Consuming practices with their everyday simulation of multiple choices continue to make a significant contribution to the identity dynamics, causing certain changes in a behavioral style and attitudes of individuals. In fact, such permanent 'identity crisis' has become an essential feature of individuals in modern societies (Danilova and

Yadov 2004: 27-30).

At the same time, in certain circumstances, people are likely to attach strong emotional and value significance to a large group membership, e.g. ethnicity. The 'awakening' of a group identity may serve a means for group integration in order to achieve group interests. In this case, one can talk about the politicizing of a collective identity. Such political process is usually backed up by a system of ideas and images, which is aimed to create strong emotional ties between a group and its members. Those images are being deliberately constructed by elite. In this sense, one can define elite, an effective strategic minority, as a subject of 'identity-building'. It is the most dynamic part of this process. However, the strategy of group mobilizing would be successful only if such 'constructed identity' - although it would be more preferable to use term 'image', or 'system of ideas', or 'brand', in accordance with our working definition of social identity, - would correspond to the whole complexity of the interests, cultural and behavioral practices, values and attitudes of group members. So that it would be helpful to divide the study of social identity into two interdependent parts, one of which deals the activities of elite groups aimed to create a certain group image for achieving political goals, whereas the other is concerned with characteristics of a larger group and deals with the sociopsychological determinants of the dynamic 'identity-building'.

In the study of social identity, three basic approaches to the study of ethnic identity can be distinguished. The first one is the primordial approach which underlines the innate nature of ethnicity as based on people's common origin, blood relations and territory (Smith 1999). The second one is the constructivist approach where ethnicity is seen as social constructed, invented phenomenon, often imposed on a group (Anderson 2002; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992). The third one is the instrumentalist approach which combines both primordial and constructivist approaches. The instrumentalist approach takes into account the interplay of dynamic 'creative minority', or elite, and more static social determinant, or majority (Soldatova 1998: 41-63). The instrumentalists recognize that identity images can be deliberately re-created and reconstructed. At the same time, a set of ideas, values and images cannot just be imposed upon the people.

Constructed identity would work only if it corresponds to the interests and attitudes of people, whether such attitudes are explicitly articulated or not. This approach is favored by the Russian ethnosociological school (Drobizheva 2002; Soldatova 1998; Yadov 1995), and it will be used in the present research as well.

#### European region-building and ‘state branding’

After the end of the Cold War the role of regional actors in European and Russian political spaces is changing. Regionalization is not a new phenomenon in international relations. It already existed during the Cold War and was connected mostly with the domains of economic integration and security. In old regionalism a region is understood as created from above as a geographic area where states organize cooperation. New regionalism focuses on another type of region, created from below, where states do not play a central role in cooperation and integration. Hettne (1999a: xvi) defines the new regionalism as a ‘multidimensional form of integration which includes economic, political, social and cultural aspects and thus goes far beyond the goal of creating region-based free-trade regimes or security alliances’. Such regions will attempt to become a subject of international politics (L hteenm ki and K k nen 1999: 214). Regionalization is a dynamic, multidimensional process. Regions are not defined a priori by states or military blocs; they rather evolve through a bottom-up process and define themselves in the making.

According to Hettne (1999b: 6-7), there are five degrees of ‘regionness’, or regionality, which is understood as the result or current state of regionalization: (1) region as a geographical unit, this first degree is referred to as a ‘proto-region’; (2) region as social system, which is characterized by various types of cross-border relations between human groups, this level is called a ‘primitive’ region; (3) region as organized cooperation in cultural, economic, political or military fields, this degree is defined as a ‘formal’ or ‘real’ region, 4) region as civil society , in which the organized forms of cooperation promote social communication and convergence of values between different cultural areas of a region, this level indicates a ‘regional anarchical society’ and 5) region as acting

subject with a certain identity and legitimacy as well as capability and other qualities of an actor within international politics, thus defined as a 'region-state'.

One of the most vivid examples of the new region building is the Baltic Sea region, 'a dynamic third of Europe' (Kivikari and Antola 2004). The concept of the Baltic Sea region and the Northern Dimension of Europe implies the integration of the countries belonging to this geographical and geopolitical unit into a cross-border network of cooperation. These networks are aimed to create 'efficient economies and political stability, co-operation in planning and constructing infrastructures, the conservation of ecological systems, and the exchange over cultural, social and educational policies' (Williams 2001: 8).

New regionalism implies that successful regionalization of the Baltic Sea area will depend on successful identity-building. This process is linked with the activity of a minority (elite) that seeks to construct and promote new identity as a means for group integration in order to achieve group interests. At the same time, successful communication of new ideas depends not only on their correspondence with rationally calculated and articulated group interests, but also with the attitudes and cultural patterns of the majority. New images should be able to establish emotional ties within a group.

A new region-building draws on a pluralistic model of identity which allows maximum room for inclusion of people from different backgrounds. A new European identity image is also seen as being formed on the 'civic', rather than on antagonistic nationalist platform (van Ham 2000):

*Europe's identity should be based on its celebrated diversity, its openness and inclusiveness... European identity is an act, which can experience the continuous redefinition of itself only through relationships with others.*

Van Ham (2001; 2005) argues that better understanding of the identity-building requires new concepts, and the concept of the 'brand state' is one of them . Branding gives products an emotional dimension; brands are aimed to create in their customers a feeling of belonging to a certain life-style or 'experience'. Branding applies not only to well-known consumer goods and services, but also to

political actors, in full accordance with the principles of brand asset management. Within the EU, traditional notions of Westphalian state such as sovereignty, power-politics, territoriality and the ‘national interest’ are losing their centrality (Caporoso 1996: 29-52). The former national states are gradually transforming into the ‘brand-states’. Van Ham argues (2001) that since last two decades one can see how *state branding is gradually supplanting nationalism. The brand state's use of its history, geography, and ethnic motifs to construct its own distinct image is a benign campaign that lacks the deep-rooted and often antagonistic sense of national identity and uniqueness that can accompany nationalism. By marginalizing nationalist chauvinism, the brand state is contributing greatly to the further pacification of Europe.*

In modern European public discourse ethnicity is being deliberately depoliticized. Kymlicka (2001: 57) uses different terms, while talking about a model of ‘thin’ societal culture as opposed to ‘thick’ ethnographic culture. The former is typical for liberal nationalism, the latter for illiberal one. Ethnographic ‘thick’ culture includes shared preferences in religion, lifestyles, common rituals and customs. Societal culture is much thinner; it focuses mainly on a common language, the development of national media, the adoption of national symbols and national holidays, memorizing the heroes of the past, etc thus allowing maximum space for inclusion of the Other.

Ethnic and religious aspects of social identity: the case of Kaliningrad exclave

To what extent the constructed norms of regional cooperation could be internalized by Kaliningraders? How the ideas of the European ‘state branding’ would be perceived and appreciated? Do Kaliningraders represent a “Western/ European” type of Russians? (Browning and Joenniemi 2002: 73). All those questions could be addressed through the perspective of ethnic and religious studies.

From 1945, when Königsberg became a part of the Soviet Union, it was set aside to become a new Soviet town in the former territory of East Prussia. Within a few

years after the end of World War II, the German population was evicted from the region. The newcomers, many of whom came from the parts of the Soviet Union devastated during German occupation, set out for a new life. For the new authorities, it was important to naturalize a connection of the former German territory with the Soviet Union as soon as possible. Yet it was a challenging task. If appealing to traditions and history is usually regarded as an important instrument during identity-building in a time of change (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992), then, in case of Kaliningrad, the history was problematic. Russian historical connections to the region were quite limited. Therefore, in the official discourse the history of the *oblast* was allowed to appear only with World War II. After 1945, Kaliningrad became 'the most Western Soviet garrison'. A high proportion of the population was constituted by military personnel, numbering up to 100,000 of the approximately 900,000 inhabitants by the end of the 1980s. In this respect, the war epic and heroism were also important to support the status of Kaliningrad as a military fortress and outpost (Browning and Joenniemi 2002: 70-73).

Yet Kaliningrad ceased to become a reference model for a new truly Soviet region. There were several factors which contributed to that failure. First, the high level of migration, which was connected with the presence of military personnel and seamen, turned out to be a factor which prevented people from making roots in the region and participating in identity building. Second, despite their intentions and hard efforts, the Soviet authorities were never able to erase the past physically and mentally. The remnants of German architecture and material culture, the findings by archeological diggers, the mystified memories, myths and legends about Königsberg created a certain spirit of fascination and nostalgia for the imagined past of the destroyed town. Forbidden Königsberg was bound to become a captivating phantom. Third, despite closed borders with the West and Poland, Kaliningraders had many contacts with its not fully 'sovietized' neighbors, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Besides, Kaliningrad was a large sea port. The impressions and the consumer goods, which were brought by the seamen from their voyages to the other side of the 'iron curtain', contributed to the coming into being of a kind of distinct self-perception for Kaliningraders, who did feel themselves as a special group in the Soviet Union, which is more open to the

West, mainly in a sense of privilege access to the foreign goods and some samples of Western culture, especially rock-music. Also they were perceived by their fellow citizens as being closer to '*Pribaltika*', than to the other parts of Russia.

Ethnic and religious relations in the *oblast'* during the Soviet period were marked by a high degree of toleration and an absence of ethnocultural conflicts. Among others, one can name the following background of this peaceful setting. First, although altogether there were 110 ethnic groups in the *oblast'* by the end of the 1980s, the largest ethnic groups were constituted by Slavic peoples, by Russians, Byelorussians and Ukrainians, who constituted in 1989 correspondingly 78 per cent, 8.5 per cent, and 7.2 per cent of the population (Dubova, Lopulenko and Martynova 1998; the Census 1989).

Second, Kaliningrad used to be a region of Sovietization, and thus sustained the image of the Communist internationalism of the Soviet era. In Soviet times the most important ideological category shaping societal behavior and attitudes was the category of '*sovetskij chelovek*', or a 'Soviet person'. It was constructed on the basis of Communist internationalism and helped to diminish ethnic tensions. In the late Soviet era its primary importance had already been largely diminished, and with the collapse of Communist system this category totally disappeared from the hierarchy of identifications of the ethnic minorities and majorities (Soldatova 1998: 41-63). In the 1990s, the category of '*sovetskij chelovek*' was replaced by ethnicity for many of the former Soviet citizens. When the sense of collective identity within the Soviet state was lost, the myths and heroes of Soviet history were rapidly destroyed, and many previous national achievements were questioned, it became relatively easy to promote the image of ethnicity as something unchangeable in the time of chaos. However, after the break-up of the Soviet Union, ethnic-religious tensions did not increase enormously, to the point of unsolvable conflict. The patterns of toleration were sustainable enough to overcome the ideological breakdown. Last but not least, what made for the remarkable tolerance of Kaliningraders, was the fact that the whole territory was settled by migrants; therefore, none of the ethnic groups could seriously claim a dominant status on the historical grounds of being a more rooted, or traditional community.



During the Soviet period of Kaliningrad's history, there was no religious tension. This was largely because of the fact that there was no institutionalized religion in the *oblast'* until the 1980s. Religious activity was not encouraged by the atheist ideology of Communism. The planned Sovietization of the former German territory did not anticipate the construction of new churches, temples, mosques or synagogues. The requests of the post-war newcomers to establish an Orthodox parish were consequently denied by the local authorities (Gurov 2004). Although there were small communities of Baptists, Adventists and Pentecostals, one can claim with certainty that by the 1980s Kaliningrad became a territory of successful 'atheistization'. Situations started to change only with *perestroika*. The first orthodox congregation was registered in 1985; in the early 1990s, the communities of Lutherans, Catholics, Muslims, Buddhists and others were institutionalized as well. At the moment, there are 42 officially registered religious organizations in the *oblast'*. The dominant majority is represented by the Russian Orthodox Church. Until the late 1990s all Orthodox churches in the region had been located in the former Lutheran and Catholic religious buildings. The newly built Orthodox churches had begun to appear very recently. Until 2005 there was no 'authentic' Orthodox center in the *oblast'* center, Kaliningrad. Along with the Orthodox believers, the Roman-Catholic, Evangelical Lutherans, Muslims, Charismatics, Baptists, and Mormons are among the most active in the regional religious life. Kaliningrad represents an interesting pattern of Islam and Orthodox relations which shows how tensions and conflicts could still be negotiated and overcome in the everyday coexistence of two confessions (Karpenko 2005).

At the same time, while talking about religious affiliations in the post-Soviet period in Russia, it is important to consider the so called 'Orthodox non-believer' paradox demonstrated by the public opinion polls: the results show that the number of people who say that they believe in God is less than the number of those who identify themselves with one or another traditional confession. Thus, in the 2000 poll there were 46.9 per cent believers against 69.5 per cent of those who considered themselves Orthodox or Muslim. Such paradox allows one to assume that religious and ethnic identities are mixed; either Orthodoxy or Islam is considered by many as an essential sign of broader ethno-cultural, but not

necessarily, religious identity: 'If I am Russian, then I am Orthodox; If I am Tatar, I am Muslim' (Mtchedlov, 2000). Thus, religious identity in Russia is being defined by ethnicity and culture. Religious affiliations as such are unlikely to provoke conflicts, unless they would be supported by awakened ethnic tensions.

The argument which was briefly outlined above allows concluding that one might well have some reasons to think of Kaliningrad as a multicultural and tolerant ethnoreligious setting for successful implementation of regionalization in this area of Europe. It is a matter for further research and analysis to look at the whole variety of factors that might play role in making salient one or another aspect of social identity. Just to name a few of such future areas of research, one could mention the study of correlation between the consuming practices and ethnoreligious affiliations, especially considering the fact that Kaliningrad is being more dependent on the import of consumer goods than any other Russian regions. The main idea of this paper was to draw attention to the importance of scholarship on Kaliningrad from a sociocultural interdisciplinary perspective that differs from traditional geopolitical and institutional approaches.

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