

What's New About Today's EU-Russia Border

Vadim Kononenko

Researcher

The Finnish Institute of International Affairs

vadim.kononenko@upi-fia.fi



upi Working Papers
50 (2004)

WHAT'S NEW ABOUT TODAY'S EU-RUSSIA BORDER?

Vadim Kononenko
Researcher

The Finnish Institute of International Affairs
Mannerheimintie 15 A, 00260 Helsinki, Finland
Tel. +358 (0)9-43420719
Fax +358 (0)9-43420769
Email: vadim.kononenko@upi-fia.fi
<http://www.upi-fia.fi>

WHAT'S NEW ABOUT TODAY'S EU-RUSSIA BORDER?¹

Introduction: The paradoxes of the 'new EU-Russia border'

On May 1st 2004, the EU reshaped its eastern borders by taking on board ten new member states. Among the many neighbours the EU meets across its enlarged borders, Russia occupies a very specific place. With all the talk about the emerging new EU neighbourhood, one may find it paradoxical that Russia is regarded as one of these *new* neighbours.² There seems to be nothing new about Russia and the EU being neighbours, as they have had a common border for nine years already, since the accession of Finland to the EU in 1995. In this regard, the border that emerged in 2004 can be seen as simply a continuation of the existing 1300-km borderland in the north and as a result of the long-planned accession of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland to the European Union.³ Added to this is the notion that, for all these countries, the existence of a border with Russia had become a reality more than a decade ago, after every legal and political tie with the dissolving Soviet Union had forever been severed.⁴ Later, as

¹ An earlier draft of this paper was presented at the NorFA Research Seminar 'Identities in Transition' in Tallinn, June 1-7, 2004. I am grateful to all of the participants for their comments. I would like to also thank Lynn Nikkanen for checking the English language.

² See, for instance, Commission of the European Communities: Communication from the Commission to the Council and European Parliament, "Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours." Brussels, 11.03.03 COM (2003) 104.

³ See, for instance, Patten Ch. The Wider Europe – New Neighbourhood Initiative: an opportunity for cooperation. Speech at "Wider Europe: intensification of cooperation in Central-European Europe through the common border with the enlarged EU", Kyiv, November 2003, available at <http://europa.eu.int>

⁴ It is noteworthy that the new independent Baltic states and Russia failed to conclude a border treaty thus leaving the border issue a potential political 'hot spot'. The EU enlargement, particularly the Kaliningrad problem, prompted Russia to ratify the border treaty with Lithuania. The respective treaties with Latvia and Estonia are yet to be

preparations for these countries to join the Union got underway, they, in order to comply with the EU's Copenhagen criteria for the new applicants, were to transform their external borders and policies according to the EU's Schengen *acquis*.⁵

Yet it can be argued that the eastern EU-Russian border should not be regarded simply as an extension of the existing one, as there are several factors that suggest a change. First and foremost, on the EU side, the border is still in the making. By nature, the 'historic' eastern enlargement of 2004 was not a linear process but rather piecemeal and incremental. In many respects it is still waiting to be finalized. Some of the organizing policy instruments that make the emerged border a full-fledged EU external border are yet to be implemented, and not before the EU is ready to open its internal borders and lift all the restrictions for the new members. Further, according to the Commission's plan, the design of various EU policy instruments of cross-border cooperation and assistance, such as INTERREG, Tacis-CBC and PHARE, will be re-shaped and a New Neighbourhood Instrument (NNI) will be put in place from 2007 onwards.⁶

Furthermore, with the latest enlargement round, the balance of interest might have shifted in the EU, affecting its external behaviour. In this context, it is worthwhile examining the way in which the new Baltic members define

concluded. Thus, another paradoxical aspect: the ungratified inter-state border between Russia and the two Baltic states had become a functioning Russian-EU border.

⁵ The preparations of these countries for EU membership started by concluding the "Europe Agreement" with the EC in the mid-1990s

⁶ Paving the way for a New Neighbourhood Instrument, Communication from Commission of the European Communities COM (2003) 393, Brussels, July 2003

their interests and policies vis-à-vis the Russian border in the complex environment of the EU.

Second, there are changes in Russia that do, and will, affect the EU's evolving border policy. The Russia of 2004 is different from the Russia of 1995.⁷ This is particularly true when comparing Russia's attitudes towards the EU in 1995 and on the eve of the latest enlargement. It is well known that Moscow presented a list of concerns regarding the recent enlargement and even threatened to freeze its relations with the EU by declining to extend the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement – the foundational treaty and the legal basis of Russia-EU dialogue.

On a more conceptual level, this paper takes a closer look at the wider EU-Russian border by focusing on the factors of change of the EU's 'border policies' – instruments, programmes, and projects – brought into existence by the interplay of states, regions, institutions and individuals, a multiplicity of actors so characteristic of contemporary European politics. The notion of 'border' is viewed here in Anssi Paasi's terms as a "social process and a discourse", including an attempt to add to it a political dimension or, what Paasi himself called, "the links between boundaries and power".⁸ In examining the evolution and transformation of the EU's 'border policies' in time and space, this paper raises two questions: What is the European Union's Russian border and what are the factors of change? This paper's major observation is that the transition of the EU-Russian border between

⁷ See below for more on this.

the years 1995 and 2004 ran parallel with the process of enlargement. This paper also argues that while organizing its external border in the European North – in Karelia and eventually in the Baltics – the European Union is engaged in the process of contesting the notion of ‘the EU’s outer/Russian border’ and subsequently ‘the EU’s border/external policy’. In other words, this process can be described in terms of social construction through discourse in which the principle partakers are the EU institutions, member states, border regions and, to an extent, external actors like Russia and Russia’s border regions.

In addition, this paper goes one step further in analyzing the *external* element of the EU’s border-making process. It is noteworthy that Russia is both a policy recipient and part of the EU’s discursive game, as well as an actor with its own mode development.

⁸ Paasi A. Boundaries as Social Processes: Territoriality in the World of Flows in Newman D. (ed). Boundaries, Territory and Postmodernity, Frank Cass, London 1999 pp. 69-89.

1. Between the rounds of enlargement: The EU in need of a policy for its Russian border

Origins of the EU's Russian border

For the EU, the need to define its policy towards Russia's border is commonly held to be one of the repercussions of the accession of Finland to the EU in 1995.⁹ There was a 'historic' momentum when the EU encountered the post-Soviet Russia in the North, on the Finnish-Russian border, and there was also an emerging need for the EU to introduce itself not only to Moscow – with whom the political dialogue had already been opened by signing the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in 1994 – but also to the bordering regions in Russia's Northwest.

On the EU side, expectations and concerns were voiced by the new member states – primarily Finland but also Sweden – regarding the role and impact of the EU's 'presence' in the region. During the accession period, the two states were in the process of defining their respective foreign policies towards their Baltic neighbours and Northwest Russia. They were seeking ways to accommodate their respective foreign and security policies, as well as the shared 'Nordic' interests, to EU membership.¹⁰ As far as the new members were concerned, Finland was referred to as being especially

⁹ Besides Finland, Sweden and Austria joined the EU the same year.

¹⁰ See, for instance, Hultdt Bo (et al) Finnish and Swedish Security – Comparing National Policies, SI Series 2001.

interested in providing the EU with a special agenda towards its Russian border and the wider European North.¹¹

What is more, the Finnish border regions were very active in promoting the cross-border cooperation with Russia.¹² The decentralization of the centre-periphery relations that followed the breakup of the Soviet state enabled Northwestern Russia to develop closer contact with the neighbouring regions and municipalities across the border. For the Finnish border regions, such as North Karelia, Kainuu, and Northern Ostrobothnia, this was the moment to restore the broken connection with former parts of Finland ceded to the Soviet Union after World War II.¹³ Furthermore, some contacts existed between the Finnish and Russian regions of Kuhmo and Kostamuksha, mainly in the form of twinning and limited economic cooperation established in the late 1980s.¹⁴ In the EU, the Finnish regions were seeking both financial resources and political assistance with respect to cooperation with Russia's regions and, concomitantly, to avoid making this cross-border cooperation appear suspicious in the eyes of Moscow. Besides these historical motives, there were also some economic prospects regarding the paper industry and the forest sector in Karelia and the transit of Russia's energy export. Also noteworthy is the fact that the interests of the Finnish

¹¹ Ojanen H. How to customize your Union: Finland and the "Northern Dimension of the EU". In *Northern Dimensions*, The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 1999.

¹² Eskelinen H., Haapanen E., Druzhinin P. Where Russia Meets the EU. Across the Divide in the Karelian Borderlands in Eskelinen H. et al (eds) *Reconstructing Borders and Scales for Interaction*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998, p. 330

¹³ The Finnish territories ceded to the Soviet Union after World War II include the Republic of Karelia and part of the Leningrad oblast of the Russian Federation.

¹⁴ Haukkala H. Two Reluctant Regionalizers? The European Union and Russia in Europe's North, Working Paper 32, The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Finland 2001 pp. 12-13.

regions were stimulated by Finland's EU membership, as it provided new sources for financial support such as the European Commission funding for the disadvantaged regions distributed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).¹⁵ The contribution of the Finnish regional authorities – sometimes at the level of personal charisma¹⁶ – can be seen as exemplary in terms of steering the attention of both the central government and the EU's institutions towards cross-border cooperation with Russia.

Looking for the 'Teleology' of the EU's Russian border

It is noteworthy that with its 'northern enlargement' in 1995, the EU didn't move into a dark and empty space. As students of political geography note, by the mid-1990s the European North had been institutionalized into two major complexes: the Baltic Sea Region represented by the Council of the Baltic States (1992) and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council – BEAC (1993).¹⁷ Both organizations included Russia as a founding member and were sought to address the diverse political challenges associated with existing borders in the region.¹⁸ Therefore, it was precisely the EU which was seen as lacking its 'northern dimension': a strategy for its new outer frontiers in the North

¹⁵ Sandelin P. Cross-Border cooperation in Karelia in Bort E. (ed) *Borders and Borderlands in Europe*. The University of Edinburgh International Social Sciences Institute, Edinburgh, 1998, p. 47.

¹⁶ Among many others, a notable example is Tarja Cronberg, Executive Director of the Regional Council of North Karelia between 1993 and 2001.

¹⁷ Moisio S. Back to Baltoscandia? European Union and Geo-Political Remaking of the European North in *Geopolitics* Vol. 8, N 1, Spring 2003. See also Antola E. The Presence of the European Union in the North in Haukkala H. (ed) *Dynamic Aspects of the Northern Dimension*. Working paper 4, Jean Monnet Unit, University of Turku, Finland, 1999.

and in a broader sense a sort of existential *northern* purpose. Some observers note that the EU had always been hesitant about developing a northern attitude, despite having a genuine northern member – Denmark – since 1973.¹⁹ Nor was the EU intent on or prepared for any action towards Russia’s border regions, as the EU-Russian Partnership and Cooperation Agreement signed in 1994, a year prior to the ‘northern enlargement’, discloses little on the subject.²⁰ On the contrary, Finland had developed an agenda vis-à-vis neighbouring parts of Russia and a “*de facto* Northern Dimension” as early as the late 1980s.²¹ One might wonder why the EU has been so slow in formulating a purpose and goal for its eventual ‘presence’ in the North. More important, however, is the question of why the EU has been referred to as lacking a certain purpose in the first place, and how this very need for the EU to have some ‘northern purpose’ or ‘dimension’ was diagnosed and finally talked into existence?

Perhaps the best way to understand this teleological debate would be to situate it in the socio-political context briefly described above. Paasi talks about social contexts as floating systems of meanings and concepts. He also talks, in a very loose sense, about rules and practices as manifestations or

¹⁸ See The CBSS Copenhagen Declaration 1992, available at <http://www.cbss.st/documents/foundingdocs/dbaFile751.html> and The Barents Euro-Arctic Council Kirkenes Declaration 1993 <http://www.beac.st/>

¹⁹ Aalto P. The European Union’s “Wider Northern Europe” and Estonia in Kasekamp A. (ed.) The Estonian Foreign Policy Yearbook 2004. The Estonian Foreign Policy Institute, 2004 p. 31.

²⁰ Haukkala H. 2001, Fairlie L. Will Kaliningrad become a test case in “regionalities”? in Joenniemi P. and Viktorova J. (eds.) Regional Dimensions of Security in Border Areas of Northern and Eastern Europe. Peipsi Center for Transboundary Cooperation, Tartu, 2001.

²¹ Heininen L. Ideas and Outcomes: Finding a Concrete Form for the Northern Dimension Initiative in Ojanen H. (ed) The Northern Dimension: Fuel for the EU? The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2001. p. 31.

embodiments of power or various agents' claims to power. Finally, he mentions power as 'diffused in global networks of wealth, information and images'.²² Teleological debate can be regarded as part of the power interplay between actors and a mode of political interaction. In this light, of course, 'teleology' should not be considered in its ancient sense as some pre-given 'final cause' but, quite the contrary, as a continuous process of construction of meanings for political action. One may find a strong resemblance between this definition and that of discourse, at least in the general way discourse is understood in contemporary social sciences.²³ Indeed, teleological debate can be conceived as a type of discourse which is driven by actors seeking to substantiate or legitimize political acts (policies). In other words, teleological debate is a discourse which contains statements which, in the view of the actors, should form a legitimate basis for a policy.

In the regional context, the enlargement has contributed to a situation of double accommodation for the EU as a new player in the region and for the new northern EU members as the newcomers to the Union. While the EU was portrayed as a 'novice' in the region, reluctant and irresolute, the new northern members were regarded as keen to promote their specific interests in the EU, such as the welfare state, the environment and gender equality²⁴, as well as more traditional geopolitical interests and concerns such as non-alignment or the relationship with Russia.²⁵ In terms of institutional cohesion, the new members might have posed an internal challenge for the

²² Paasi A. in Newman D (ed.), 1999 p. 82.

²³ Foucault M. *The Archeology of Knowledge*. Routledge, London, 1972 ; Sierle J. *The Construction of Social Reality*. The Penguin Press, 1995.

²⁴ Heininen L. in Ojanen H. (ed.) 2001.

EU or even a threat. For instance, there was some apprehension in the EU that the newcomers would have been willing to fracture the cohesion within the Union by forming a ‘Nordic bloc’ in order to tap the EU’s resources or promote certain interests.²⁶ The debate on the EU’s ‘purpose’ and the process of double accommodation may also be considered in terms of constructing a regional identity (or identities) for the EU. The new actors that had been embraced by the EU in the process of enlargement injected their understandings of how the EU should act in the region; concomitantly, they were filling the identity gap that the EU allegedly acquired through expansion towards the North. Some observers who share this constructivist perspective note that the interests of Finland and Sweden which were prioritized in the EU context, such as a sustainable environment, cross-border cooperation, and a cooperative stand towards Russia, lay at the heart of these countries’ political identities.²⁷ At the same time, the accession to the EU was the factor which, in its own way, reshaped these countries’ identities (and their respective foreign and security policies)²⁸ in terms of *inter alia* revitalizing the domestic debate on their historic, symbolic and geopolitical belonging.²⁹

²⁵ Pursiainen Ch. Finland’s Policy towards Russia. How to deal with the Security Dilemma? In Northern Dimensions. The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2000.

²⁶ Ojanen H. Enlargement: A Permanent Threat for the EU and a Policy Problem for Finland. In the Northern Dimensions, The Yearbook of Finnish Foreign Policy. The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Helsinki 2001 p. 24.

²⁷ Ojanen H. Enlargement..., Laitinen K. Geopolitics of the Northern Dimension: A Critical View on Security Borders in Geopolitics, Vol. 8 No. 1 Spring 2003.

²⁸ Mouritzen H. The Two Musterknaben and the Naughty Boy: Sweden, Finland and Denmark in the Process of European Integration. Working Papers 8, Centre for Peace and Conflict Research, Copenhagen. 1993.

Without doubt, ‘the Russian issue’ was part of this context. Great concern was expressed regarding the need for an effective EU involvement at the border where the socio-economic gap was widening and many environmental and social threats were emerging, thereby threatening the northern part of the EU.³⁰ The EU was called upon to respond to these external risks.³¹ As for the role of the EU in the region, one of the biggest concerns was that the Union would not be active or it would simply lack the resources for a real commitment vis-à-vis its Russian border, and that priority would be given to other issues – perhaps much more acute – such as Central-European transition, development in the Mediterranean and security in the Balkans. For the new members, the failure to help the EU articulate its external role carried the risk that this role would eventually be formulated by others, probably in due time by the Baltic and Central-European candidates. The proponents of the EU’s involvement argued that the EU would still need to take action not only in order to tackle certain environmental and social problems but, more importantly, in order to avoid the negative consequences of its own enlargement, such as the emergence of the new *normative divide* – “a difference in standards and norms that could push Russia out of practical cooperation”.³² Thus the issue of the EU-Russian border was given

²⁹ Browning Ch. Coming Home or Moving Home? ‘Westernizing’ Narratives in Finnish Foreign Policy and the Re-interpretation of Past Identities. Working Papers 16. The Finnish Institute of International Affairs. 1999.

³⁰ Pursiainen Ch. Soft Security Problems in Northwest Russia and their implications for the outside world. With the assistance of Haavisto P. and Lomagin N. Working Paper (31), The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Helsinki 2001.

³¹ Lipponen P. The European Union needs a policy for the Northern Dimension. Speech delivered by the Prime Minister of Finland at ‘Barents Region Today’ conference, Rovaniemi, 15 September 1997.

³² Ojanen H. Conclusions: The Northern Dimension – Fuel for the EU’s External Relations? In Ojanen H (ed.) The Northern Dimension: Fuel for the EU? Programme on the Northern Dimension of the CFSP. The Finnish Institute of International Affairs. 2001.

a very expansive meaning, including not only typical border-related problems such as cross-border crime or regional cooperation but more serious implications of European integration and EU enlargement in the North. In other words, the Russian issue was moved to the centre of the ‘teleological debate’ around the EU’s external role – and the role of the EU’s newcomers.

Before we proceed to the political implications of this discourse, two remarks are warranted on the ‘double accommodation’. First, as far as the issue of the EU’s Russian border is concerned, this was in many ways a ‘bottom up’ process – Finland addressing the European Council on the importance of a ‘northern dimension’ for the EU; Finnish regions applying for the EBRD funding for cross-regional cooperation with Russia (and also informing Helsinki about their initiatives). Second, these moves were subject to counterbalancing from the EU side.³³ For various reasons,³⁴ several member states were opposed to the idea of developing a specific EU policy towards Russia’s border regions, while the institutions of the EU – the Council, the Commission, the Committee of Regions and so forth, had very diverging attitudes. Hence the projects that the EU has thus far been able to offer Russian counterparts have to be examined by taking this internal game of bargaining and streamlining into consideration.

³³ Haukkala H. Succeeding Without Success? The Northern Dimension of the European Union. In *The Northern Dimensions. The Yearbook of the Finnish Institute of International Affairs*. 2001.

³⁴ See Haukkala H. Succeeding...

The Northern Dimension, Tacis CBC and the Euroregions: The EU in search of its Russian border policy?

Most of the programmes and instruments the EU makes use of when approaching adjacent Russian regions represent the functionalist idea of cross-border cooperation as a method of tackling the problems originating across the border and making an inter-state frontier serve as a channel for cooperation. The Euroregion Karelia is a case in point.

The Euroregion Karelia is a joint initiative of the three Finnish regions of Northern Ostrobothnia, Kainuu and Northern Karelia and the Republic of Karelia of the Russian Federation. The project is often seen as a case of the EU attempting to transfer its model of managing inter-state borders through trans-boundary cooperation regimes. Within the EU, Euroregions are successfully used to open up border zones between member states for trade, social contact, and cultural exchange, thereby integrating border regions into the EU's inner 'space for freedom, stability and justice'. Needless to say, the Euroregions are impossible to imagine and put into practice without pulling together other elements of supranational integration, such as the free trade area, the Community *acquis* and the Schengen Agreement. In fact, the Euroregions were unfolding in tandem with European integration, with the first Euroregions being established in the 1960s and 1970s along the German and Dutch borders and then gravitating towards the French, Belgian and Luxembourg border areas.³⁵ In the late 1990s, the Euroregions between the Czech, Polish, German, Finnish and Estonian regions were designed with the

³⁵ Scott J. Dutch-German Euroregions: A model for Transboundary cooperation? In Gangster P. (et al) *Borders and Border regions in Europe and Northern America*, p. 111.

aim of facilitating the overall process of making the applicant states eligible for EU membership, namely their eventual accession to the area with relaxed internal borders.³⁶ Obviously, the Euroregio concept runs into many practical problems when such a model is put into practice on the external border of the EU, just like in Russian Karelia. The project envisaged by the Euroregio may be incompatible with other arrangements or it may simply lack adequate political, legal and financial support.

A well-known example of such incompatibility is the Euroregio's co-existence with restrictive Schengen regulations. Another case in point is the lack of coherence between the two main funding programmes, Interreg (with funding going to EU partners) and Tacis-CBC (with funding going to Russian partners). In the case of Euroregio Karelia, these two examples illustrate practical reservations and even the counterproductive effects of the EU's approach towards its Russian border.

The Schengen Agreement of 1985 and the Convention of 1990 were seen to facilitate the internal integration of the EU (EC) by harmonizing the border regimes of its members, thus allowing the free movement of persons, goods, capital and services across the Union. The Schengen process includes the establishment of a common visa regime, a system of surveillance and information-sharing and other common instruments of immigration control. While turning the EU's inner borders into soft administrative and economic boundaries, Schengen reinforces the Union's external borders, impeding cross-border contact and cooperation. In this regard, Schengen revokes the sovereign state-centred logic of a border, thus conflicting sharply with the

cooperation-driven idea of a Euroregio, the idea of making borders an interface for social contact. In practice, Schengen imposes limits on cross-cooperation in that the cooperation can only develop providing it doesn't violate the rules of Schengen. Schengen also shapes and moulds the very process of cooperation, namely through the formal exchange of delegations of certain instances and selected people, thereby enabling mainly archaic and overly bureaucratic regional 'paradiplomacy'.

Funding is another sensitive issue. Russia-Finnish Euroregio Karelia is funded through two Commission programmes: INTERREG, the programme for cross-border cooperation among member states and Tacis, the assistance programme for Russia. Tacis has been the largest financial instrument allocating EU resources for Russia as a whole, and through its Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) subprogramme it provides funding for small-scale projects in Russia's regions.³⁷ In practice, INTERREG and Tacis-CBC are managed differently, as Russian and Finnish regions have unequal access to EU funds. There is also limited coordination between the two programmes, for instance in terms of paying salaries to Russian and EU personnel working on certain projects.³⁸

The EU's Northern Dimension, a mega-project which was aimed, among other things, at improving the practical work of cooperation between various organizations and helping border regions inside and outside the EU

³⁷ See European Commission, Tacis Small Project Facility (CBC) at http://europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid/projects/tacis_cbc_spf/index_en.htm.

³⁸ Cronberg T. A Europe without divides? The EU-Russia Partnership and the Case of Virtual Borders, Copri Working Paper Series Copenhagen Peace Research Institute, 2002.

overcome the normative divide, did little in terms of yielding tangibility. On the positive side, one should note that the Northern Dimension has contributed to a process of creating some, albeit limited, rapport between Russian and EU border regions and, in more general terms, providing some kind of inclusive framework for Russia. In this regard, the ND could be seen as an offshoot of the discourse described earlier. In practice, the Northern Dimension initiative has gone through a substantial institutional transformation, which limited many of its initial prospects of success. Sami Moisio argues that one should consider two ‘Northern Dimensions’: one is Finland’s original proposal to the EU and the idea of an integrated wider European North, while the second is the Northern Dimension of the European Community, namely the Commission-forged policy guidelines for the EU’s policy of the Northern Dimension.³⁹ The crucial difference, as Moisio sees it, is that the Commission formulated the ND as part of the EU-Russia relationship in the realm of energy policy and border management. This conceptual change marks the divide between the initiative’s initial characteristics of reducing tensions between Russia and the EU through effective functional cooperation and by creating ‘border permeability’ and ‘those of the Commission’s formulation’.⁴⁰

³⁹ Moisio S. Back to Baltoscandia? European Union and Geo-Conceptual Remaking of the European North. In *Geopolitics*. Vol. 8, No 1, Spring 2003 p. 90.

2. Beyond the 2004 enlargement: A new border in the making?

The teleology of the EU's Russian border revisited

As described above, the issue of the Russian border was a frequent theme of the debate in the aftermath of the 1995 enlargement. The 'Russian issue' was interwoven with the larger theme of the EU's emerging 'northern dimension'. The 'eastern enlargement' of 2004 gave rise to a much more diverse discourse both thematically and geographically. As far as the problem of the EU's Russian border is concerned, the enlargement-accession debate in those states which, after enlargement, would constitute the EU-Russian border – Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia – was centred on the two related aspects: Kaliningrad becoming an enclave of the EU, and the changing regime of the Baltic-Russian border. Besides being difficult practical problems in themselves, these issues are also fitting examples of how the many functions of the border and the very concept of 'the EU's external border' were transformed according to the logic and agenda of the 'Big Bang' enlargement.

This logic was as follows. First, compared to the previous enlargement, the organizing role of the EU was much more pronounced in terms of steering the course of economic and political reforms in the applicant countries, setting the criteria for accession and in this way 'Europeanizing' them. The very term 'Europeanization' implies the top-down approach: the EU is the principal 'Europeanizing' actor; the applicant countries are subject to 'Europeanization'. In practice, the prospective member states were expected

⁴⁰ Ibid p. 92.

to adopt the entire EU *acquis*, including Schengen. Putting Schengen into force in turn meant the abolishment of a more flexible visa regime for the neighbouring Northwestern Russian regions and Kaliningrad. Although the change of border regime was regarded by the Russian side as detrimental to cross-border trade and tourism,⁴¹ Brussels nonetheless put pressure on the candidate countries, thus ensuring that their visa policies were harmonized with the Schengen norms before accession. In other words, political conditionality was instrumentalized by the EU as a means of demarcating its ‘European Eastern limits’.⁴²

Looking at the overall process of the 2004 enlargement, one may say that Russia was treated the same way as all the other countries that form the impressive continent-wide external frontier of the EU. In the case of the other countries, this ‘Europeanization’ had a more painful effect in terms of dividing the kindred nations or blocking the ethnic minorities living outside the EU, as in the case of Hungary. Such a strict policy was accompanied and legitimized by the post-Cold War angst of mass migration and crime that replaced the Cold-War enemy image.⁴³ As experts note, these widespread fears were in many cases unsubstantiated.⁴⁴ In the case of Russia these

⁴¹ Romanovsky V. Head of Department for International Affairs and Foreign Economic Relations of the Kaliningrad Oblast ‘Geography Encourages Cooperation’ in Grönick R. et al (eds.) Kaliningrad: Isolation or Cooperation? The Finnish Committee for European Security (STETE). 2001.

⁴² Van Meurs W. and Berg E. Borders and Orders in Europe: Limits of Nation-and State-Building in Estonia, Macedonia, and Moldova. In *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, Vol 18, No. 4, December 2002, pp. 61-74 Frank Cass, London.

⁴³ Grabbe H. The Sharp Edges of Europe: Extending Schengen Eastwards. In *International Affairs* 76, 3 2000.

⁴⁴ Grabbe The Sharp Edges..., Jopp M. and Arnsward S. The Implications of the Baltic States’ EU Membership. Programme on the Northern Dimension of the CFSP, No 14. The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Helsinki 2001.

alarmist statements are usually made vis-à-vis Kaliningrad, dubbed Russia's (and Europe's) hell-hole enclave⁴⁵, and regarding third-country nationals trying to settle in the EU by using Russia as a transit country. However, as several expert assessments show, Schengen may not be the best problem-solving strategy.⁴⁶

Second, Brussels' 'Europeanization' strategy and somewhat dirigiste policy of enlargement did not contradict the EU-centred mainstream discourse in the Baltic states and Poland. The return to Europe was seen by these nations not only in terms of detaching themselves from the Cold-War and Soviet past but also in terms of protecting the border with Russia and the 'East' in general. As noted by Eiki Berg 'after fifty years of Soviet occupation and uncontrolled Eastern immigration, control of the Eastern border has become virtually synonymous with independence, statehood, and ethno-national survival.'⁴⁷

Third, the 2004 enlargement discourse, its 'Baltic' part, to an extent 'rivals' the 'northern' discourse of the 1995 enlargement. One reason for that might be that the Baltic countries were not very responsive towards the idea of the 'northern dimension', perceiving it merely as Finland's project of fostering Finnish interests in the EU and drawing the EU's attention and resources

⁴⁵ Chris Patten Russia's Hell-Hole Enclave in The Guardian, April 7, 2001
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/russia/article/0,2763,469844,00.html>

⁴⁶ Moshes A. Europe Without Visas: Does Russia Have a Chance. PONARS Policy Memo 302, 2004; Fairlie L. and Sergounin A. Are Borders Barriers? EU Enlargement and the Russian Region of Kaliningrad, FIIA, 2003

⁴⁷ Berg E. and Ehin P. EU accession, Schengen, and the Estonian-Russian Border Regime in Kasekamp A. (ed.) The Estonian Foreign Policy Yearbook 2004. The Estonian Foreign Policy Institute, 2004

towards the region.⁴⁸ Following this ‘balance of interest’ argument, one may see Poland as the next biggest competitor. Indeed, the Polish idea of an Eastern dimension emulates the Northern Dimension just as much as it competes with it.⁴⁹ In the case of the Eastern Dimension, the EU’s resources are deflected away from the Russian border.

To sum up, the issue of the EU’s Russian border has again been redefined in the context of the discursive game of the new EU members.

Evolving EU border policies?

Enlargement has not only changed the content of the discourse around the EU’s Russian border but also expanded the political agenda. On the one hand, the rules and practices of Schengen were introduced on the Lithuanian border, which created practical difficulties for the Russian transit to Kaliningrad. Moreover, people living on the Russian-Estonian border, including a tiny minority of the indigenous Seto, lost the privilege of travelling to Estonia under a specially simplified regime. After rather tense negotiations with Russia (particularly on the Kaliningrad issue) between 2000 and 2002, the EU made the decision to adjust the border regime to cater for local needs. Today, Russians can travel to Kaliningrad via Lithuanian territory under a Facilitated Rail Transit Document (a single trip by rail) and Facilitated Transit Document (multiple trips by car) Scheme. In

⁴⁸ Raik K. Estonian Perspectives on the Northern Dimension in Hiski H. (ed.) *The Dynamic Aspects of the Northern Dimension*. University of Turku, Turku 1999.

⁴⁹ For criticism on the ED, see for instance Haukkala H. *Towards a Union of Dimensions, The effects of Eastern Enlargement on the Northern Dimension*. The FIIA Report 2, The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2004.

addition, Estonia agreed to provide several thousand Russian citizens living in the adjacent areas with multiple-entry visas. The visas are granted yearly and the issuance is regulated by the applicant's need to travel to Estonia frequently for religious or family reasons.

On the other hand, the EU seems to be developing its expanded Russian border according to the old formula of promoting cross-border cooperation. Between 2003 and 2004 two more Euroregions were established in Kaliningrad (Russia + Poland + Lithuania + Latvia) and in Pskov (Russia + Estonia). The projects, still in their infancy, are seen to form a network of cross-border cooperation between local authorities, increasing the social contact on both sides of the border.

Another important objective which the EU has been increasingly pursuing vis-à-vis its external border is that of securing the border and preventing the many risks, such as illegal border-crossings and human and drug trafficking, through effective and integrated 'border management'. In the EU's wording, the policy of 'border management' represents a mix of restrictive and cooperative approaches regarding the EU's outer border. For instance, the Commission's website enumerates the aims of border management as follows:

1. Facilitate the flow of trade and people across borders by improving border crossings' infrastructure facilities, strengthening national institutions and procedures (e.g. customs, veterinary agencies) and improving related infrastructure elsewhere within the country (e.g. multi-agency information systems).

2. Enhance the control at the border by strengthening the infrastructure and institutional capacities of border guard agencies, supporting border demarcation and promoting co-operation with national police.
3. Develop border regions, where required, both through regional development programmes and through programmes for cross-border co-operation.⁵⁰

In practice, ‘border management’ runs into the obvious difficulties of finding the balance between border control and cross-border cooperation. Following similar concerns regarding the disabling effect of Schengen, one might fear that ‘border management’ brings cross-border cooperation to a halt or that it channels it towards something that drastically contradicts the very idea of cross-border cooperation. When it comes to the Baltic states, more optimistic views surface, however. Membership of the EU (and NATO) makes the Baltic states more confident and somewhat relaxed in their dealings with Russia, thus allowing the governments to revert to ‘normal’ politics between ‘neighbours’.⁵¹ Similar arguments are made by some observers in the case of Poland.⁵² The validity of such optimism remains to be seen. What is clearer is that ‘border management’ will, for better or for worse, become a sort of post-enlargement border discourse in the EU.

In 2003, the Commission announced that after 2006 the existing instruments for its neighbourhood policies – the Tacis Cross-Border Cooperation Programme, Interreg, the Phare Cross-Border Cooperation Programme,

⁵⁰ <http://europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid/projects/cards/reg1.htm>

⁵¹ Berg E. and Ehin P. EU Accession, Schengen, and the Estonian-Russian Border Regime in Kasekamp A. (ed.) *The Estonian Foreign Policy...*

⁵² Cichocki J. *Direct Neighborhood: Border Issues and Visa Regulations – An Eastern Perspective* in Kempe I. *Beyond EU Enlargement. Vol 1.* Bertelsmann Foundation Publishers, Gutersloh 2001.

CARDS and MEDA – would be restructured into a new legal instrument – the New Neighbourhood Instrument (NNI).⁵³ Through the NNI, the EU intends to manage its enormous external border, including the prospective Romanian-Moldovan border. In such a case, the EU will inevitably face the problem of prioritizing, both in terms of deciding where to allocate its limited resources and determining which issue area to address. It is likely that the policy of cross-border management will be perpetuated – and prioritized – and will, in the framework of the NNI, embrace current EU cross-border cooperation projects.

Russia as a border-making actor

On the Russian side, the EU's border-making efforts have been met with mixed feelings. The prevailing attitude in the late 1990s was that of cautious optimism, particularly at the regional level. The optimism evaporated, however, when it became obvious that the Northern Dimension and other projects would not bring to border regions the expected financial support. When it comes to cross-border cooperation, particularly with regard to the Euroregions, confusion and disillusionment have been growing, both among experts and instances involved in the actual work. For example, as regards the EU's recent decision to launch a new Euroregion Pskov, some observers doubt the plausibility of the project and its relevance to local needs. As Lev Shlosberg, regional leader of the democratic Yabloko party, notes: "there is huge confusion regarding the term Euroregion. We should concentrate on strategy, leaving aside terminology. Up to now, there has been no vision of

⁵³ See European Commission Communication "Paving the way for the New Neighbourhood Instrument" COM (2003).

how the Pskov region should develop in the future, particularly in the realm of cross-border cooperation. We should think about the substance, of which the Euroregion is currently devoid.”⁵⁴

For Moscow, cross-border cooperation on the Northwest has not been a priority, as it was regarded as ‘low politics’ and a policy field that the centre could delegate to regions. Recent trends towards centralization of power in the hands of the centre, the establishment of the Northwestern Federal District in 2000, have not resulted in any new policy with regard to Russia’s border regions. Rather, the centralization and the inevitable bureaucratization do not create a positive environment for local grass-roots initiatives and actual cooperation.

Nonetheless, the problem of managing a common border has a rising profile in Russia’s EU policy and Russia-EU relations. Enlargement and the subsequent Kaliningrad visa problem have propelled the border issues to the top of the Russia-EU political agenda. In the midst of the Kaliningrad crisis, Russia’s key decision-makers, prominent politicians, and even President Putin himself, expressed deep concern that the enlarged EU might jeopardize the rights of Russian citizens to travel to another part of their country. In addition, the expansion of Schengen was perceived as the widening of a symbolic wall that excludes Russia from Europe. Up to now, the issue of the common border has had a low conflict potential in Russia-EU relations but, as the Kaliningrad case shows, it reflects Moscow’s geopolitical concerns regarding Russia’s role and place on the continent.

⁵⁴ Shlosberg L. A Euroregion or a EuroDead-end? (Evroregion ili evrotupic?) Interview for The Pskov News, 31.05.2003, available at <http://pln.ru/opposition/7362.html>

3. What's new about today's EU-Russian border?

This paper has attempted to grapple with the EU-Russian border changes that have been taking place in the interim period between the EU's two enlargements and beyond. At the same time, the question mark at the end of the title implies that there is still uncertainty as to whether the new post-2004 EU-Russian border is indeed 'new'. This of course leads to another question, namely how this 'novelty', change (or lack of it), continuum or whatever, can best be assessed? In other words, what factors should be taken into consideration when examining the effects that the enlargement of a unique supranational actor has on this actor's own border, in effect something which is thought to delineate the limits of this actor both geographically and legally? How can we measure the border change other than by simply marking its new location on the political map?

A starting point that was chosen by this author was to look at discourses and the process of defining what is meant by a border, described here as a 'teleological game.' The enlargements of 1995 and, most recently, of 2004 gave rise to two different discourses in which the EU's Russian border was portrayed differently. Thus the Finnish-Russian border was perceived in the earlier discourses as a channel for cooperation, whereas the prevailing discourse in the Baltic states tends to view the EU's external border more cautiously as a line protecting the EU's internal stability against external risks. On closer inspection, it appears that at the heart of these debates lie the interests of these states and that EU membership is the most crucial factor that shapes these interests. In other words, it was not so much the Russian border that concerned the states but their future position in the EU. This goes

some way towards explaining why the EU still does not have any coordinated ‘border policy’ towards Russia but rather a mix of projects, initiatives and even declarations. Such a viewpoint can lead one to conclude that the border is nothing more than a subject or an instrument for the member states to further other more important interests and goals, never a goal in itself.⁵⁵ The border doesn’t change by itself; it is the interests and discourse that drive the change.

This is, however, only one side of the coin. The EU-Russian border change can also be understood in a more general sense, as that of increasing ‘Europeanization’ of the border. With every enlargement, the EU has an increasing need to define its border instruments, identify priorities, reallocate funding and so forth. In the case of the ‘Big Bang’ enlargement, the EU was preoccupied with assisting the applicant countries in catching up with accession criteria, thus ensuring their respective border regimes would come in line with the emerging EU common border regime, be it the present Schengen Agreement or its modified version. Another implication of the enlargement is the emergence of a peculiar EU border which has *de facto* replaced the interstate Russia-Baltic border without changing its legal status, as the border treaty between Russia and Latvia and Estonia is still pending. This aspect of ‘Europeanization’ demonstrates the increasing role of the EU’s supranational institutions with respect to designing the EU border regime. This poses both challenges and opportunities for the EU. On the opportunities front, one can argue that Brussels will be in a better position to make the border policies of the respective member states constructive. For

⁵⁵ The Finnish idea of the Northern Dimension was criticized (also by the Russian side) for precisely this reason.

instance, Aalto argues that there is a shift in the Estonian position towards the Northern Dimension ‘from somewhat suspicious views in the late 1990s to a tacit and relatively positive acceptance and finally to an embrace’.⁵⁶ In Aalto’s view, this signifies the strength of the EU to ‘socialize’ its new members. The ‘socialization’ of the new EU members, their coming to grips with the new EU environment, is also a process in which not only Brussels and national governments play a role but also the many regional, sub-regional, social actors, associations and networks that populate the ‘EU-world’. As the case of Finland shows, border regions have their own place in the border discourse. This is something that often tends to be overlooked if one focuses on such aspects of border regime as Schengen, visas, migration and so forth. In fact, these issues are also dealt with by grass-roots organizations. For instance, the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) actively works with local governments, EU institutions and decision-makers, thus influencing European and regional politics.⁵⁷ In this connection, Brussels should concentrate not only on imposing its own power on border states (and regions) in shaping their border policies but also on sharing power with other actors, and efforts to ‘empower’ regions. Cross-border cooperation, particularly in the framework of Euroregions, is the area where this positive ‘EU-socialization’ should take place. In that respect, the EU-Russian border presents a challenge, as nascent Russian-Baltic Euroregions lack substance.

⁵⁶ Aalto P. in Kasekamp A. (ed.) *The Estonian Foreign Policy ...*

⁵⁷ See, for instance, the AEBR Recommendations for cross-border security and cooperation on the future external borders of the EU, taking account of the Schengen Treaty. July 2003 at <http://www.aebr.net/>

Finally, the notion of ‘change’ can also be interpreted in the sense that, for borders, change poses a threat. Borders are meant to be stable for the sake of stability in the area they embrace. Change implies instability, disorder and the emergence of an unwanted ‘hole in the wall’. In the case of the Finnish-Russian border, ‘stability’ is often presented as an asset, something inherently positive as opposed to the unstable borders in the Balkans, for instance. Nonetheless, the ‘stability’ of the EU-Russian border may have its dark side, as it doesn’t provide for essential political interaction between Russia and the EU, let alone some possible integration spillover. It is this stability that is very easy to turn into marginalization, or peripherization of the border. In this case, the new EU-Russian border will run the risk of becoming an impermeable normative divide.