

# Königsberg Bridgehead

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## JOURNEYS TO KANT

### 1.

The first time I came to these parts was with my family in the summer of 1976.

Those days have not faded from memory even after quarter of a century. We were young, and for the first time in our lives we were holidaying with the children in a real Guesthouse.

In the little town, the image of a real *German* resort had not yet been effaced. Formerly it was called Rauschen and had been very fashionable in the period between the World Wars. In those days there was even a special express from Berlin to Rauschen, with no visas nor inspections, through the *Danzig corridor*. Thirty years after the war, the little town, though somewhat dilapidated, was still pleasant. Old villas, farms, guesthouses, pine trees, dunes, the sea.

That summer, my wife and I avidly read *Joseph* and his brothers. It was strange to discover that Thomas Mann wrote his book here in *Rauschen*, in this little house here (as the tour guide showed us) and not far away, on the *Curonian Spit*, in the Lithuanian *Nida*, through which I later departed by bus. Thomas Mann lived in *Rauschen* in the summer of 1929. He even built himself a house there which stands to this day.

Time is a mysterious element: one day a moment arrives when the increasing weight of years begins to act as a lens, no longer distancing us from the past, but bringing it closer, magnifying it.

That is what is happening now in Kaliningrad, as it celebrates the 750th anniversary of Königsberg. The city has awoken from its long oblivion and looks around asking – “So! What was here before?”

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The general feeling from that strange and disturbing journey long ago does not allow itself to be forgotten. The feeling of an alien cemetery; a ghostly land, looming through a normal Soviet provincial centre. We roamed around the blackened

skeleton of the cathedral, like an enormous battleship sunk by the shore. Walls of red brick, pitted by tank shells. The heavy tiled roof, freed from burnt-out rafters, collapsed as far back as that terrible night of 30 August 1944, when the old town of Kneiphof ceased to exist following an attack by the Royal Air Force. Much later, I saw similar marks of bombing raids in London on the building of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. War pitilessly matches ruin with ruin.

There were gaping holes in the headless towers. Inside, everything had burnt out and collapsed. But in a strange way the ruins retained their dignity.

## THE SHADOWS OF WAR

It is well known that the future of the postwar world was decided at three meetings of the Big Three in Tehran, Yalta and Potsdam.

Roosevelt died on 12 April 1945, and the USA was represented at Potsdam by Truman, while Churchill unexpectedly and dramatically lost the first postwar election in 1945, and did not complete the Potsdam conference. But of the three he alone, rejected by his own people at a moment of supreme triumph, had the time and energy to leave memoirs, for which he later received the Nobel prize for literature (a poor consolation for a man “*DEPRIVED OF THE POWER TO DETERMINE THE FUTURE*”).

Already in Tehran, Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill discussed the appearance of the postwar world and their claims. They also spoke of the future irrevocable partition of Germany.

Churchill recalled Stalin’s words: “There are no ways of blocking the movement towards unification. The Germans will always strive to unite and take revenge. We must be strong enough to defeat them if they ever start another war.”

(Churchill *The Second World War*, Moscow, 1998, Vol. 5, p. 252.)

Among other things, Churchill argued on behalf of the future Polish state.

“Stalin said that the Russians would like to have the ice-free port of Königsberg and sketched a possible line on the map. In this way, Russia would be as it were breathing down Germany’s neck. If he gets this, he will be ready to agree to my formula for Poland.”[1]

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The English bombed Königsberg on 27 and 30 August 1944, which was after this conversation had taken place. The fate of Königsberg had not yet been decided, although it had already taken shape.

Reflecting now on the reasons for the bombardment, I am not prepared to accuse the English of destroying Königsberg so that it would not fall into the hands of the Russians, as was often written in Soviet books (although such things have indeed happened). The cruellest war in history was raging and no-one was too particular in it, especially if viewed from 2005.

In 1940 and 1941, England and above all London withstood the cruellest bombardments, traces of which can be found even now. In June and July more than 3,000 V-1 missiles, “doodlebugs” as the Londoners called them, were launched against London.

Churchill:

From time to time the “Discovery” Channel shows the television documentary *The Battle of Britain*. The commentator asserts that if the rocket bombardments had gone on for another month, the English would have sought a separate peace. The Germans also thought so, unlike the stubborn English.

Later, 1,359 V-2 rockets were launched against London: throughout August and September 1944, the German bombardments of London continued.

By the end of the campaign, some 2,000 English airmen had perished in the defence of London.

The purpose of both sides was the economic and moral collapse of the enemy. The attack on Königsberg has to be seen in this context.

Let us not forget that on 6 June 1944 the Allies began the massive landing in Normandy – operation “Overlord” – and had started to drive the Germans across the whole of Europe. On 5 June Rome was liberated, on 25 August Paris rose up and was liberated, and on 3 September Montgomery entered Brussels.

One further thing: the fate of Königsberg was linked to the fate of Warsaw, as was the fate of East Prussia to that of Poland (remember: on 1 August 1944 the Warsaw uprising, headed by the Kraiovy army, broke out, and had failed bloodily by October, not having received the expected help from the Russians).

Throughout that time, secret and tense messages were being exchanged between Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin concerning the fate of the Warsaw uprising. The Allies requested Stalin to allow them to use frontline Soviet airfields for the landing and refuelling of aircraft dropping munitions to the rebels in Warsaw. (Not only did Stalin himself not help, he also curtly refused the Allied request.) Churchill bombed Königsberg, East Prussia’s nearest communications and administrative centre to Warsaw, to destruction.

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*At the north-eastern corner of the cathedral, at a place where nothing remained of the ancient island city, we stood for a long time at the “Stoa KANTIANA”, strangely unharmed in this chaos. This is not a tomb, but actually a memorial to Immanuel Kant. The Stoa was erected by the architect Friedrich Lars on the bi-centenary of the philosopher’s birth, which was celebrated in 1924. In defiance of general opinion, the sage’s remains were left undisturbed in the Professors’ vault in the Cathedral. After all, close by stood the ancient Albertina, the famous University of Königsberg, founded as early as 1544. For centuries, the Cathedral was the university church. Kant was the last of the professors of Albertina to be buried in the Cathedral.*

*The memorial of the unassuming Kant turned out to be unharmed, as if enchanted – which has astonished all who have been here: both at the time in the still smoking ruins, and afterwards even to this day.*

*There is something of ancient Egypt in this: across the green waves of the park that has grown up on the foundations of the old town, the Stoa Kantiana, a frail bark on slender columns of red sandstone, bears the seer’s form ever further into eternity. Ascetic simplicity, as in Kant’s house: a plaque and inscription on the wall: “Immanuel Kant 1724-1804”.*

At one time, soon after the war, some kind of craze started among the Russian soldiers – to write something clever on the Kantian walls. The graffiti were erased, and reappeared. In chalk. In paint or scratched with nails. In fuel oil. Photography saved one of them (in chalk): it is in the museum. Some half-educated admirer of materialism didactically wrote: “Now are you convinced that the world is material”?

Probably he regarded the transformation of the city, where Kant was born, studied, taught, thought and died, into dust and debris as the final triumph of materialism.

It is unlikely that he knew of Kant’s words from the “Universal Natural History and Theory of Heaven”: “Give me the material, and I will create a world out of it”.<sup>[1]</sup>

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Perhaps it is thanks to this miraculous survival, or to the famous name, or perhaps out of piety towards German philosophical academia, preserved from Soviet times, but with each passing year Kant is increasingly becoming something like a city saint or patron of modern Kaliningrad.

In front of the old building of Kaliningrad University (where the new main block of Albertina stood) they have restored a monument (it was cast in Germany from a maquette that was found) which was created in the nineteenth century by Christian Daniel Rauch.

At the university, there are readings from Kant, his works are published, dissertations on Kant are defended. Professor Kant is once again the most popular citizen of the Russian city that has arisen on the ruins of Königsberg and that did not read his works.

Both during his life and to this day, many strive to enter into debate with Kant. He would have welcomed this.

*The Rector of the university, born in Kaliningrad (that is important here), Andrey Pavlovich Klemishev, has a sensitive attitude to the handing-down of traditions.*

*To become a new "Albertina", he says, the Kaliningrad University has a very long road to travel, and above all it must seriously raise the level and quality of teaching and research, the organisation of independent university life, the professorial staff and students, and restore the traditions of European and German universities. We must renew links with the best Russian and European universities, and install modern equipment. We have to work, and not put on airs. It is for just this purpose that the first European faculty in Russia has been created here together with the Baltic University centre, and a European Union information centre. For this purpose, a never-ending stream of international conferences is being held at the university, and we are running an international journal on the internet.*

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At Kaliningrad University there is a museum which brings together what little remains of the old Albertina. The museum staff lovingly show all the most interesting items. The miraculously preserved books from the famous Walenrod library that was housed in the cathedral, and symbols of the nineteenth century, student swords and caps, an exercise yard for delinquent students, fragments of didactic bas-reliefs in that courtyard, and engravings and photographs. On top of a cupboard in the office of the museum there stood (and probably still stands) a large picture from the Soviet 1950s, depicting the historic meeting between Karamzin and Kant.

Karamzin, as an officer of the postwar military administration, is imposingly seated in an armchair, one leg over the other; Kant, wizened and old, scurries around in front of him.

The picture is pathetic and false, and for that reason it is not exhibited. It deserves to be in another exhibition, which would show the agonising evolution of Russian consciousness, the reworking of the European inheritance. The theme is not complete but, in essence, reflects all the creative strivings of present-day Kaliningrad: Russian culture and this land, conflict and coexistence.

## KANT AND KARAMZIN

Since we revived the *Herald of Europe*, I have had a personal relationship with Kaliningrad. The founder and first editor of the *Herald of Europe* was, after all, the unforgettable Nikolai Mikhailovich Karamzin. It was through Königsberg that he started his European journey, later described by him in the famous *Letters of a Russian Traveller*. At that time, in 1789, he was 23 years old but his relative youth did not prevent his meeting Kant.

Karamzin described his visit to Kant in detail (as far as I know, Kant made no record at all of this visit from a Russian not of his acquaintance).

Let us read Karamzin.

*Königsberg, June 19, 1789.*

*...Königsberg, capital of Prussia, is one of the large cities of Europe, being about fifteen versts[2] in circumference.*

Karamzin is not yet fully Karamzin. The creator of the new Russian prose, journalism, literature and history has still to come into his own. The observations are unpretentious, but the language is wooden.

*“I saw quite a few good houses, but none as large as in Moscow or St Petersburg, although on the whole Königsberg is built almost better than Moscow.”*

The local garrison is so numerous that one sees uniforms everywhere... Dark blue uniforms, light blue and green with red, white and orange lapels. But here is the famous excerpt:

*“...Only yesterday after lunch (note this detail, he didn't try to invite himself to lunch) I visited the renowned Kant, the profound, subtle metaphysician, who refutes both Malebranche and Leibnitz, and Hume and Bonnet, Kant – whom the Jewish Socrates, the late Mendelssohn, named as none other than der alles zermalmende Kant, that is, the all-destroying Kant.*

*I had no letters of introduction, but courage overcomes all obstacles, and the doors to his study were opened to me.”*

Courage is courage, but how, with what words did he prepare for the meeting?

*“I am a Russian nobleman, I love great men and desire to express my esteem for Kant”.*

Rather strained...

*“He at once asked me to sit down, saying: ‘what I have written cannot please everybody; not many people like metaphysical subtleties’.*

*For half an hour, we spoke of various things: of journeys, of China, of the discoveries of the New World”.*

Karamzin does not give details, but the general subject of the conversation is easy to imagine... Kant is a polite man. He does not pester people with questions. But then it is perfectly polite to ask a person who has burst into your house:

– Where have you come from and where are you going? And with what, so to speak, aims?

Karamzin replies in detail. About St Petersburg, about Moscow.

– You’re a Moscovite, that’s so interesting. (Says Kant, presumably without enthusiasm).

– No, I spent my childhood in the depths of Russia, on the Volga, if you know of it.

Kant does know, he has given a student course in physical geography 46 times.

The conversation comes to life.

Is it true that the Volga is so great? Kant, of course, has read Pallas and Miller, who travelled all over Russia and described it, but in front of him there sits a young man who grew up on the Volga! Incredible. And beyond the Volga there are the Tartars, the Urals, then Siberia, China. A gigantic, unimaginable, incorrigible void.

Kant had very regular, expressive, spiritual facial features and enormous blue eyes. To those who saw them they seemed larger than they really were, because they were of a strange, rarely encountered ethereal light blue and slightly moist, which increased their brilliance and piercing quality... In conversation, he had the mannerism of suddenly raising his eyes and drinking in his interlocutor with those eyes – recounted the philosopher Merab Mamardashvili[3], as if writing of a close acquaintance, two hundred years later in *The Kant Variations*.

Karamzin, is probably showing off a little, he is young after all, about the origins of his own family, the inhabitants of the Volga area, Tartars and Cossacks, and Razin.

*“One had to marvel at his historical and geographical knowledge, which, it seemed, could in itself overload the storehouse of human memory; but this was for him, as the Germans say, a side-issue.*

*Then I, not without a wrench (Karamzin’s emphasis), turned the conversation towards the nature and morality of man; and this is what I was able to retain in my memory from his arguments:*

*‘.. I speak of a moral law: we call it the conscience, the sense of good and evil, but they do exist. I have lied, no-one knows of my lie, but I am ashamed – probability is not an obvious matter when we are speaking of the future life; but having considered*



*everything, the reason commands us to believe in it...But speaking of our definitions, of the future life and so on, and the already proposed existence of an Eternal creative reason, everything has some purpose, and everything is a blessing of the creator.'*

*What? How?...But here the leading sage admits his ignorance; here the light of reason goes out and we are left in the dark; only the imagination can take wing in this darkness and give shape to the insubstantial."*

*– Esteemed Master! Forgive me if in these lines I have garbled your thoughts!...*

*Kant speaks rapidly, rather quietly and obscurely, and for that reason I had to strain every nerve of my hearing in listening to him. His house was small, and there was little furniture in it, everything was simple, except... for his metaphysics.*

This text from *Letters of a Russian Traveller* has been quoted many times. In the annals of Russian memoirs, it is difficult to find a document of greater importance – direct evidence of a meeting of people of Western and Russian culture. Such meetings were few. Karamzin was young and green, bold to the point of insolence, and unschooled in manners. It was unheard of to come to Kant just like that, with no invitation, no recommendations. To breach the established order of life, to impose oneself for three hours, was absolutely impossible for a European, but for an admiring young barbarian, forgivable. From Karamzin's text, you can feel the incredible strain imposed on him by this visit.

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In his book *A Portrayal of the Life and Character of Immanuel Kant* (1804), Ludwig Ernst Borovsky writes:

*"... Kant rose at 5 o'clock every morning; this routine remained unbroken for many years. He devoted one to two hours a day (and formerly up to five hours) to lectures...*

*Then before lunch he engaged himself in the revision of those works which he still wished to give to the world...*

*Kant usually invited a small circle of people to his modest lunches: three or four guests, imparting to their meal the delights of company and conversation on the widest of fields deserving of interest and study... Towards evening he took a stroll... This was one of those walks Königsberg has in abundance that dispel sadness and calm the mind. Then, at the end of the day, Kant immersed himself in reading, whose subject could relate to the most diverse of spheres and fields. When the chiming of the clock signalled that it was already ten, Kant, not permitting a single exception in this, went to bed and sleep never failed him".[4]*

*...“In intellectual circles in Europe, the Königsberg sage was famous for his philosophical teaching, while among the ordinary people of Königsberg, far removed*



from metaphysical niceties, the pedantic, slightly eccentric, unchangingly well-disposed Herr Professor Kant was a deeply respected and honoured personage, the original *good soul* of old Königsberg, its local landmark.”[4]

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During the Seven Years War, Königsberg was part of the Russian Empire. A Russian administration governed the city, but its life was almost unchanged.

Here is an account of Kant’s lecturing activities:

Kant gave a course in logic 54 times, metaphysics 49 times, moral philosophy 28 times, natural law 12 times, encyclopaedia of philosophy 11 times, natural theology once, pedagogics 4 times, anthropology 24 times, physical geography 46 times, theoretical physics 20 times, mathematics 16 times, mechanical sciences twice, and mineralogy once.

“Through his activity, he exerted a profound influence on the outlook of the country’s ruling classes. Over a period of several decades, almost all the officials and ecclesiastics, teachers and doctors of old Prussia and the eastern provinces bordering it passed through his school. Thanks to him, the insignificant, provincial university advanced to the first rank of German higher education establishments.”[5]

Merab Mamardashvili asked in his lectures:

– How are we to understand this dictum of Kant’s: “Hope in God is so absolute, that we cannot involve hope in him in any of our own affairs”?

We are free because we are guilty, only total guilt makes us free.

– What does “total guilt” mean? What is Kant thinking? How is it possible to think in this way? What can one do in order to think in that way?

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And how does all this connect with the fate of Kaliningrad? Where is the answer, the hidden key? Where is the main hoard, the secret deposited not in the fortresses of Königsberg, nor in deep vaults, but in the very structure of human thoughts and the principles of coexistence?

How are we now to organise life in Russia, in Europe, and throughout the world? On what basis: universal law, acknowledged by the peoples? On the basis of roots, attachment to the soil, the nation?

The charred earth of Königsberg does not allow us to forget where that leads.

Kant was indifferent to all that, the first citizen of the world, a *cosmopolitan*. The national to him was of little significance. He was seeking answers to the eternal conversation between man and God.

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*Notes on Nationalism* was written by George Orwell 60 years ago, in May 1945, when left-wing intellectuals were intoxicated with the great victory.

“By nationalism I mean first of all the habit of assuming that human beings can be classified like insects and that whole blocks of millions or tens of millions of people can be confidently labelled “good” or “bad” (p.301). But secondly, and this is much more important – I mean the habit of identifying oneself with a single nation or other unit, placing it beyond good and evil and recognising no other duty than that of advancing its interests...

By patriotism I mean devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world, but has no wish to force on other people...”

For example, Jerzy Marek Nowakowski, a former deputy minister, writes:

“In 1939, after Germany declared its demands concerning an extraterritorial motorway and railway line through the so-called “Polish corridor” to East Prussia, Count Ciano put forward a proposal: “A tunnel – that is the solution of the problem”, he exhorted our ambassador Venyava-Dlugoshovski”.

In Russia also, there were people seriously speaking of the need for a tunnel to the Kaliningrad province.

Nationalism is inseparable from the desire for power. The abiding purpose of every nationalist is to secure more power and more prestige, not for himself, but for the nation or other unit in which he has chosen to sink his own individuality.”

Astonishing agreement with the thoughts of the Russian philosopher Vladimir Soloviev, whom the sceptic Orwell probably never read. In his famous work *The National Question in Russia*, Soloviev showed how “*the positive force of nationality turns into the negative thrust of nationalism*. And further: “Taken to extreme intensity, nationalism ruins the people that have fallen into it, making it an enemy of humanity, which will always be stronger than an individual people”.[6]

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This was perhaps the main theme of postwar German philosophy and literature. Not populist literature. The theme of the reflections of people who had retained moral feeling and reason, trying to understand why the catastrophe occurred.

If guilt is total, then it is possible to be free, that is, responsible and of sound mind...

Count Hans von Lendorf described how the Russian victors entered Königsberg on 10 April 1945:

“From the Köningstrasse, through the Rossherter Markt and further to the Castle itself, there winds a gigantic serpent of troops moving into the city, and we now found ourselves within the noose that it formed...

The Königsberg of 1945, I say to myself over and over again. What is happening: this old, good-natured, worthy city, which moreover had never been considered of the first rank, which was even somewhat looked down on before, was just awaiting this tremendous spectacle, to reveal itself and disappear!

And how skilfully it managed this, hiding its secret from us... Only the storms of that last summer, the two English raids, tore the mask from that face and paved the way for the arrival of this moment. We are floating in a flow of red-hot lava, cast down onto the earth from some evil star... Between the ruins engulfed in flames a wild mob, without beginning or end, floods through the streets. But is all this really happening today, on this day? Didn't this happen two thousand, ten thousand years ago, or perhaps it will have to happen that many years from now? ...

I know just one thing: this is victory, victory as it looks in 1945, as it should look. The laughable and nightmarish details of which the whole picture is composed appear to me as inevitable actions and reactions within a single physico-chemical process. This boundless, unfathomable performance taking place here, for whom is it being staged? Who is seeing it all? Or is all this absolutely meaningless and without purpose? Or is God himself demonstrating something? And this is not a moment in world history which passes by, it is world history itself at the given moment, the moment which had your name on it.

So look now. Herein lies the will and providence of the Lord. And the dirty, pitiful worm, the exhausted creature that is myself, trembles from profound bliss.”[7]

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Kant – Hope in God is so absolute that there is nothing to hope for...

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And now I'm here again... I've met the governor, and members of the Parliament. We've taken a small launch along the semi-derelict canals and channels of the Polessk region. The feeling is phantasmagorical, reminiscent of Tarkovsky's *Stalker*. Living pictures from Claude Laurent or Hubert Robert. Ancient remnants of an alien, hostile civilisation from another planet. The mossy stones of the canals. The rusty, vandalised mechanisms of long disused locks. The broken tiling of dilapidated roofs. But there is also the new: people have again begun to settle in these marvellous but abandoned places. Farms are being restored. Dykes are being strengthened. The old German stately homes and even churches are being restored. The "new Kaliningraders", having become rich, travelled across Europe, looked at their neighbours, the Poles and especially the Lithuanians, directed their attention towards the crumbling thick-walled houses of ancient red brick, the farms, next to which they grew up in five-storey blocks of flats and barracks. The old German villa, the farm, now these are smart and prestigious. Muscovites and St Peterburgers and businessmen from the furthestmost parts of Russia are becoming ever more interested in the property and prospects of the Kaliningrad province. Anyone who wants to work directly with the West, especially with the Baltic world, must have his base and his contacts here.

But overall, and this is visible from the cars, the shops, the restaurants, the new buildings, and the pace of life, in the province, as in the majority of medium-sized towns in Russia, there is no really big money yet. The money passes through it, in transit to its destinations, to Moscow and St Petersburg.

### THE ANTIQUES SHOP

Opposite the once stylish station, with its spacious glass canopy enclosing ten platforms, there is a little antiques shop.

There they sell, at very reasonable prices, Königsberg's past.

Old tableware (a properly managed conversation with the shop owner secures items in no way inferior to those on display in the city museum) from the Königsberg restaurants. I was shown plates with black (weekday) and with claret-coloured (festival) borders, even from the famous vault in the royal castle, the legendary restaurant "Blutgericht". Here in this shop of recent antiques is a rare selection of the medals, coins and emblems of the Third Reich. But basically, as in the sea after a shipwreck, every kind of bric-a-brac has accumulated here. Enamelled door-plates taken from long-vanished doors that used to lead to doctors, teachers and lawyers, all long dead.

Doorbells, letterboxes. Daggers and scabbards. Telescopes and compasses from ships cut up for scrap, books, postcards and photographs of the already long gone

city, whose 750th anniversary a different town, grown up on its ruins, is preparing to celebrate.

I gave a start, suddenly glimpsing, in the shop window among a heap of ironmongery, a little badge from the “Albertina” (with its famous emblem – a knight in armour with a sword). The badge probably dated from 1944, when Königsberg University under the bombs was celebrating its 400th anniversary. Now I am wearing it.

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The name in the Cyrillic alphabet is Калининград. Being at the Western border of the Soviet Union, it was assumed from the start that it would be written in Roman script – Kaliningrad – which looks entirely in keeping.

The gothic of the usual letters and the capital K, the most important, remain, and the sharp-pointed L, is architecturally extremely important here imitating the spire of the cathedral on the square. And, of course the G (g), very Germanic – Germany. There is something very generally Baltic, and unifying, in this sound, reminiscent also of Tallinn and even Stockholm.

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Gradually it is becoming clear that changing a name solves no cultural problem and that the original strata of culture continue to exist and live out their lives. In Brezhnev’s day, the subject was simply not discussed. The province was hidden away. Not only was the task of surpassing the previous owners of the lands, forests and rivers, towns and canals not set, there were no proposals even for maintaining them in decent condition.

(Another subject is whether the Socialist system, having received the ruins of an outlying capitalist country, was capable of this at all.) It would seem that the leaders of the USSR did not believe in the historical irrevocability of the acquisition. They tried not to draw attention to it, digging themselves into the ground with rocket silos. Then they simply forgot. After all, there were other problems.

The problems of the Kaliningrad province are acute precisely because they are the problems of any normal Russian province, rather average, mediocre, decrepit and cast out – but cast into the centre of Europe and moreover superimposed onto an alien cultural pattern, with which the very landscape was imbued.

Remember that the military confrontation reached a peak at the end of the seventies, that this territory was firstly, secondly and thirdly a military advanced post, a closed zone, a first strike border, just like Berlin, the most politically critical subject for postwar Germany. (So critical that even today Germany prefers not to dis-

cuss the problem of the Kaliningrad province with Russia directly, delegating the explosive problem to the EU.) However, under the resolutions of the Potsdam conference, Russia received the smaller part of East Prussia, and the larger part went to Poland and Lithuania, new members of the EU.

## THE CITIZENS

A quarter of a century ago, there were no Russian books on the prewar fate of this region, nor could there be. In the last ten years, many have appeared, both academic and popular. The study of local history is also bound up with the past, for which local historians needed the German language, and old books and old (including German) libraries... The German language here is in demand, and not only from the local historians. The local inhabitants are more dynamic than the majority of the inhabitants of Russian towns, with the exception possibly of the citizens of Moscow and St Petersburg. The average citizen of Kaliningrad goes to Lithuania, Germany and Poland several times more often than to mainland Russia.

In terms of origin, the modern population of the city and the province divides into three unequal parts. The first are the old inhabitants, children and grandchildren of those who arrived here in 1946 to 1950.

These represent quite a large proportion, about a third of the population. They settled in the abandoned German houses, they cleared away the ruins. They built and rebuilt, started up factories and launched ships.

The city itself has basically been built anew, both the University and the Theatre, the Palace of Arts, and schools, and residential homes.

But I would have difficulty in nominating these as the creators and bearers of a new regional or even exclave consciousness, of some kind of local Kaliningrad culture.

Another part consists of people who arrived here in the seventies and eighties, as a rule from internal Russian provinces. Many were former sailors or fishermen.

The third part, the newest, still the least assimilated, are the migrants of the last, tempestuous ten years. People from the countries of the CIS (the majority from Kazakhstan), and some from the Baltic countries. But there are few of these. In spite of all the problems, few Russians leave here. The third group is the most heterogeneous, unstable, and turbulent.

The province has not yet reached a population of even one million. Almost half of these live in Kaliningrad. Many here are military, past and present. Whole units and formations were transferred here from Germany, Poland and the Baltic States. They were transferred in haste, into temporary, poorly equipped settlements and barracks, and so it has remained. The base of the Baltic fleet is here, and it is by no means by chance that the present governor is an Admiral and former Commander

of the Fleet, the wise (in the administration, behind his back he was called “the non-crazy one”, which must demonstrate the difference between the present governor and the previous one) and optimistic Admiral Vladimir Yegorov.

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The most important argument in favour of the present name for the town is that those living there are already fourth generation citizens.

To refer to what now stands on the Pregoly (the river’s name has through some oversight remained) as Königsberg, is not the choice of the Russian or, more precisely, Russian-speaking population here. They understand both that the town is not Königsberg and that they are not citizens of Königsberg. In spite of this, however, in a leisurely debate about names in the Kaliningrad newspapers and websites, the city is gradually taking on a different landscape in sound and in form. Königsberg and other old names are everywhere. On advertising hoardings, on cognac, beer and mineral water labels, in the names of hotels, restaurants and banks. It is not the old Slavonic style of lettering that is in fashion here, but the old Gothic, and a margarine is more likely to be named “Tilsit” than “Sudarynya”.

This echoes modern Greece, where the emblems and symbols of ancient Greece are ubiquitous on ranges of popular commercial brands.

At the same time, the self-awareness of the local business and political elite is growing; it is already distinctly different from the central Russian and is at a somewhat intermediate stage. It already experiences itself as a Russian tribe, shifted into the centre of Europe, and with each passing year it gazes more intently at the past of this land.

The local young people, unlike those in the Russian mainland, have been to Poland, Germany and Lithuania many times. Here people have more business with the West than with the East, with Moscow. Indeed, many have never been to the mainland at all. And have no desire to go there.

A university chauffeur, not long arrived from Belgorod, drove me to the airport. Life is incomparably more dynamic here, he said. And the money and the possibilities here are greater (Poland and Germany are the main external trading partners: 19.5% and 19% respectively of external trade volume, and about another 8% with Lithuania. The EU member countries account for 75% of the province’s external trade turnover.)

Even so, it has to be understood, that Kaliningrad is not Moscow, not St Petersburg, not one of the oil capitals, where the pavements are strewn with gold. What is certain, however, is that Kaliningrad is the most Europe-oriented city in Russia.

Königsberg is 750 years old.



In the Kaliningrad province, signatures are being collected for the city's historical name to be returned to it. The initiative will last two years. The appeal text reads: "Giving a tribute of respect to our native city on the threshold of its 750th anniversary, we want its worthy name to ring out, as it once did, proud and free".

## THE POLISH CORRIDOR

The tragedy of East Prussia did not start in 1945, nor even in 1939. It was a problem of the whole twentieth century.

The Versailles peace treaty of 1918 already doomed East Prussia to partition and restricted freedoms.

When nowadays people say that Poland has a hang-up about the word "corridor", thinking of the *Danzig corridor*, either they don't remember history well, or they expect more from it than it has given.

In principle, a nervous reaction to corridors could probably have been expected from the Germans. After all, Versailles took the territories of Danzig (Gdansk) and further along the sea *from Germany in favour of Poland*, while for communication with the cut-off East Prussia, there remained the totally controllable "Polish" (or "Danzig") corridor.

Right up to the Second World War, trains ran along this corridor from Berlin to Königsberg with locked carriages, with Polish frontier guards on the footplates, with customs inspection, visas and everything else that nobody in the world likes and everyone rightly considers an indignity.

To go from Berlin to Königsberg, it was necessary to obtain Polish and Lithuanian visas, which the travellers wrote about with concern every time.

In 1933, the writer George Ivanov undertook a car journey from Lithuania to Western Europe. Subsequently, he published his notes *Through Europe by Car*. He left us an impressive story about the "Polish corridor".

"At Königsberg, the car journey is interrupted "due to circumstances beyond our control". It is interrupted for me alone. My travel companions have Latvian passports, mine is a Nansen one. And in order to obtain a transit visa through the Polish corridor with documents which state: "d' origine russe, n'ayant acquis aucune autre nationalité" Warsaw must be consulted. It takes about 6 weeks to receive a reply, and it is by no means certain that it will be favourable. In short, I shall have to travel through the "corridor" by train (where visas are not required, they just hermetically seal the carriages), get out at Schneidemüll on the frontier, and there await the car... Five hours of exhausting bumping and jolting. Stations with Polish names. High railings between the lines (after all, the locked-in Nansenist might climb out of the window), empty platforms, lit with a ghastly, bright light..."

Jerzy Marek Nowakowski, a former deputy minister, writes:

“In 1939, after Germany declared its demands concerning an extraterritorial motorway and railway line through the so-called “Polish corridor” to East Prussia, Count Ciano put forward a proposal: “A tunnel – that is the solution of the problem”, he exhorted our ambassador Venyava-Dlugoshovski”.

History repeats itself: in Russia there are also people seriously talking about the need for a tunnel to the Kaliningrad province.

*(Yu. Kostyashov, G. Kretinin. Russians in East Prussia. Vol. 2. Diaries, letters, notes and recollections. Kaliningrad, “Yantarny skaz” 2001, p.237.)*

## THE METAPHYSICS OF THE FRONTIER

In the present dispute over Kaliningrad, there is a hidden agenda, which it is not done to speak about in public.

“We do not wish to turn Kaliningrad into a window into Europe for organised crime and illegal emigrants”.

“In Brussels, they are worried that the Kaliningrad province holds first place among the Russian regions for the numbers infected with HIV. This is a consequence of the widespread narcotics use and prostitution”.

In the EU, they consider that the Russians are deliberately dramatising the situation in order to look better in Russian eyes. In Moscow, they consider that Brussels has drowned the problem in bureaucracy, a problem which could have been resolved long ago, given the will.

And what about Russia, what are its interests?

Russia as a State has, of course, special interests which are not identical to the sum of the interests of all (or some) of its inhabitants.

These are first and foremost strategic questions: security, defence, frontiers. Encirclement. Communications. Ports, outlets to the sea.

I think that Russia has not yet fully realised why she has been given the Kaliningrad province and how important it is.

In the context of the traditional concept of confrontation with the West, its significance is obvious: on the one hand a bridgehead, and on the other an exclave. An island. Isolated. Militarily speaking: a pocket, a trap... The military understood this when 9/10 of the armed forces were withdrawn from there.

As a matter of fact, in any confrontation scenario, active or passive, of Russia and Europe (and NATO), the Kaliningrad province does not have a future. Perhaps just as a bridgehead for a first strike, an unsinkable aircraft carrier deployed far to the front. But an aircraft carrier which, even if unsinkable, can still be reduced to ashes, as the history of Königsberg shows.

If, however, one believes in the strategic and unswerving rapprochement of Russia and Europe then it becomes incredibly important. In integration, in the most unusual and unexpected forms, in a new strategy of European security that includes Russia. Then this really does emerge as an experimental test area, “a pilot region for co-operation”, a zone for the working out of the most varied mechanisms and schemes for economic, political, psychological, interpersonal and cultural interaction.

The frontier question is not the most difficult. But it is possible that it will be just this that for years determines the real direction of Russian–European relations.

“I cannot eat these eggs! They are of quite different size” said Hercule Poirot.

The great detective, as a true European, expressed in these words an important feature of the European Union, both a striving to unify and universalise policy, and also the inability to take account of completely different circumstances.

The present-day Kaliningrad is the last, but also the largest remnant of the Tehran-Yalta-Potsdam world system that has continued in existence from 1945 to our time.

A crafty exchange, when thousands of square kilometres were exchanged for millions of people, long in the past. And Poland is no longer a vassal of Moscow, but a European country, member of NATO, member of the European Union, and thus a friend and ally of Germany. And there are few that will now remember the people who determined the frontiers of postwar Europe.

Under a resolution of the Potsdam conference, the Soviet Union received the part of East Prussia with Königsberg. Poland received another (larger) part. Lithuania received Memel and part of the German and formally Polish territories. Since 1940, Lithuania had been part of the USSR, which the Allies never acknowledged, however Lithuania received the new East Prussian territories as a republic of the Soviet Union. (Stalin even tried to promote Lithuania together with the Ukraine and Byelorussia as constituents of the UNO, but did not succeed.) In 1990, with the declaration of Lithuanian independence, the Potsdam resolution operated to Lithuania’s advantage.

The Soviet “Diplomatic dictionary” of 1950 reads as follows:

“The conference *in principle* agreed to transfer to the Soviet Union possession of the city of Königsberg with the adjoining region (Art. VI) and determined the new Soviet frontier *right up to the final resolution* of territorial questions.” Incidentally, “the president of the USA and the prime minister of Great Britain declared that

they would uphold this resolution of the conference in the impending peaceful settlement". The settlement was delayed half a century.

But in the summer of 1946 the Kaliningrad province was formed as a part of the USSR. In 1946–1948, the local population was driven out of these territories. Many have written of the tragedy of the exodus. Better than the others was Siegfried Lenz in *The Museum of Local Studies*. And others less skilful also added to the literature.

Today this subject, still forbidden until recently, acutely disturbs the citizens of Kaliningrad. East Prussia was resettled, within the Polish borders by Poles, and in Lithuania by Lithuanians. And, in the Kaliningrad province formed in 1946, by immigrants: Russians, Byelorussians and Ukrainians.

Today Russians live here, and are already the fourth generation living here.

Today, Russia's rights to this territory are acknowledged by the world community and, consequently the rights of its population are also acknowledged.

As the first priority, the interests of this population must be taken into account.

The problems of the Kaliningrad province, which unfortunately in their time the officials did not understand (just like those in Moscow and in the European Union), are very complicated, sensitive, painful, complex problems, of social culture and civilisation, and not narrowly political and economic.

So what is the way forward, and in what direction should it be sought?

If we stay clear of all manoeuvring, thrusts, counterthrusts and demonstrations, then this question will most probably be resolved by compromise, without coercion. And most likely in stages, undramatically, boringly and imperceptibly.

People will travel, trains will run, pipelines will work, and the rest will be agreed by the officials.

In Kaliningrad now, they dream of some kind of Republican status. Now they talk of direct Presidential rule (poorly understanding what this really is), now they write of the need to introduce in the government of the Russian Federation the post of Vice-Premier for the Kaliningrad province thus making the province subject to this designated High Official.

Meanwhile, the thrust of a logical movement towards greater independence of the region can be discerned.

Kaliningrad is like the appendix. While everything is normal its presence is not noticed but once inflamed it becomes a crisis point. For a Europe-oriented Russia it can indeed become a "pilot region", if only real content is introduced into this at

present meaningless concept: the first zone of continuous, intensive economic and cultural interaction.

Christopher Patten jokingly spoke of the 5 million Chinese needed to transform Kaliningrad into a Baltic Hong Kong.

The Polish president Alexander Kwasniewski was worried that if the privileged transit system is retained, the population of the province will grow by 4 million. Curious that the figures came out so similar.

Today the population of the Kaliningrad province falls short of a million people, with a demographic structure that is not the most favourable for development.

What will develop here? Members of the Kaliningrad parliament, administrators and businessmen discussed this with me.

I think that in an initial period (some five to seven years), the current trends will continue. Assembly plants (like BMW or KIA), the production of components, and the like.

In the future, the province can become a major distribution centre for East–West trade (having in mind flows of goods from the Far East, Japan, Korea and China). The transit of goods and, such is the reality, also of people. The growth of the drugs business in the region merely shows that drug dealers recognise sooner than others the transit advantages of a region.

In other words, large volume transit. This means that the rail networks, motorways, and bridges must be improved, and warehouses must be constructed, and the vehicle reception areas, customs terminals and border crossings associated with them.

Analysts confirm that a major European telecommunications centre can be sited here – it is only necessary to create a favourable legal system for a TV and radio station, MMDS and cellular communications to be sited here.

Thirdly, the printing business. The printing of editions of newspapers and weekly magazines, advertisements and books. Simply clear away the clutter, and the money will flow in. At least until the cross-border potential differences in standard of living and wages are evened out.

The average monthly wage here is about 60 dollars a month (in Russia on average 64.3), and in Lithuania 280, in Poland 430 and in Germany more than 1000.

While the prices for electric power for industry here are five times lower than in Lithuania, and half those in Poland.[8]

With such an enormous potential difference, it should be sparking along the whole frontier. And it is sparking. Corruption in the customs, in the tax and other inspectorates, queues at the frontiers, murky rules for the export of profits...

What kind of money can arrive here in the first instance?

In Kaliningrad, they are firstly expecting Russian money that is sitting in Europe and in offshore accounts. Possibly it will be necessary to give them an amnesty to launder it here, not sending it immediately to mother Russia.

Secondly, money from the businessmen of Poland and the Baltic States (firstly Lithuania) who are seeking to invest their money on a larger scale and who are not satisfied with the local level of profits.

Thirdly, money from the Russian regions, seeking an outlet into Europe; from here they could start the laborious battle for European markets.

Fourthly, money from European programmes, which is worth striving for.

Fifthly, we should not forget about globalisation and the slogan “The Baltic Hong Kong”; South Korean and Chinese businessmen have been wanting to come here.

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And the ancient university with its traditions, inspiring reverence, the dignified rituals and the dazzling constellation of professors, who constituted the glory of Germany and world knowledge, and the all-destroying Kant!

In conclusion let us return to Kant. Kant directs us to think.

– He sees what these people would wish, that the world was built just as reliably before them, without them and after them, and does not understand how it is possible to resort to the image of God in the sense of such a world order. After all, I, moving along the path of the *binding force of self-awareness*, am an element in the world, without which this world would not have been...

Königsberg, happy birthplace of marzipans, well-brought up, rather dismally prim and proper Königsberg, where music from the European capitals from the year before last is playing in the parks, and the tram conductor greets all the passengers...

Königsberg, the first capital of the Protestant State in the world, into which (maybe fate's first irony) was transformed the stern order that stood here on the frontier of the Catholic world at the Polish-Lithuanian borders, being remade to such an extent that even the Grand Master wanted to become a temporal hereditary count.

And after all this, after the brilliant Albrecht, and everything good that followed – the reddish-brown Nazi uniform in the streets and spiders on their sleeves, and the vulgar “Heil”.

It was not Russian barbarians that inundated and swallowed up this world, this island of civilisation.

It itself determined its fate, by voting for Hitler. The city first of all betrayed itself, renouncing itself, and applauding the gauleiter of East Prussia Erich Koch, preaching here, to applause:

“Liberal education has been greatly overvalued, clear thinking is more important than any knowledge of the sciences, and the will of iron is stronger than any philosophising!” The gauleiter’s intellectual worthlessness was merely a foretaste of the worthlessness of the future secretary of the Regional Committee.

It was not the Russians who started the wave of renaming: Adolf Hitler Square and Avenue, Hermann Goering Strasse, and Königsstrasse became the SA Strasse in honour of the storm troopers...

The catastrophe was not the raids of 1944, nor the siege of 1945. This was merely the programmed, inevitable and expected denouement. The catastrophe was the voting in 1933 and the leading position of East Prussia in casting votes for the Nazis. Many understood this. The exodus started in 1933. Thomas Mann never came here again.

Kaliningrad and its environs became the last monument and museum in Europe of that age of merciless resistance and the shared guilt of already departed generations of Germans, Russians, Poles, Englishmen and Lithuanians.

The challenge, the riddle of Kaliningrad is much more serious than one would like to think.

It is metaphysical in its nature, emerging from the depths of history into the tunnel of the future.

And Russia will become a lonely and incongruous knight of a pathetic nature, I would say, if it does not find its place in the European and World system that is being created.

The Europeans, who desired to become not modest and prosperous inhabitants of their comfortable countries, but instead responsible members of a Greater Europe. With this new fortifying metal in their voice, they could also have understood that the challenge of Kaliningrad, all the inconveniences and annoyances associated with this vandalised, dilapidated and cheerless place, is a challenge not only to Russia, but also to her, Europe, to the very essence of her declared aims.



Königsberg-Kaliningrad, a Russian island in the European Union, does not stand here simply to be the *back yard* of civilisations that have turned their faces away from one another.

## COMMENTS

The Kaliningrad scandal is symptomatic. It is difficult to understand Russian bureaucrats. They stand for the development of the Kaliningrad region, they are concerned about its inhabitants but at the same time refuse entry to neighbours with whom they have close ties. Lithuania and Poland are both close neighbours, friends and partners of Kaliningrad. The inhabitants of Kaliningrad co-exist, do business, depend on those neighbouring countries and visit them more often than the ‘big land of Russia’.

We are told the question is not about Königsberg-Kaliningrad – this is big politics.

“This is an absolutely emotional, non-pragmatic decision. Now we might as well forget any negotiations over the Kaliningrad problem”, commented the deputy of Kaliningrad regional Duma Solomon Ginzburg in Izvestiya newspaper (29.06.05).

But, perhaps the Kremlin game is not so blunt and primitive (one would like to think). Perhaps it is not just connected to Kaliningrad and the Victory Day but to a general crisis of the EU and an attempt by Moscow to participate in this crisis?

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[1] Churchill, Vol.5, page 253

[2] 1 verst = 1.06 km

[3] Merab Mamardashvili (1930-1990), Soviet Georgian philosopher

[4] Lavrinovich, p.157

[5] Lavrinovich, p.174

[6] Count Hans von Lendorf. East Prussian diary, 1960. Translated by Svetlana Chervonaya, Quoted from Dittmar Albrecht, p. 137

[7] see note on previous page

[8] O Kusnetsova, B. Mau “The Kaliningrad province “from unsinkable aircraft carrier to unsinkable assembly plant” Brochure of the committee Russia in a united Europe. Moscow, 2002.