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Kaliningrad Factor in Lithuanian - Russian Relations: Implications to the Security Issues of Lithuania****

The Kaliningrad issue has always been part of several contexts of Lithuanian foreign policy and security assurance. That is why it is significant to look at what relationship models Lithuania has tried to implement with Kaliningrad and what opportunities and threats it has created for Lithuania. This article analyses the Kaliningrad factor, which became apparent during Vladimir Putin's rule, in Russia's relations with Lithuania, the EU, and NATO, and assesses the aspects of both "hard" and "soft" security. We argue that it is important to consider what Kaliningrad Oblast means to Russia, what role it plays in its foreign policy, how it is changing and what the dynamics of the EU and Lithuania's relations with Kaliningrad has recently been, and what the possible and desirable scenarios of Lithuania's cooperation with Kaliningrad could be.

Introduction

The dissolution of the Soviet Union determined a specific situation of Kaliningrad Oblast – after the restoration of the independence of the Baltic States, Kaliningrad was separated from the rest of Russia and became an exclave and, with Poland's and Lithuania's accession to the EU, Kaliningrad

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Oblast became a kind of an enclave.¹ It should be noted that, despite their small territory or population, such formations become of disproportionately great and often dividing importance in international relations.² An important role of a military outpost was played by Kaliningrad Oblast during the Cold War, when geographically it was not yet separated from the rest of Russia. However, after the fall of the USSR, when a new stage of the relations between the West and Russia began, the question of Kaliningrad's future arose. The Kaliningrad issue has always been part of several contexts of Lithuanian foreign policy and security assurance. First, this question has often been a priority of the EU and Russia's relations, when both sides expressed their own policy of "soft" security and engagement. Second, Kaliningrad Oblast is an important part of bilateral relations between Lithuania and Russia (or Poland and Russia), when Lithuania (or Poland) assesses the opportunities and threats of cooperation with Kaliningrad Oblast or is forced to react to the dynamics of Lithuanian (or Polish) and Russian relations. That is why it is significant to look at what relationship models Lithuania has tried to implement with Kaliningrad and what opportunities and threats it has created for Lithuania. Third, the issue of "hard" security is important in evaluating the role of Kaliningrad in Russia's foreign and defence policy and Russia's attitude towards NATO and military security, and vice versa, in addressing the question of what Kaliningrad means to Lithuania and NATO in the field of security.

This article analyses the Kaliningrad factor, which became apparent during Vladimir Putin's rule, in Russia's relations with Lithuania, the EU and NATO, and assesses the aspects of both, the "hard"³ and the "soft"⁴ security. In our analysis, it is important to consider what Kaliningrad Oblast means to Russia, what role it plays in the foreign policy, how it is changing and what the dynamics of the EU and Lithuania's relations with Kaliningrad has recently been, what opportunities and threats are created by Lithuania's or the EU co-

¹ For the sake of accuracy, Kaliningrad Oblast should be considered an exclave in part because it can be accessed from the main part of Russia by sea. However, most authors writing about Kaliningrad choose to use a more convenient concept of an enclave, since this has no major impact on the processes under discussion. Kaliningrad Oblast as the EU enclave is discussed in the literature that analyses Kaliningrad Oblast and is important inasmuch as it reflects the specific situation this oblast of the Russian Federation is in, in comparison to other oblasts.

² Diener, A. C., Hagen, J., "Geopolitics of the Kaliningrad exclave and enclave: Russian and EU perspectives", *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, vol. 52, issue 4, 2011, p. 568, http://mds.marshall.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1006&context=geography_faculty.

³ In this text, the challenges of "hard" security mean military threats only (both, conventional and unconventional).

⁴ "Soft" security includes threats in the areas of environment protection, cross-border smuggling and organized crime.

operation with Kaliningrad, and what the possible and desirable scenarios of Lithuania's cooperation with Kaliningrad could be.

This topic is not new in Lithuania. For example, Vladas Sirutavičius and Inga Stanytė-Toločkienė have noted that the Kremlin is creating two main strategies for Kaliningrad: 1) of a military outpost and a special strategic region or 2) of a test area for economic reforms; however, it is not clear which strategy should be dominating.⁵ Raimundas Lopata has claimed that Russia exploits Kaliningrad Oblast as a geopolitical hostage: it does not allow for Kaliningrad's self-expression as a subject but, at the rhetorical level, supports the illusion of Kaliningrad's exceptionality and uses it as a means to influence the relations with the West (especially with NATO) in its own way.⁶ In addition, there is substantive research, by the above mentioned and other authors, done in the areas related to transit between Kaliningrad and the rest of Russia and Lithuania's Euro-Atlantic integration. The research discusses practical interests of the Republic of Lithuania, evaluates the factor of the Russian military transit or the impact of Lithuania's membership in the EU.⁷ For example, Lopata, Sirutavičius and Laurinavičius once predicted that Russia's military transit across Lithuania's territory should not impede Lithuania's Euro-Atlantic integration.⁸ Because the main research, which formed the discourse of the Kaliningrad studies in Lithuania, was carried out a decade ago, and observing the development over that time and Russia's increased hostility towards the West, it is relevant to revive the Kaliningrad studies and to evaluate anew the Kaliningrad factor, as well as to recognize the dominating strategies of the Kremlin, especially bearing in mind the growing importance of the "hard" security.

The theory of enclave development provides for the analytic framework of the article. One of the most significant attempts to systematically analyse the processes of economic and political development of enclaves that exist in the world is the book "A Theory of Enclaves" by Evgeny Vinokurov.⁹ The author claims that the special character of the territories holding the status of an en-

⁵ Sirutavičius, V., Stanytė-Toločkienė, I., "Strategic Importance of Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation", *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review*, 2002, vol. 1, p. 187.

⁶ Lopata, R., Geopolitical Hostage: the Case of Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation, *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review*, 2003, vol. 2, p. 203-220.

⁷ Laurinavičius, Č., Lopata, R., Sirutavičius, V., *Military Transit of the Russian Federation through the Territory of the Republic of Lithuania (Rusijos Federacijos karinis tranzitas per Lietuvos Respublikos teritoriją)*, Vilnius: Eugrimas, 2002, 79 p.; Joenniemi, P., Lopata, R., Sirutavičius, V., Vilpišauskas, R., "Impact assessment of Lithuania's integration into the EU on relations between Lithuania and Kaliningrad Oblast of Russian Federation", *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, vol. 6, 2000, p. 46.

⁸ Lopata, R., Sirutavičius, V., Laurinavičius, Č., "Rusijos Federacijos karinis tranzitas per Lietuvos Respublikos teritoriją", *Politologija*, 4 (28), 2002, p. 2-34.

⁹ Vinokurov, E., *A Theory of Enclaves*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007, p. 328.

clave determines that much greater attention is paid to them, attention that is disproportionately large in comparison with their size or number of inhabitants.¹⁰

For the enclave research, Vinokurov offers an approach, which he calls the MES triangle (*Mainland – Enclave (Exclave) – Surrounding State Triangle*, Scheme 1). He defines four vectors that influence enclave development: 1) the relations between the state territory (the centre) and the enclave, 2) the relations between the surrounding state (states) and the enclave, 3) the relations between the main state (the centre) and the state (states) surrounding the enclave regarding general issues and 4) the relations between the main state (the centre) and the states surrounding the enclave regarding the enclave's issues.

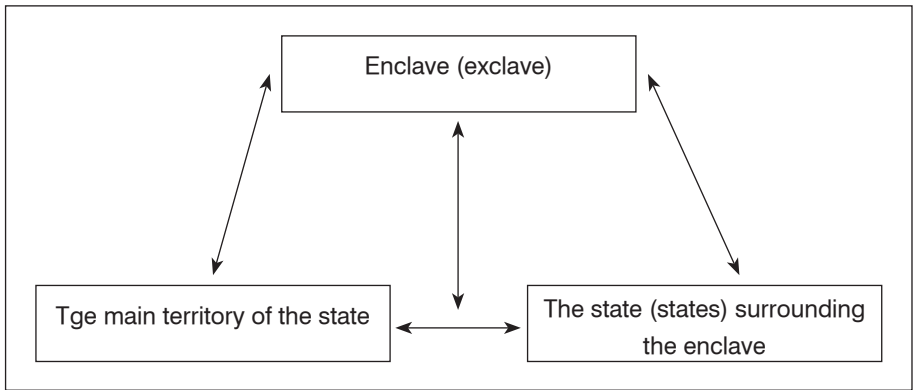


Figure 1. MES model¹¹

The arrows denoting the relations are bidirectional because they reflect the bilateral effect that arises from those relations; however, the effect is not necessarily equally strong. The relations are defined by several conditions. The central government of the state that the enclave belongs to has the casting voice for the development of the territory. Respectfully, the relations of the central government and the surrounding states define the scope of action for the enclave, to which it has to adapt. Also, the impact of the surrounding states on the enclave is greater than vice versa, but it is important to notice that, despite the size of the enclave, it influences the decisions of the central government and the policy of the surrounding states, and even their bilateral relations, too.¹²

¹⁰ Ibid, *Kaliningrad Enclaves and Economic Integration*, Brussels: CEPS, 2007, p. 1, <http://aei.pitt.edu/11753/1/1472.pdf>.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 9.

¹² Ibid.

While adapting the model for the analysis of Kaliningrad Oblast, it is important to notice that the oblast is surrounded by two, not one, states and also has a seaway connection to the main territory of Russia. For these reasons, the oblast is not considered to be an enclave in the strictest sense, but it is an enclave in respect to the remaining territory. Even more, in 2004, with the accession of Lithuania and Poland to the European Union, Kaliningrad Oblast became an economic and political enclave in the territory of the EU. In the same way, Kaliningrad can be considered an enclave in respect to NATO. The dynamics of the four vectors defined by Vinokurov (Scheme 2) will be helpful in answering the questions on the role of Kaliningrad Oblast and the impact of this factor on the relations of Russia and Lithuania, Russia and Poland, and Russia and the EU.

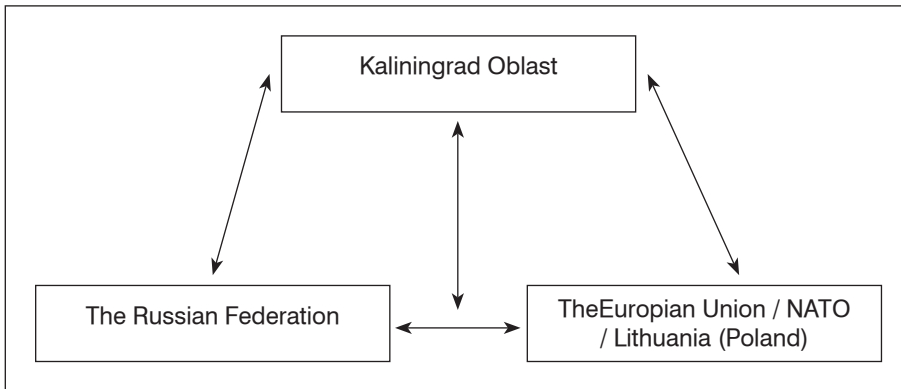


Figure 2. **MES model, adapted to the research of Kaliningrad Oblast**

In this article, it is assumed that Kaliningrad Oblast maintains the status of a geopolitical hostage and the military component is becoming the driving force of its development today. Discussing the implications for the security of Lithuania and region as such, it can be evaluated how much Kaliningrad is important to Russia as a platform of defence (e.g., when reacting to NATO enlargement and the security situation in the region) and of military or another kind of aggression. Also, by looking from a Lithuania's and NATO's perspective, it is worth asking how Kaliningrad Oblast – currently a fishbone in the throat – could, looking at Europe as a board game, be turned into a stuck checker.

1. Russia's Central Government and the Enclave: Two Visions of Kaliningrad's Development

The geopolitical uncertainty of the region is first determined by the policy of the federal centre of Russia in respect to the oblast. During the first years of existence, the central government of the Russian Federation did not have any clear regional policy, including a vision for the development of Kaliningrad Oblast, thus strong decentralization tendencies led to greater independence of the regional figures. Even though, from the very start of 1991, Moscow took measures to compensate for the difficulties arising from the specific situation of Kaliningrad Oblast (both geographical and socioeconomic), it did not have a clear direction for its policy. In this respect, Moscow was inconsistent and ineffective in destroying the existing barriers which hindered the development of the region.¹³

In 1991, the decision was made to establish a free economic zone (FEZ). It was cancelled in 1993 as it had not met expectations, and in 1995, a special economic zone (SEZ) was established instead because it had more powerful levers for attracting investments. However, such measures were insufficient, and the local political elite encouraged the formation of Kaliningrad Oblast into a kind of pilot project of economic reforms by strengthening the cooperation channels with the neighbouring states and the EU. Unfortunately, Moscow feared that, due to the economic reforms, separatist tendencies may grow stronger, so it took the passive stance of an observer towards such reforms or even hindered such processes.

In the long run, Russia became interested in engaging the exclave into the great politics. In Moscow, two visions of the development of Kaliningrad Oblast emerged: 1) a special strategic region and military outpost and 2) a test area for economic reforms.¹⁴

During the period of the Cold War, Kaliningrad Oblast was completely closed for the West, the Socialist Republic of Poland, and even the residents of the USSR. There were (and still are) the headquarters of the Baltic Fleet located in the oblast, and 100 thousand troops and tactical nuclear weapons targeted at NATO countries were also deployed there. After the collapse of the USSR, with the changes in military transit opportunities and after the Russian Federation

¹³ Falkowski, N., Marszewski, M., "The 'Tribal areas' of the Caucasus: the North Caucasus – an enclave of 'alien civilisation' within the Russian Federation", *OSW Studies*, no. 34, 2010.

¹⁴ Sirutavičius, V., Stanytė-Toločkienė, I., "Strategic Importance of Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation", *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review*", 2002, vol. 1, p. 187.

accepted Lithuania's conditions for the military transit, the number of troops deployed in the oblast decreased four or five times. Moscow announced that by the year 2003, the number would drop to 8.6 thousand. In 1997, after the status of Kaliningrad Special Defence District expired, it was claimed that the military configuration of the region had become completely defensive. In 2010, Kaliningrad Oblast was definitively joined with the former military oblasts of Leningrad and Moscow, in order to form the Western Military District.

Kaliningrad Oblast was perceived in Moscow as an instrument which performs the function of deterring NATO expansion towards the Russian borders. Just like at the time of the USSR, the militarization of this oblast and its use in convincing Western partners not to conduct development in the Baltic States was meant to ensure Russia's domination in the region. In the opinion of the Kremlin's strategists, this was the main strategic function of Kaliningrad Oblast. For example, in the context of the NATO enlargement and the EU, the Kremlin sought to use Kaliningrad as a tool to impede Euro-Atlantic integration by raising the question of military and civil transit. At this moment, the militarization of Kaliningrad Oblast is being used again as a means against the Alliance: this time to deter NATO from increasing its military and political visibility in the Baltic States (troops, deployment of military equipment, etc.), this way hoping to maintain the status of the Baltic States as, in a sense, inferior members of NATO.

The second aspect of Kaliningrad Oblast as a test area for economic reforms is related not only to the economic reforms of the oblast or the entirety of Russia, but also to the encouragement of the economic cooperation of the EU and Russia, by means of strengthening Kaliningrad Oblast as a transit region and establishing it as a centre for economic trade in the Baltic Sea Region.¹⁵ Due to its military importance in the Soviet Union, Kaliningrad Oblast was one of the least productive and diversified regions,¹⁶ which is why economic restructuring of the region was necessary. Gradually more significant attention was paid to Kaliningrad. Only after it was recognized that Kaliningrad would be subsidized (i.e. it would not be self-sufficient) for a long time, were there attempts to increase the cost-effectiveness of the region by investing in production facilities and transport infrastructure, and SEZ was established there. However, this was implemented by raising the development of the region to the level of the relations with the EU (especially after Lithuania's and Poland's

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 176–178.

¹⁶ Diener, A. C., Hagen, J., "Geopolitics of the Kaliningrad exclave and enclave: Russian and EU perspectives", p. 574.

accession to the EU) in the attempt to force the EU to share the costs necessary for the reforms.

One should distinguish The Federal Targeted Development Program for Kaliningrad Oblast for the Period until 2010, which was approved in 2001.¹⁷ It defines how Kaliningrad differentiates from the rest of Russia: 1) as an enclave surrounded by Poland and Lithuania, 2) its proximity to the markets of the West and Eastern Europe; transport corridors; the infrastructure of European communication; and the ice-free harbour and 3) tourism-friendly environment; amber resources (they constitute 90 per cent of the amber resources of the world). In addition, the document highlights that the number of inhabitants of Kaliningrad Oblast is decreasing due to migration, but at the same time there is an increase in investments. Also, the document provides for measures to improve the infrastructure of production companies, transport and energy sectors, and devotes attention to the reconstruction of cultural objects. Specific means of promoting cooperation with the EU are also defined. Moreover, great expectations regarding the status of SEZ are expressed and special means of promotion are set so that this zone becomes effective and creates a favourable environment for investment.

Nevertheless, today it has been acknowledged that Kaliningrad has not managed to create an export oriented SEZ,¹⁸ the status of which expired on April 1, 2016.¹⁹ Though SEZ was geared towards strengthening economic ties with the neighbouring states, Moscow, in principle, sought to absorb the special EU funds allocated for the development of Kaliningrad and the Baltic Sea Region and use the support for the economic development of Kaliningrad Oblast but not open it up fully for cooperation. SEZ has failed to implement the goal to create an economically flourishing region, and Kaliningrad has remained an oblast which has one of the biggest black labour market in the Russian Federation – around 10 per cent of all inhabitants work illegally.²⁰

Lopata and Sirutavičius have distinguished the groups forming Moscow's policy regarding Kaliningrad Oblast: these are the supporters of the hard

¹⁷ The Federal Targeted Development Program for Kaliningrad Oblast for the Period until 2010 (No 866), approved on December 7th, 2010, <http://fcp.economy.gov.ru/cgi-bin/cis/fcp.cgi/Fcp/ViewFcp/View/2014/135>.

¹⁸ Based on the speech given to the Association of the Experts at the Development of Kaliningrad Oblast in July, 2004: Vinokurov, E., "What can replace the Kaliningrad SEZ?", <http://www.vinokurov.info/assets/files/SEZeng.pdf>.

¹⁹ Liuhto, K., "Special economic zones in Russia – what do the zones offer for foreign firms?", *Electronic Publications of Pan-European Institute*, no. 2, 2009, <https://www.utu.fi/fi/yksikot/tse/yksikot/PEI/raportit-ja-tietopakettit/Documents/Liuhto%202009%20web.pdf>.

²⁰ Sukhankin, S., "Kaliningrad: Russia's stagnant enclave", 31 March 2016, http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_kaliningrad_russias_stagnant_enclave_6052

line, who seek to remilitarize the oblast, and the moderate, who, together with the political and business elite of Kaliningrad, seek to create a truly functioning SEZ and open the oblast up for the markets of the neighbouring states and the EU.²¹ In 1999, the authors claimed that the Kremlin did not approve of the position of the hard line supporters, and the vision of Kaliningrad FEZ had not yet begun to be implemented in reality. However, during Putin's rule the politics in respect to Kaliningrad revealed that the formal implementation of the moderate vision was actually in preparation to remilitarize the oblast. The business and political elite of Kaliningrad is forced to approve of the central government's direction, despite the fact that the elite has its own vision for the development of the oblast, and the cooperation of the oblast with the neighbouring states is taking place at the municipal level only and only at the level of "low" politics.

Moscow, now demonstrating greater hostility towards the West and especially while reacting to NATO enlargement, keeps increasing the role of Kaliningrad Oblast in terms of "hard" security,²² which contradicts the need to revive the economy of the oblast and to open it up for outside investors. That is why, when the federal government is solving this dilemma, the questions of economic or political cooperation become secondary. James Horris notices the same problem while analysing economic factors, security in its broad sense, and military factors, and concludes that Kaliningrad as a geopolitical entity manipulates these factors, which has a harmful effect on the EU (and also NATO) and Russia's relations.²³

2. The EU Relations with Russia and Kaliningrad Regarding the Development of the Oblast

For the first time in the 21st century, Russia named Kaliningrad as a potential pilot region for increasing cooperation of the EU and Russia in a document presented at the summit of the EU and Russia in October, 1999. The document laid down the aims to implement legal and economic reforms

²¹ Lopata, R., Sirutavičius, V., "Lithuania and the Kaliningrad Oblast: a clearer frame for cooperation", http://lfpr.lt/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/LFPR-3-Lopata_Sirutavicius.pdf, p. 4. The article published in *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, vol. 3, 1999, p. 51–56.

²² Diener, A. C., Hagen, J., "Geopolitics of the Kaliningrad exclave and enclave: Russian and EU perspectives", p. 575.

²³ Horris, J., "Kaliningrad and its effect on EU-Russian relations", *Towson University Journal of International Affairs*, Fall, 2014, p. 25, <http://webapps.towson.edu/iajournal/Documents/Articles/Fall%202014/Horris.pdf>.

and initiate a fight against corruption. However, when Vladimir Putin became president of Russia, Moscow's position towards Kaliningrad changed: in the ninth summit of the EU and Russia, which took place in May, 2002, Putin stated that the EU and Russia's relations would depend on solutions to various problems related to Kaliningrad and expressed concern regarding the isolation of the exclave.²⁴ According to Putin, to Russia, Kaliningrad Oblast is "a strategically important territory, the future of which is directly related to the national interests of the state".²⁵ That is why, in spite of the objective to increase the cooperation between Kaliningrad Oblast and the surrounding states, Russia observes the rule to prevent a higher level of cooperation of the oblast even with the rest of Russia. In other words, Moscow saw the development of the pilot region as a lever in the relations with the West in order to pursue its own interests. Moscow sees the Western influence, which overlaps with the spread of the values of western liberal democracy and which could encourage Russian society to seek reforms in the country, as a threat to the regime stability. It has become particularly important to reach the fundamental goals of Russia's foreign policy, such as to implement the vision of a multipolar world and to reform the post-Cold War system of international relations, which are dominated by the West, in the eyes of Russia, and to isolate Russia's society and decrease the influence of the West in the country.²⁶

For a long time, Russia considered the EU enlargement, as opposed to the NATO expansion, to be non-threatening its national interests, which would lead to the conclusion that economic cooperation related to Kaliningrad Oblast should not have become a challenging factor. Bilateral agreements between Russia and Lithuania and Poland granted the residents of Kaliningrad Oblast various privileges: favourable tariff treatment and the visa-free regime became incentives for strengthening economic and trade relations between the oblast and the neighbouring states. Nevertheless, when Poland and Lithuania entered into negotiations on their accession to the EU, this process had direct impact on the future of Kaliningrad Oblast because, in the case of their EU

²⁴ Malevskaya, V., "Between Russia and the EU: three choices facing Kaliningrad", <http://www.iar-gwu.org/sites/default/files/articlepdfs/malevskaya.pdf>, p. 39. Straipsnis publikuotas: *International Affairs Review*, vol. XXI, no. 1, 2012.

²⁵ Egorov, V., "Keynote address: Kaliningrad – the region of cooperation", *Kaliningrad 2020: its Future Competitiveness and Role in the Baltic Sea Economic Region*, ed. K. Liuhto, p. 2, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303792371_Kaliningrad_2020_Its_future_competitiveness_and_role_in_the_Baltic_Sea_economic_region.

²⁶ *Ambiguous Threats and External Influences in the Baltic States*, Phase 2: *Assessing the Threat*, Ft. Meade: U. S. Army Asymmetric Warfare Group, 2015, p. 9–10, <http://www.stratcomcoe.org/ambiguous-threats-and-external-influences-baltic-states>.

membership, it meant the withdrawal of the privileges the oblast enjoyed and Kaliningrad would find itself in the “double periphery”.²⁷ First of all, it affected the areas of trade and transit, relevant not only to Russia, but also to the EU. That is why new, possible models of a further inclusion of Kaliningrad were sought after, which faced several challenges: 1) the hope was to come up with new forms of cooperation (which would be closer than with the main part of Russia), 2) with Lithuania’s and Poland’s accession to the EU, it was vital to resolve the transit problem between Kaliningrad and the remaining part of Russia, also, other problems related to visa facilitation would arise.

It is important to note that the initiative on the cooperation between Kaliningrad and the EU was asymmetric because it was mostly based on the EU programs for the region. In 2004, a program for the cross-border cooperation of Lithuania, Poland, and the Russian Federation was launched, for the implementation of which a 47.5 million euro budget was allocated. The program was extended after the new program of cross-border cooperation of Lithuania, Poland, and the Russian Federation, for the period of 2007–2013, was drawn up, and which aimed at promoting economic and social development on both sides of the border, overcoming together common challenges and problems, and developing person to person cooperation. This was meant to amortize the new challenges posed to Kaliningrad Oblast by Lithuania’s and Poland’s membership in the EU.

From 2004 to 2006, the Special Program for Kaliningrad Oblast (the former part of the National Guidance Program for Russia) was in effect, according to which 25 million euros were allocated for the development of social and economic cross-border cooperation, by carrying out this activity under other federal programs of Russia. Whereas in the National Guidance Program for Russia for the period of 2007–2012, Kaliningrad Oblast was considered to be one of the two most significant priorities, especially in strengthening the fight against corruption, improving governance and the like. Also, the EU partnership component was indicated.

However, Russia’s actions in practice differed from the objectives laid down in the programs. Russia interpreted the EU neighbourhood policy, which is based on financial support for the neighbouring states in order to bring them closer to EU standards in various areas of governance, as potentially treating Russia as a younger brother. Thus, instead of such cooperation, the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) was signed between the EU and Russia in 1997. By the year 2006, the EU had allocated almost 100 million

²⁷ Sirutavičius, V., Stanytė-Toločkienė, Op.cit.

euros for joined projects, and during the financial period of 2007–2013, 132 million euros were expected to be allocated for the cross-border cooperation program between Lithuania, Poland, and the Russian Federation.²⁸ In addition, under the Baltic Sea Region Program, 217 million euros more were expected to be allocated. However, when Russia came into conflict with Georgia in 2008, the EU and Russia's cooperation under the PCA practically froze.²⁹ Moscow's actions, which aimed at a deliberate delay of processes, lead to the minimal use of the EU funds by Kaliningrad Oblast. Russia, which means Kaliningrad Oblast, too, could not make use of the Baltic Sea Program at all because Moscow did not sign the financial agreement with the EU by the date set, and the cross-border cooperation stalled due to Moscow's desire to become a full member of the program, i.e. at the final stage of project development Moscow declared that it wished to contribute 44 million euros and, in return, receive decision-making rights in support distribution and control. During the negotiations, upon the invitation of the EU members, Russia was allowed to take part in auditing projects, and when it expressed the wish to ratify the financial agreement, the start of the program implementation was delayed until the middle of 2010.³⁰ Russia politicized this financial EU instrument in part because of the changes in the geopolitical environment and also because of its reluctance to open up the Kaliningrad Oblast for closer cooperation with the neighbouring EU member states.

Kaliningrad Oblast was not attractive for foreign investors due to insecure business environment in Russia (massive corruption, little legal protection of business entities, fast changing legal regulation) and the specifics of the oblast (higher production costs, which arise from the isolation of the local market from the rest of Russia). That is why in 2010, foreign direct investment per capita constituted only a third of the investments in the remaining part of Russia, and the biggest business entities of the Russian capital sought to establish themselves through Moscow in Kaliningrad Oblast and in this way, to reduce the impact of foreign investors there.³¹ Infrastructure projects, implemented by the central government in Kaliningrad Oblast, even though they are welcomed by the local elite, cause the discontent of the local businessmen

²⁸ <http://www.lt-pl-ru.eu/news.php>.

²⁹ Diener, A. C., Hagen, J., "Geopolitics of the Kaliningrad exclave and enclave: Russian and EU perspectives", p. 577.

³⁰ Rogoża, J., Wierzbowska-Miazga, A., Wiśniewska, I., "A captive island: Kaliningrad between Moscow and the EU", *OSW Studies*, no. 41, 2012, p. 51–52, http://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/prace_41_en_0.pdf.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 21–23.

because the big players who are entering the market (such as “Gazprom”, “LU-Koil” or construction companies) push the local business to the margins and increase the influence of the central government.³² Thus, the constituent of economic cooperation in Kaliningrad is rather fragmented and inconsistent.

Meanwhile, the resolved question of the transit between Kaliningrad and the remaining part of Russia, which arose when Lithuania was acceding to the EU and later joining the Schengen Area, with active mediation of the EU, gave grounds for the expectation of closer cooperation perspectives. Due to the specific geographic status of Kaliningrad Oblast, problematic questions of transit could be resolved either by opening the borders for the free movement of persons, or by retaining tightened border control. Before Lithuania’s and Poland’s membership in the EU, the issue was not a problem, because visa-free travel had been established by international agreements. However, from 2004, Kaliningrad Oblast was surrounded by the states, which, from 2007, had to join the Schengen Area, the travel to which required a passport and visa. Although the EU offered to issue special Schengen passports to the residents of Kaliningrad, the central government of Russia disagreed with such a proposal and claimed that such special status would interfere with its sovereignty in respect to the oblast, and that the citizens of Russia have the right to the unrestricted travel from one territory of Russia to another without visas, and it even offered to create a land corridor.³³ The complex dispute was resolved with a compromise: with an introduction of low-cost, simplified transit documents, but this situation showed that the EU considered the problem of transit of the residents of Kaliningrad Oblast as an issue of “soft” security, whereas Russia saw it as a “hard” security problem.³⁴ Moscow in principle sought to impose its own rules on opening the borders of Kaliningrad and Schengen Area, and to discuss this question in the common context of the visa regime of the EU and Russia. Despite the fact that the government of Kaliningrad Oblast requested to turn the region into the “pilot project” in the field of visa-free travel, the central government delayed the facilitation of travel to the neighbouring states for the oblast residents, and negotiated favourable travel conditions between Kaliningrad Oblast and the remaining part of Russia only.³⁵ The central government does not adhere to the principle that the welfare of the oblast residents

³² Ibid, p. 38–39.

³³ Malevskaya, V., “Between Russia and the EU: three choices facing Kaliningrad”, p. 39.

³⁴ Diener, A. C., Hagen, J., “Geopolitics of the Kaliningrad exclave and enclave: Russian and EU perspectives”, p. 580.

³⁵ Rogoża, J., Wierzbowska-Miazga, A., Wiśniewska, I., “A captive island: Kaliningrad between Moscow and the EU”, p. 47–48.

is of first priority; instead, it prioritizes the aspects of national security and territorial integrity, this way limiting the opportunity for Kaliningrad Oblast to become a specific test area, in which it could explore cooperation possibilities with the EU.

Another stage of cooperation of the EU and Russia is the negotiations on the visa-free travel between the EU and Russia, which could be considered to have begun at the EU and Russia summit in St. Petersburg in March, 2003. The summit concluded with the agreement to analyse the possibilities for visa-free travel in the long term. Later, this goal was set officially in The Road Map on the Common Space of Freedom, Security and Justice, approved at the EU and Russia summit in Moscow, in May, 2005. It was stressed that it is necessary to conclude negotiations as fast as possible and sign agreements on visa facilitation and readmission.³⁶ Visa facilitation began at Sochi Summit on May 25th, 2006, with the agreement between the EU and the Russian Federation.³⁷ This was the first time in EU history when an agreement of this kind was concluded with a third country. Also, the agreement on readmission was signed at Sochi Summit between the EU and Russia.³⁸ Both agreements entered into force at the beginning of 2007. They laid the foundations for further dialogue regarding the possible cancellation of a visa regime. In July, 2007, at the annual meeting of the EU-Russia Permanent Partnership Council, which was set up to develop cooperation in the areas of security, freedom, and justice, it was agreed on the procedures of the dialogue on a visa-free travel regime. Finally, in December, 2011, common steps were confirmed, after the implementation of which the launch of negotiations on visa-free travel was planned, discussing the progress at the EU-Russia summits.³⁹ However, a specific deadline for the implementation of the steps was not set, and the EU, in its turn, avoided defining it.

In addition, the new wave of cooperation could be related with the ongoing dialogue for modernization,⁴⁰ which was initiated by Germany. This sui-

³⁶ "Road Map on the Common Space of Freedom, Security and Justice", 10 May 2005, <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/3588>.

³⁷ Agreement between the European Community and the Russian Federation on the facilitation of issuance of short-stay visas, *Official Journal of the European Union*, May 17, 2007, t. 50, L 129, p. 27–34, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/LT/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2007.129.01.0025.01.LIT&toc=OJ:L:2007:129:TOC#L_2007129LT.01002701

³⁸ Agreement between the European Community and the Russian Federation on Readmission, *Ibid*, p. 40–60, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/LT/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2007.129.01.0038.01.LIT&toc=OJ:L:2007:129:TOC#L_2007129LT.01004001

³⁹ *Ibid*. The first reports prepared by the EU and Russia on the implementation of the common steps on May 15, 2012.

⁴⁰ http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/russia/eu_russia/tech_financial_cooperation/partnership_modernisation_facility/index_en.htm

ted the general “reset” policy in the West, when Dmitry Medvedev became president of Russia. From the meeting at Rostov in 2010 to the Ukrainian crisis the program “Partnership for Modernization” (P4M) was actively implemented, which aimed at enhancing technical harmonization, legal system and cooperation in many other areas. Both sides were convinced that this program would become a base for the strategic partnership of the EU and Russia⁴¹, would help to realize earlier expectations for cooperation and would restore mutual trust, which was weakened because of Russia–Georgia war in 2008. Even though the Program “P4M” did not focus specifically on Kaliningrad, it is important to note that the EU - Russia dialogue on visa-free travel encouraged the discussion of facilitated transit between Kaliningrad and the neighbouring states. For example, the EU welcomed the initiative of the EU member states which have borders with Russia to permit unrestricted travel of the Russian citizens in the part of their territory, which means the EU territory, too. From July 27th, 2012 facilitated travel procedure of persons was implemented in Kaliningrad Oblast of Russia and part of Poland (in Pomeranian and Warmian-Masurian provinces).

The EU was about to support Russia’s goals of visa-free travel when the Ukrainian crisis postponed the EU-Russia strategic partnership and the issue of visa-free travel to the future. Due to the aggression demonstrated in Ukraine, Kaliningrad, just like the rest of Russia, was faced with the sanctions of the EU and other western states. As a result, Kaliningrad has suffered even more from the EU economic sanctions than other regions of Russia,⁴² but the central government hasn’t taken any action to improve the economic situation of the oblast residents and continues to use Kaliningrad as a geopolitical playing-card.

3. Lithuania and Kaliningrad: Direct Cooperation in the Context of the EU and Russia’s Policy

Two stages can be distinguished in the cooperation of Lithuania and Kaliningrad Oblast and their relations. The first stage, which began when the interstate relations between Lithuania and the Russian Federation had been

⁴¹ Larionova, M., “Can the partnership for modernisation help promote the EU-Russia strategic partnership?”, *European Politics and Society*, vol. 16, issue 1, 2015, p. 62–79.

⁴² Oldberg, I., “Kaliningrad’s difficult plight between Moscow and Europe”, *UI paper*, no. 2, 2015, p. 5, <http://www.ui.se/eng/upl/files/111799.pdf>.

normalized, was characterized by intensive direct cooperation of Lithuania and Kaliningrad Oblast. This was mostly the result of the regionalization in Russia during Boris Yeltsin's rule, when Lithuania had an opportunity to develop bilateral relations directly, not through Moscow. In 1994, a consulate of the Republic of Lithuania in was opened in Kaliningrad, and in 1995, an agreement on visa-free travel for visits shorter than 30 days was signed. Until 1998, negotiations on 15 projects in the fields of environment protection, transportation, education, culture and other areas were concluded with Kaliningrad Oblast. In the period of 1999–2000, various platforms of bilateral cooperation were established, such as the Association of NGOs and the Academics, the Russian-Lithuanian Council on the long-term cooperation between regional and local authorities of the Kaliningrad Oblast and the Republic of Lithuania, an inter-parliamentary forum, and the Nida Initiative. Sander Huisman, in his study carried out in 2002, concluded that Russia hadn't yet formed its realistic policy nor attitude towards Kaliningrad,⁴³ and Lithuanian researchers Sirutavičius and Stanytė-Toločkienė distinguished two possible strategies of the Kremlin for Kaliningrad – as a military outpost or a test area for economic reforms – but they could not tell which of the strategies would dominate and would actually be implemented.⁴⁴ That is why, despite the problematic issues of military and civil transit and dependence in the energy sector, Lithuania followed the assumption that intensive cooperation with Kaliningrad Oblast may help the region to become a pilot project which would be developed in line with Lithuania's interests in the broader agenda of the EU and Russia. This was also reflected in the National Security Strategy of 2002, which included political, social, economic, and ecological stability in Kaliningrad Oblast among other significant security measures, as well as maintaining good neighbourhood and economic trade and cultural partnership relations, and reducing the oblast's economic underdevelopment and raising the standard of living, which was lower than in the neighbouring states, especially when they were acceding to the EU.⁴⁵

The second stage began with the intensive negotiations on EU membership (the period of 2000–2004), when the EU devoted great attention to both components: the regional component of the Baltic States and that of the bilateral relations with Russia. This period can be considered as transformational because at that time, Russia sought to use Kaliningrad Oblast as a means

⁴³ Huisman, S., "A new European Union policy for Kaliningrad", *Occasional Papers*, no. 33, March 2002, p. 13, http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/occ33_01.pdf.

⁴⁴ Sirutavičius, V., Stanytė-Toločkienė, I., *Op.cit.*

⁴⁵ Decision on the Approval of the National Security Strategy, May 28th, 2002, No IX-907, <https://www.e-tar.lt/acc/legalAct.html?documentId=TAR.2627131DA3D2>

of pressure in hindering transatlantic and European integration of the Baltic States, and centralization tendencies limited the sovereignty of Kaliningrad Oblast to the maximum. While supporting Kaliningrad engagement initiatives in minor politics, Lithuania took a reserved stance regarding the questions of the great politics. Three important things should be noted from Lithuania's accession to the EU in 2004. First, Lithuania took an active part in setting guidelines for transit program between Kaliningrad Oblast and remaining Russia and in preparing its implementation measures. Second, Lithuania criticized the possibilities to extend visa facilitation with Kaliningrad and opposed the EU and Russia on this issue. Third, Lithuania sought to open up direct economic ("2K Project") and cultural cooperation with Kaliningrad, supported the oblast's aims of modernization but avoided broader bilateral commitments with Russia.

Facilitated transit was a compromise reached through tripartite negotiations (with the participation of the EU, Lithuania, and Russia), which allowed for the implementation of something unprecedented when, by permitting visa-free travel to the Russian citizens across the EU territory, communication for Kaliningrad enclave with the remaining part of Russia was ensured. A facilitated transit document (FTD) and a facilitated railway transit document (FRTD) replaced visas. This is how the communication problem of the residents of Russia was successfully resolved, at the same time maintaining full control over the movement of Russian citizens.⁴⁶ However, when the dialogue of the EU and Russia on visa-free travel was opened, Lithuania was much more cautious throughout. In the spring of 2012, the foreign minister of the Republic of Lithuania described the country's position by appealing to the technical objectives set in the so called common steps document signed by the EU and

⁴⁶ From the moment the agreement entered into force until now the EU has been carrying out its undertaking to finance entire implementation of transit procedures between Kaliningrad and the remaining part of Russia: 1) by covering the institutional administrative costs and developing the necessary infrastructure; 2) by compensating for losses incurred due to foregone consular fees. For example, according to the Special Kaliningrad Transit Program for the period from May 1st, 2004 to September 30th, 2006, financial assistance constituted 138 million litas. See the Joint Statement of the European Union and the Russian Federation On Transit Between the Kaliningrad Region and the Rest of the Russian Federation, which was signed by the EU and the Russian Federation on November 11th, 2002, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/73188.pdf. The greatest losses covered were due to unissued visas, the revenue for which Lithuania would have received if it had applied the standard visa procedures to Russian citizens, and additional expenses related to ensuring smooth transit from/to Kaliningrad Oblast. See: <http://www.cpva.lt/lt/veikla/paramos-administravimas/anksciau-administruota-parama/specialioji-kaliningrado-tranzito-programa.html>

Russia on December 15, 2011.⁴⁷ The process of implementing those steps is closely tied with the process of implementing visa-free travel between the EU and Russia. At the meeting of the intergovernmental commission of Lithuania and Russia that took place in Klaipėda in October 2011, Audronius Ažubalis, the foreign minister of the Republic of Lithuania at that time, claimed that cooperation in criminal cases will be important for the dialogue of the EU and Russia on visa-free travel.⁴⁸ What he had in mind was the January 13th case, the Medininkų case, and Russia's insufficient cooperation. These requirements were regarded as an expression of Lithuania's traditional scepticism by Moscow.

At that time, the issue under discussion was if Lithuania, similarly to Poland, would implement the procedures of facilitated movement of persons by providing a kind of stretch for free movement from Kaliningrad. Lithuania's goal was that the agreement would be in force within the territory of Lithuania and 30–50 km from the border.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, Russia wanted to follow the example of the agreement between Poland and Russia of 2011 (on visa-free travel for residents of Kaliningrad Oblast and northern Poland), which provided for the mirror principle, when countries open a territory of an equal size for movement of residents.⁵⁰ Russia tried to project Lithuania as an obstacle and considered the agreement with Poland an important step towards broader cooperation in the field of a visa-free travel regime between the EU and Russia.⁵¹

At that time, even though the amendment to the Regulations of the European Parliament and Council (EB) No 1931/2006 was in force, which allowed for considering the entire territory of Kaliningrad Oblast as border area, Lithuania observed the “50 km rule”, according to the agreement of 2009.⁵² It ignored the political implication of the exemption from Schengen *acquis* – that

⁴⁷ Ivanauskas, V., Janeliūnas, T., Jurkonis, V., ir kt., *Bevizis režimas tarp Europos Sąjungos ir Rusijos: poveikis Lietuvai. Galutinė tyrimo ataskaita*, Vilnius: Rytų Europos studijų centras, 2012, p. 8, <http://www.eesc.lt/uploads/news/id566/es-rusijos%20bevizio%20poveikis%20lietuvai-1.pdf>.

⁴⁸ “Ažubalis: už Rusijos bevizį režimą su ES, tik jei Rusija bendradarbiaus baudžiamosiose byloje”, BNS information, October 4th, 2011, http://www.alfa.lt/straipsnis/12607682/Azubalis.uz.Rusijos.bevizi.rezimas.su.ES.tik.jei..Rusija.bendradarbiaus.baudziamosiose.bylose=2011-10-04_14-44/?wicket:pageMapName=?wicket.

⁴⁹ “Skiriasi Lietuvos ir Rusijos URM pozicijos dėl galimo bevizio režimo su Kaliningradu”, “Regnum” information, January 20th, 2012, <http://www.geopolitika.lt/?artc=5164>

⁵⁰ Komaras, J. J., “Gazeta Wyborcza”: ypatinga bevizio režimo reikšmė Rusijai”, December 19th, 2011, <http://iq.lt/pasaulis/gazeta-wyborcza-ypatinga-bevizio-rezimo-reiksme-rusijai/>.

⁵¹ Marcinkevičius, T., “Europos eksperimentai su Kaliningradu”, September 7th, 2012, <http://www.pazinkeuropa.lt/euroblogas/savaite-temos-klaustukai-229/europos-eksperimentai-su-kaliningradu-234>.

⁵² Based on the information provided by www.15min.lt on January 17th, 2012, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation broadcasted on its website a commentary by its representative Alexander Lukashovich, in which Russia criticized Lithuania's caution with visa-free regime and praised Poland. See: <http://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/pasaulis/rusija-kritikuoja-lietuvos-atsarguma-del-bevizio-rezimo-57-190534#ixzz2BRD6Ltto>.

residents of Kaliningrad Oblast do not pose any threat to the neighbouring EU member states – and stressed the 30–50 km border area, to which the exemption was not applied, in order to ground its position. Lithuania took into consideration that the so called mirror principle raises too much risk and a disproportionately huge part of the Lithuanian territory would be reached, which means that, in reality, not a local movement procedure but a visa-free travel regime would be established. The Lithuania-Russia agreement on Kaliningrad was not approved because Lithuania did not agree to open its border areas to residents of the entire Kaliningrad Oblast and was not inclined to accept facilitated travel conditions in its own territory. Negotiations took place only on the increase of mobility of residents living at the Lithuanian-Kaliningrad border, not further than 50 km from it, and promotion of people-to-people contacts. But after Poland agreed to open its borders to residents of the entire Kaliningrad Oblast, Russia's expectations grew – Russia focused on its goal of visa-free travel between the EU and Russia. Although Lithuania officially declared that it does not hold any prejudice against visa-free travel between the EU and Russia, and that it would ground its decision on purely technical evaluation of the implementation of Russia's commitments,⁵³ from the start of the negotiations it has stressed the need to first grant visa-free travel to the Eastern Partnership States which are on the way to European integration.

Meanwhile, while evaluating the EU-Russia program “Partnership for Modernization”, Lithuania claimed several times that during the implementation of this program, an equal focus should also be given to human rights issues and the rule of law in Russia, and that a significant part of modernization measures had been implemented in Kaliningrad because it was in Lithuania's interests that the oblast would become one of the most progressive regions in Russia.⁵⁴ In 2004, after the accession to the EU, business expectations were expressed that foreign investors would look at the Baltic States as a springboard for business in Russia, Belarus or Ukraine.⁵⁵ That is why the EU actively supported the idea to strengthen the Baltic States, as well as the infrastruc-

⁵³ “A. Ažubalis: V. Putino pareiškimai apie bevizį režimą tėra kalbos prieš rinkimus”, on March 1st, 2012, <http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/aazubalis-vputino-pareiskimai-apie-bevizi-rezima-tera-kalbos-pries-rinkimus.d?id=56168421>.

⁵⁴ “EU-Russia partnership for modernization has to include the modernization of Russia's attitude towards neighbors, Lithuania's foreign minister says”, 24 09 2010, <http://www.eurodialogue.eu/osce/EU-Russia-Partnership-For-Modernization-Has-To-Include-The-Modernization-Of-Russias-Attitude-Towards-Neighbours-Lithuanias->

⁵⁵ Based on the speech “Baltijos valstybės ES: neišnaudotos galimybės” by Algirdas Aušra, the director of UAB “Baltijos verslo vystymo agentūra”, given at the Baltic Economic Forum, which took place in Tallinn on May 17th, 2004, see <http://www.mediabv.lt/resursai/pasisakymai/Ausros-kalba-BEF-lt.pdf>.

re joining Kaliningrad and Belarus, through the implementation of the respective infrastructure projects at the expense of EU financial assistance. The “2K Project”, initiated on the eve of the EU membership of Lithuania, aimed at connecting the ports of Klaipėda and Kaliningrad, making them the main points of freight transport from the West to the East and vice versa, and well reflected the attitudes to consolidate cooperation with Russia in the field of minor politics.⁵⁶ However, this initiative faced determined opposition: Lithuanian politicians raised questions regarding the threat the project posed to national security.⁵⁷ The idea that Kaliningrad could be a platform to the markets of Russia and the East was not fully realized but it was practically dominating throughout the entire period from Lithuania’s accession to the EU until the Ukrainian crisis in 2014. For example, this idea was constantly raised by business people, especially in 2012,⁵⁸ when the hope was that Lithuania, just like Poland, would implement a local border traffic regime.

Lithuania also supported the ideas which would intensify cultural and people-to-people connections with Kaliningrad, especially by contributing to the promotion of the historical heritage related to Prussian Lithuania (*lietuvininkai*) or Prussian culture. According to S. Huisman, even though it is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania that coordinates the question of Kaliningrad in Lithuania, its practical implementation in the field of minor politics takes place at a lower level, with more power being transferred to the municipalities bordering the Kaliningrad Oblast.⁵⁹ That is why, despite the fact that bilateral relations of Lithuania and Russia have worsened considerably, cooperation in the field of science or culture between Kaliningrad Oblast and individual municipalities remains quite intensive. For example, in 2005 the “Three K” initiative was launched (Klaipėda-Culture (Kultūra)-Kaliningrad)⁶⁰ – a cultural partnership between the cities of Klaipėda and Kaliningrad, which continues today, following the renewed partnership agreement between the

⁵⁶ Marinecas, V., “Projektas „2K“ – dar vienas žingsnis nelengvame kelyje”, 2003 m. gegužės 2 d., <http://www.jura24.lt/lt/naujienos/uostas/projektas-2k-dar-vienas-zingsnis-nelengvame-kelyje-126074>.

⁵⁷ “„2K“ projektas nekelia grėsmės nacionaliniam saugumui”, BNS informacija, 2003 m. rugsėjo 24 d., <http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/2k-projektas-nekelia-pavojaus-nacionaliniam-saugumui.d?id=2908413>.

⁵⁸ The opinion was expressed at the conference of the Lithuanian Confederation of Industrialists in 2012, based on: Levickaitė, R., “Kaliningrado sritis – platforma į pasakišką rytų rinką ar grėsmė saugumui?”, February 10th, 2012, <http://www.tv3.lt/naujiena/580998/kaliningrado-sritis-platforma-i-pasakiska-rytu-rinka-ar-gresme-saugumui>.

⁵⁹ Huisman, S., “A new European Union policy for Kaliningrad”, p. 31.

⁶⁰ Gližerienė, A., “Kultūra sujungė Klaipėdą su Kaliningradu”, April 16th, 2005, <http://kauno.diena.lt/naujienos/lietuva/salies-pulsas/kultura-sujunge-klaipeda-su-kaliningradu-536104>.

two cities.⁶¹ Nevertheless, even though such cooperation protects Kaliningrad Oblast from complete isolation from Lithuania, it does not have much influence on the development of the relations with Russia. Although the political and economic elite of Kaliningrad Oblast, in spite of deteriorated cross-border relations, seek further cooperation, trade development, and implementation of joint projects, this can only be achieved in minor political issues.

4. Kaliningrad as Russia's "Military" Playing Card in the Relations with the West

The Lithuanian academics who have studied the development of Kaliningrad Oblast almost unanimously agree that Moscow evaluates its enclave as a threat, both, internal and external. According to Lopata, Moscow has turned this region into a geopolitical hostage – a territory obtained as war booty in the process of cession, which Moscow seeks to sustain (internal aspect), and also force other countries or international institutions to take or withhold from any action, as direct or indirect fulfilment of the condition to release the hostage (external aspect).⁶² Sirutavičius and Stanytė-Toločkienė, having analysed the most intensive period of EU-Russia cooperation and the aspects of the determination to resolve the Kaliningrad problem, concluded that the problem of Kaliningrad adaptation is not a priority in the agenda of regional actors.⁶³

In general, the Kaliningrad problem has gone through several stages of analysis in the scientific literature: right after the fall of the USSR, the focus was on the aspects of demilitarization of the oblast; at the end of the last decade of the previous century, Kaliningrad studies were dominated by the aspects of "soft" security: social and economic underdevelopment, crime, illegal migration, ecology, etc.⁶⁴ However, the intensifying militarization of Kaliningrad Oblast over the past few years and the aspects of the military outpost of the region, discussed more and more broadly in the analytic public debates, have led to raising the primary problems again: what is going on in Kaliningrad Oblast in terms of "hard" security and what impact it has on the security of the region.

⁶¹ <http://consulate-kaliningrad.mfa.lt/kaliningrad/lt/naujienos/pasirasysa-klaipeidos-ir-kaliningrado-partnerytes-sutartis>.

⁶² Lopata, R., Geopolitical Hostage: the Case of Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation, *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review*, 2003, vol. 2, p. 207.

⁶³ Sirutavičius, V., Stanytė-Toločkienė, I., "Strategic Importance of Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation", *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review*, 2002, vol. 1, p., p. 214.

⁶⁴ Lopata, R., Geopolitical Hostage: the Case of Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation, *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review*, 2003, vol. 2, p. 204.

A twofold view on the militarization of Kaliningrad Oblast is possible: 1) the number of deployed military units and equipment is being increased and large-scale military exercises, including of offensive nature, are being launched, in order to deter NATO from increasing its defence capabilities in the region, and, most importantly, in order to remove the Baltic States from NATO defence plans without having any offensive aims; 2) this is the process which aims at gaining absolute military control over the region thinking of possible offensive actions in the Baltic Sea Region.

While evaluating the possible expansion of NATO to Eastern Europe, in 1998 it was already recognized that in such a case it would be relevant to implement a deterrence policy, which would ensure peace rather than undermine it, especially when the defence of the Baltic States in a conventional war was seen only with ensuring military protection of the eastern border of NATO and consolidating forces nearby (recognizing that such measures may not suffice).⁶⁵ Experts in Lithuanian and Polish security draw attention to the intensifying militarization of Kaliningrad Oblast and, especially over the past few years, the military exercises and the type of military objects deployed in the region: “Kaliningrad Oblast has been hyper-militarized. Its militarization has essentially not changed since the Cold War and, in some respect, has intensified, because eventually some former USSR military units which were withdrawn from Germany and Poland have been deployed there”.⁶⁶ Also, the importance of Russia’s conventional armed forces in hybrid military operations is emphasized: “Kaliningrad Oblast is most important in demarcating the region so that external armed forces could not get in and it provides many opportunities for various hybrid scenarios, for example, by making use of the transit [across Lithuania- the author’s note] problem or by creating some sort of humanitarian crisis”.⁶⁷ The war in eastern Ukraine showed that the success of separatists strongly depended on the support of conventional armed forces during the conflict, when Russia was pursuing its own goals by means of structures not directly related to it, i.e. the separatists.⁶⁸ In the assumption that Russia began implementing power politics, when the dynamics in the field of the military in the region is understood as productive, the

⁶⁵ Kober, S., “NATO expansion flashpoint no. 3: Kaliningrad”, *Cato Foreign Policy Briefing*, no. 46, 11 February 1998, <http://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/fpb-046.pdf>.

⁶⁶ Vytautas Keršanskas’ interview with Aleksandras Matonis on January 14th, 2016.

⁶⁷ Vytautas Keršanskas’ interview with the experts of the Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW) on December 7th, 2015.

⁶⁸ *Ambiguous Threats and External Influences in the Baltic States*, p. 46.

military aspect of Kaliningrad Oblast becomes essential for the evaluation of security and possible development of the region.

The development of the relations of Russia and NATO and its individual members can be divided into two main stages. During the first, Russia made use of the instruments and means of pressure available to achieve that Poland and the Baltic States were not accepted to the Alliance. It tried to prove that after the Cold War was over, there was a need to create a common space of security and reminded NATO of the alleged commitment to not expand closer to the borders of Russia. During the second stage, Russia made use of the available tools of pressure, including the playing card of Kaliningrad as a military outpost, in order to deter the Alliance from deploying numerous military units, i.e. to prevent those countries from becoming fully integrated members of NATO.

In response to the possible accession of Lithuania and other Baltic States to NATO, Russian officials delayed the ratification of the block of contracts on the eastern border of NATO; also, plans to stop reducing the military forces deployed in Kaliningrad and revive the oblast as a military bastion were under discussion. When NATO-Russia relations settled, after the NATO-Russia Council was established and greater focus was placed on solving common international security threats, the Kaliningrad problem was raised less and less frequently, although during this same period, Moscow continued to further modernize the military units deployed in Kaliningrad Oblast and organized regular military exercises. But in 2007, Russia decided not to proceed with the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, signed at the end of the Cold War, according to which a limited amount of conventional military equipment was allowed on the continent. Even though Moscow had broken the Treaty several times before, the decision to halt its participation in the Treaty had a direct effect on the Baltic States, which was not mentioned in the original document. Russia aimed at reviewing the Treaty to include the limit of conventional armed forces for the Baltic States. When the parties of the Treaty refused to approve of the new version of the document, Russia withdrew from the negotiations and at exactly the same time increased the military capacity in the Western Military District, which borders with East European states.⁶⁹ In response to Russia's invasion into Georgia in 2008, the USA made the decision to deploy surface-to-air Patriot missiles in Europe. In turn, Russia deployed "Iskander" missiles in Kaliningrad. When Barack Obama became president of

⁶⁹ Socor, V., "Kremlin would re-write or kill CFE treaty", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol. 4, issue 139, 2007, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=32874&no_cache=1.

the U.S., the initiated “reset” policy of the relations did not change Moscow’s attitude towards Kaliningrad Oblast, and since then the tendency of militarization in order to develop not only defensive but also offensive capacities has been observed.

In January 2015, Valery Gerasimov, the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia, declared that Russia would strongly improve its military capacities in Crimea, the Arctic and Kaliningrad.⁷⁰ A year later, in January 2016, Oleg Salyukov, the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Ground Forces, announced the concrete actions: Russia’s army will be strengthened in the central and western parts of Russia in the near future by respectfully establishing one or three new divisions.⁷¹ Kaliningrad Oblast is part of the Western Military District, thus, one can expect even greater militarization of the oblast. In 2015, the Western Military District saw the establishment of the 1st Guards Tank Army, which demonstrated its functionality in the joint exercise of Russia and Belarus, “Ščit Sojuza 2015”, the elements of which, exercised in Kaliningrad training grounds, had not been included in the official program of the exercises. This leads to the conclusion that Russia seeks to disguise the true objectives of the exercises. Although officially the exercises were not targeted at NATO member states, large military units were consolidated by the borders of the Alliance.⁷²

The report on the military balance of various countries drawn up by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in 2016⁷³ reveals that, considering the distribution of the armed forces of Russia in the region, NATO has limited opportunities to react immediately, in order to defend the eastern member states of NATO if necessary. For example, Russia has deployed military forces in Western Military District, which restrict the freedom of manoeuvring in the Baltic Sea Region. These are the remote air defence system S-400 and fighter planes MiG-31BM. Also, at the beginning of 2015, short-range “Iskander-M” ballistic missiles were brought to Kaliningrad Oblast for military exercise.⁷⁴ This has also been confirmed by the report presented by research

⁷⁰ “Russia to boost combat capabilities in Crimea, Kaliningrad, Arctic”, 13 January 2015, <http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-to-boost-combat-capabilities-crimea-kaliningrad-arctic/26791370.html>.

⁷¹ “Russia will fortify western front due to intensifying exercises”, 2016 01 22, <http://sputniknews.com/military/20160122/1033535066/russia-armed-forces-fortify-presence-nato.html>.

⁷² *Grėsmių nacionaliniam saugumui vertinimas*, Vilnius: LR valstybės saugumo departamentas, Antrasis operatyvinių tarnybų departamentas prie KAM, 2016, p. 8–9, <http://www.kam.lt/download/52036/gr%C4%97smi%C5%B3%20nacionalinam%20saugumui%20vertinimas.pdf>.

⁷³ *The Military Balance 2016*, <https://www.iiss.org/en/publications/military-s-balance>.

⁷⁴ “Deployment of Russia’s armaments in Kaliningrad region limits NATO’s capabilities – expert”, 9 February 2016, <http://tass.ru/en/defense/855511>.

and analysis organization RAND in 2016.⁷⁵ The report shows that the defence of the Baltic States is the most complicated burning issue for NATO. The Baltic States would not be able to withstand the Russian armament, and Poland would manage to defend its own territory only and its ability to aid/help the Baltic States would be extremely limited. The evaluation of threats to the national security of Lithuania in 2016,⁷⁶ states that Russia's military activity in the Baltic Sea Region was lower in 2015 than in 2014, which can be attributed to reduced financing, low quality personnel, and the poor technical condition of military equipment. However, the report also notes that this can be a mere tactical step to create an image that Russia is showing its constructive approach to the reduction of tension in the region in exchange of cooperation with NATO in fight against terrorism. In this case, the Alliance would be forced to cancel the plans to strengthen defence capabilities in the Baltic Sea Region.⁷⁷

In May 2014, Russia unilaterally terminated the Bilateral Agreement on Additional Confidence- and Security-Building Measures with Lithuania, thus Lithuania no longer has any opportunities to carry out military inspections in Kaliningrad Oblast, and the exchange of information on military forces is no longer implemented either.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, according to publicly available sources and the opinions of Lithuanian and foreign experts, it is possible to determine the existing level of militarization of Kaliningrad Oblast.

⁷⁵ Shlapak, D. A., Johnson, M. W., *Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank. Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics*, Rand Corporation, 2016, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1200/RR1253/RAND_RR1253.pdf.

⁷⁶ *Grėsmių nacionaliniam saugumui vertinimas*.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 6.

⁷⁸ Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Lithuania, "Russian Federation suspended bilateral agreement with Lithuania on additional measures for confidence and security" ("Rusijos Federacija nutraukė su Lietuva dvišalę sutartį dėl papildomų priemonių pasitikėjimui ir saugumui užtikrinti"), 2014-05-05, http://www.kam.lt/lt/naujienos_874/aktualijos_875/rusijos_federacija_nutrauke_su_lietuva_dvisale_sutarti_del_papildomu_priemoniu_pasitikejimui_ir_saugumui_uztikrinti.

Table 1. The Main Military Forces in Kaliningrad Oblast⁷⁹

Military unit / forces	Meaning
Baltic Fleet (128 th Surface ship Brigade, 71 st Order of the Red Star Landing Ship Brigade, 64 th Maritime Region Protection Brigade, 36 th Red Banner Order of Nakhimov Missile Ship Brigade)	Sovetsk, an ice-free harbour. Around 30 ships are deployed, part of them have been modernized, able to carry out various functions at sea. Small missile ships potentially could be armed with missiles “Kalibr”, which were used from the Caspian sea during the attacks in Syria.
Land Force	It is difficult to name the overall amount of armoured weaponry because public sources are not reliable, but it is argued that the realistic number of troops may be around 15 thousand (including marines), armoured military units could be counted in hundreds (around 100 tanks, 500 IFVs/MICVs, 200 artillery complexes). Since 2008, together with the Naval Infantry Brigade, land forces are in full assembly. Besides 79 th Motorized Rifle and 336 th Naval Infantry Brigades, there are also active 7 th Motorized Rifle Brigade, coastal defence artillery and artillery brigades, other support and logistical units. Basically, most of the units are fully equipped.
Long distance Voronezh radar in Pionersky	Secures air space monitoring from Greenland to the Azores, i.e. in the entire Europe and North Atlantic Airspace and Scandinavia. Allows watching aircrafts at different heights.
Air and Land Defence System S-400	Progressive defence system which can destroy targets in air and land in the range of 400 km flying at the height from 50 m to tens of kilometres. Mobile, mounted on eight-wheel trucks, can be deployed and easily moved to any location in Kaliningrad Oblast, this way increasing its coverage by 100–200 km. Thus, practically the entire airspace above the Baltic sea and Poland can be infringed by a single defence system. Also, systems such as S-300 or TOR-M2 are also located in the Oblast, there are two military aviation bases. It proves that there is full-fledged military groupings rather than individual military elements.

⁷⁹ Prepared according to: Vytautas. Keršanskas’ interview with Aleksandras Matonis on January 14th, 2016; Vytautas Keršanskas’ interview with Gražvydas Jasutis on January 5th, 2016: “Kaliningrad special defense district (KOR)”, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/russia/kor-kaliningrad.htm>, consultations with the representatives from the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Lithuania.

Tactical “Iskander-M” Ballistic Missile System	<p>Due to its range and ability to carry nuclear warheads, “Iskander-M” is used as a tool of pressure on the West by the Russian politicians. The deployment of “Iskander-M” tactical ballistic missile systems in Kaliningrad, replacing “Točka-M” and “Točka-U” missiles, increases the operational range from 200 to 450 km. Thus, there is a possibility of attacking any land target from the border of Kaliningrad Oblast to as far north as the northern border of Latvia and also as far southwest as the southern part of Warsaw. Also, the missiles would reach any target at sea. A ship is a tangible enough target for such a system, which could create certain problems for the Baltic Sea defence. Cruise missiles may reach targets up to 1000 km range, therefore the system potentially can cover all countries in the Baltic Sea region, as well as most of Central and Eastern European states.</p>
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It can be stated that the on-going militarization of Kaliningrad Oblast is aimed at: 1) building offensive capacities near the Baltic Sea, 2) controlling airspace above the Baltic Sea, the Baltic States, and Poland, 3) expanding the range of attack in the Baltic States and Poland. Some of the Baltic Fleet units are constantly ready, and the movement of military units by land and sea is becoming more and more intensive,⁸⁰ avoiding the land transit across Lithuania. Alvydas Medalinskas, compares the role of Kaliningrad in the Baltic Sea and that of Crimea in the Black Sea and claims that Russia is formulating an important task for both regions by modelling scenarios of offensive nature.⁸¹

In the opinion of a Polish security expert, with its military actions, Russia is preparing Kaliningrad Oblast for the role of detaining external military forces in the region. Moreover, military capacities deployed in the oblast may be used not only in conventional war, but also in various mixed conventional-hybrid operations on the pretext of the invented problem of transit across Lithuania.⁸² Over the past few years, in their speeches, NATO leaders have been placing greater focus on the growing military capabilities in Kaliningrad

⁸⁰ Vytautas Keršanskas' interview with Aleksandras Matonis on January 14th, 2016.

⁸¹ Vytautas Keršanskas' interview with Alvydas Medalinskas on January 14th, 2016.

⁸² Vytautas Keršanskas' interview with the experts of the Centre for Eastern Studies in Poland on December 7th, 2015.

and the arising A2/AD problem.⁸³ NATO representative Alexander Vershbow once identified at a press conference that the militarization of Kaliningrad is a problem seriously considered by NATO strategists: “The increasing concentration of forces in Kaliningrad and the Black Sea and now in the Eastern Mediterranean does indeed pose some additional challenges that our planners are going to have to take seriously into account as we consider how to live up to the pledge that we have made to defend any ally against any threat”.⁸⁴ NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg warned that Russia’s plans to deploy nuclear-capable missiles in Kaliningrad would “fundamentally change the balance of security in Europe”.⁸⁵

Moscow’s actions regarding Kaliningrad Oblast show that it sees the development of the oblast in the light of the military processes going on in the region, in particular NATO enlargement, and also the actions of the Alliance in the Baltic States and Poland. In conclusion, the overall current situation in the region is that Kaliningrad Oblast reflects a classical security dilemma: Russia seeks to build a military force near Lithuania and Poland, to which the latter states answer by demanding greater visibility of NATO in the region, which in turn provokes Moscow to increase the militarization of the oblast even more, thus connecting possible demilitarization with maintaining the Baltic States within the “grey area” of NATO.

Conclusions

The article evaluates the Kaliningrad factor in the context of regional security between Lithuania-Russia and, more broadly, the EU/NATO-Russia relations. Using Vinokurov’s enclave theory as an analytical model, four relationship vectors, which determine the problematic aspects of the enclave, in this case Kaliningrad Oblast, have been evaluated. Table 2 provides a summary of the evaluation of these vectors.

⁸³ Posts by General Philip Breedlove (2016 01 21, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_127395.htm?selectedLocale=en), President of Poland Andrzej Duda (2016 01 18, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_127127.htm?selectedLocale=en), Alexander Vershbow (2015 11 17, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_124808.htm?selectedLocale=en), and Jens Stoltenberg (2015 12 01, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_125358.htm?selectedLocale=en).

⁸⁴ The response of Deputy Secretary-General of NATO Alexander Vershbow to the question of the Reuters journalist at the press conference on October 19th, 2015: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_124025.htm?selectedLocale=en.

⁸⁵ “NATO chief says Russian nuclear threats are ‘deeply troubling and dangerous’”, 28 May 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/28/nato-chief-says-russian-nuclear-threats-are-deeply-troubling-and-dangerous>.

Table 2. Conclusions of the Analysis of Kaliningrad Oblast, According to the Relationship Vectors of the Enclave Theory

Vector	Conclusions
<p>The relationship of the central government of the Russian Federation and the government of Kaliningrad Oblast regarding the development of the region</p>	<p>Government centralization, which began when Vladimir Putin came to power, greatly limited the opportunities for the political elite of Kaliningrad Oblast to develop the independent course of the oblast. The Kaliningrad elite supported opening of the oblast to the markets of the neighbouring states and the EU, whereas Moscow did not have a clear strategy. Nevertheless, the particularly intensive remilitarization of the oblast that can be observed beginning from 2012 shows that the vision of the oblast as a military outpost by the hard line supporters has been taking over.</p>
<p>The EU - Russia relations regarding the development of Kaliningrad Oblast</p>	<p>The EU spoke for the economic development of the Baltic Sea Region but did not pay much attention to Kaliningrad Oblast and implemented its politics within the regional context. Meanwhile, Russia saw the EU "soft" policy as a threat and restricted the participation of Kaliningrad Oblast in the EU projects.</p>
<p>Kaliningrad – Lithuania relations</p>	<p>During the first decade after the restoration of independence, Lithuania was actively engaged in direct cooperation with the political elite of Kaliningrad Oblast, however, with the start of the centralization, mutual relations gradually weakened. During the most active period, Lithuania supported the idea of opening its borders to the residents of Kaliningrad Oblast. However, during the EU - Russia negotiations on visa-free travel, it saw this question through the prism of the "hard" security. With the deterioration of Lithuania - Russia relations, cooperation at the municipal level and minor politics has been continued, but this has no major impact on the issues of the great politics.</p>
<p>The EU / NATO – Russia relations</p>	<p>Although the EU/NATO-Russia relations have undergone both, breakthroughs and crises, since 2000, this has not had any substantial effect on the development of Kaliningrad Oblast. Eventually, Moscow chose two directions of Kaliningrad development: that of a military outpost and economic test area, both of which were combined but the latter one was implemented only at the formal level without any efforts to promote greater cooperation between Kaliningrad Oblast and the neighbouring states. Geopolitical confrontation has led to the remilitarization of the oblast, which is why the questions of "hard" security constitute the main component today.</p>
<p>General Conclusions</p>	<p>Kaliningrad Oblast remains a geopolitical hostage, its opening possibilities are minimal, and the essential factor determining the situation is related to the issues of "hard" security.</p>

The role of Kaliningrad in Russian politics has undergone changes over the past two decades, varying from cooperation with the West to deterrence strategies. With such twofold roles of the enclave, Lithuania was looking for its own model of the relationship with Kaliningrad. When an effective solution was achieved on transit across Lithuania between Kaliningrad and the remaining part of Russia, for some time Lithuania was inclined to take steps in the direction of the strategic partnership developed by the EU and Russia and, together with Poland, look for scenarios of closer neighbourhood, especially in economic and cultural cooperation and cross-border cooperation, but remained careful in what concerns the “hard” security. In 2012, one can observe a turning point not only in Russian politics – Vladimir Putin’s return to the presidency and promotion of imperial goals and ideology, as well as Kaliningrad being included more and more into the “hard” security agenda – but also in Lithuania’s attitude that, against the background of increasingly complex relations with Russia, a local border regime (such as the one implemented by Poland) brings about more risks than opportunities.

This changed attitude reflected the further development of Russian foreign policy and the importance of Kaliningrad within it – the oblast was of more importance in the deployment of armed forces than in Russia’s defence policy during the previous decade. This has become especially evident against the background of the increasing confrontation with the West since the beginning of 2014. The conflict in Ukraine calls for reconsideration of the threats in the region, and, with Russia exerting pressure on the neighbouring states and even raising a military challenge to the security of the entire Baltic Sea Region, it is now critical to see Kaliningrad as Moscow’s tool to deter NATO from greater visibility in the region. In such circumstances, it is obvious that today Kaliningrad is more of a threat to Lithuania (especially from the point of view of the “hard” security) than opportunity.

Thus the development of a positive agenda, especially in pursuit of a dialogue, is complicated for Kaliningrad Oblast and Lithuania or Russia and Lithuania in the current context. Also, there is not enough evidence that Kaliningrad Oblast will open up wider (due to the centralization of authority and looking at the issues of the minor or great politics from the perspective of threat). Nevertheless, with the EU mediation (e.g., through various programs) individual “islands” of cooperation can and must be maintained (e.g., border security, modernization, cultural relations, tourism, and historical heritage).

In the long term, it is worth continuing to think that Lithuania and the EU member states have to perceive Kaliningrad as a region, by affecting

which⁸⁶ it is possible to change the relationship with Russia or reduce threats by developing a policy of wider opening or, on the contrary, a policy of isolation. Nevertheless, bearing in mind that at the moment the relations with the enclave (knowing its significance for Russian politics) are affected by arising threats (e.g., the threat of a conventional or hybrid war and a possible response to it of the EU and NATO at the bilateral or individual level) and that even the usually neutral areas of Russian politics are viewed from the perspective of threats to national security, the concept of “hard” security will dominate in the short and medium term. That is why the EU expectations to influence the enclave will be postponed for the future, and Lithuania will have to shed the long sustained illusion of Kaliningrad as an effective springboard to Russia and other markets of the East.

In the field of “hard” security, it is necessary to pursue that Kaliningrad Oblast – seeing Europe as a game board – becomes a stuck checker, not a fishbone in NATO’s throat, because the costs of the latter scenario would be much higher in political and economic terms to all member states of the EU and NATO block, in comparison to the implementation of deterrence policy.

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⁸⁶ Kaliningrad Oblast is considered to be one of Russia’s regions that have suffered most from the western sanctions. Oldberg, I., “Kaliningrad’s difficult plight between Moscow and Europe”.