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MARGINALITY OR PROVINCIALITY?

PSKOV AND IVANGOROD AT THE INTERSECTION
OF RUSSIA'S TRANS-BORDER RELATIONS

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Abstract

My intention in this paper is to analyze the state of trans-border relationship between Russia, on the one hand, and Latvia and Estonia, on the other, in terms of interplay between central and non-central actors. Two basic concepts – that ones of *marginality* and *provinciality* – will be used as points of departure and compared with each other. Each of these concepts develops its own narrative and a discursive strategy. In some instances, these narratives may smoothly complement each other; and yet in other occurrences, they conflict in a manner that fuels "a battle of the story".

Conceptually, the paper is based upon the ideas developed by Noel Parker, Vladimir Kaganski and Dmitry Zamiatin that are adjusted to the study of trans-border relations. The paper argues that the Pskov oblast and the city of Ivangorod may be regarded as provinces and margins simultaneously, depending on the contextual frame under consideration. As parts of domestic conceptualizations, they would be better characterized as provinces, while entering the trans-national scene they may be labeled as margins.

Introduction

The current Russian – Estonian and Russian – Latvian borders have, historically speaking, been quite volatile, unstable and changing. Thinking in terms of the life cycles of borders, one may assume that these borders are still in their infancy. For the time being, they are heavily influenced by a variety of factors of both domestic and international origin, and may therefore be differently conceptualized.

My intention in this paper is to analyze the state of trans-border relationship between Russia, on the one hand, and Latvia and Estonia, on the other, seen in terms of interplay between central and non-central actors. Two basic concepts – that ones of *marginality* and *provinciality* – will be used as points of departure and also compared with each other. Each of these concepts develops its own narrative and a discursive strategy. In some instances, these narratives may smoothly complement each other; and yet in other occurrences, they conflict in a manner that fuels "a battle of the story".

The concept of marginality, as developed by Noel Parker, focuses on the questions the trans-border relations raise for the understanding of political space in general and the construction of Europe in particular. Conceptually, peripheries are presented as underdeveloped, inconveniently positioned, exposed to external dangers, and they are comprehended as subordinated territories. Alternatively, margins as rather autonomous spaces are able, under certain circumstances, to develop strategies of their own. Marginality, in Parker's vision, is equated with new opportunities and openings for regional actors. Thus, territories located at the intersection of different polities and identities ("cross-roads actors") are capable of comprehending how to make better use of their resources in terms of marginality through inclusive cooperation with adjacent territories. Margins are important components of different policy constellations because they usually have a room to maneuver and a meaningful degree of freedom in exploiting their location. Politically, margins are reluctant to accept that the core speaks for them; moreover, they may participate in defining the nature of the core itself[1].

The concept of margins may serve a good theoretical platform to study the trans-national roles played by non-central actors, since in order to qualify for a "margin", the region has to exist in two-way relations with at least two cores. In the meantime, the marginality theory does

[1] Parker 2000, p. 6.

not take into due consideration various natural differences between the two cores (one of them being domestic and the second one being foreign) and therefore fails to properly reflect the diverse patterns of core – margins affiliations and associations, which is well demonstrated in the case of Pskov.

A different – and seemingly more nuanced - spatial concept is developed by Russian author Vladimir Kaganskii who offers a four-chain explanatory framework containing the categories of Center, Province, Periphery and Borderlands. He, like Parker, also draws a semantic line of demarcation between province and periphery as two alternative concepts of cultural landscape. This differentiation appears to be reasonably applicable to the study of regions like the Pskov oblast. Province is depicted as a self-sufficient area, where the historically indigenous population dominates the cultural landscape and saturates the cultural milieu with meaningful texts, signifiers and images. Province is seen as a "nucleus of typicality", and a "base territory" for country's self-identification. Without province being there the spatial system would turn into an amorphous entity compressed between center and its borderlands[2]. Pskov arguably qualifies for the status and the role of Russian province seen from this analytical viewpoint.

The four constitutive elements of the above mentioned scheme are not mutually exclusive or antagonistic entities/constructs, since at certain junctures they may interpenetrate each other and converge. The center's elites may need to gain loyalty from the provinces. The provinces themselves might be interested in demonstrating this loyalty in order to ensure their stability that explicitly and intentionally may be represented as challenged by outsiders[3]. By the same token, borderlands and provinces may overlap to form a phenomenon called "border provinciality", to employ the definition elaborated by Kaganskii.

The concept of province, unlike that one of margins, gives priority to a variety of *domestic* liaisons between the center and non-centers, and is therefore mostly inward-oriented. This concept better grasps that at stake is not only international recognition of border regions' actorship but also their domestic subjectivity. This approach is very much in tune with the tradition of treating borders not only as instruments of inter-state relationship but also as intrinsic *social constructs* serving the purpose of cementing *national consolidation* and *internal* solidarity. In fact, identities need borders to mature and come into force, and yet the ways of

[2] Kaganskii 1997a.

[3] Glinskii 2003.

making use of the borders as indispensable elements of identity-forming vary from one region to another.

The second feature that makes province (in Kaganskii's interpretation) different from margin (in Parker's terms) consists of the rich cultural connotations. In political terms, province has to remain loyal to the (federal) center, albeit culturally it may challenge the center's hegemony, offering a variety of alternatives formulated mostly in identity-related terms. Identity may be used as a legitimizing force for cultural alienation and distancing of a non-central actor either from a core, or from another non-central actor. Identity, by the same token, may become a source of integrative drive, and thus trigger de-securitization (i.e. play down alarmist and threat-oriented attitudes through perceptional changes in the societal relationships). Identity, therefore, may create new social relations and modify ideational constructs[4].

According to my hypothesis, the Pskov oblast and the town of Ivangorod may be regarded as provinces and margins *simultaneously*, depending on the contextual frame one employs. As parts of domestic conceptualizations, they would be better characterized as provinces, while entering the trans-national scene they may be labeled as margins. Consequently, two different stories – that ones of marginality and provinciality – may co-exist and intermingle, laying foundations for two different *strategies of regional development*. The balance between these two strategies is determined to a large extent by the correlation between two different ways in which the regional identity is used as a discursive concept having some political connotations. One of them is centered around *exclusion*, which stipulates strong accent on «othering», bordering, distancing, isolation and securitization. The second one is conducive to the logic of *inclusion*, with de-securitization and concomitant strategies of engaging/integrating/including Russia. Since identity discourse creates differences, exclusion and inclusion may be regarded as intrinsic parts of any social identification, yet its scale is specifically large when the issues of insecurity are at stake[5]. This is even more so in border regions, where discourses tend to construct particular understandings of who are in and who are out and why; they operate on the basis of a self/other dichotomy, where the 'other' is an opposite conflict party, portrayed as an existential threat to the 'self'.[6]

[4] Botes 2003.

[5] Huysmans 2003.

[6] Diez 2003.

Of course, it has to be observed that the two border localities chosen for this analysis are not alike in terms of their political weight and significance. The Pskov oblast as a subject of federation is capable of offering its own agenda on a variety of issues, mostly that ones of socio-cultural profile. This is one of a few regions through which, historically speaking, a whole bunch of foreign influences used to penetrate into Russia. By the same token, the local identity of Pskov was nourished not only by a somehow tacit counterpoise to Moscow (which is a rather natural cultural counter-reaction to the preponderance and omnipresence of the capital) but to no lesser extent to St.Petersburg as well. As far as the case of Inavgorod is concerned, it represents an interest basically due to the fact that after 1991 this small town was administratively separated from its "twin", i.e. the town of Narva which was left on the Estonian side of the border. A part of my research plan would be to take a look at how Ivangorod has reacted to this separation, and whether the two parts of a previously single urban entity may be discursively represented as contrasting or complementing each other.

Structurally, the paper is divided into two topical blocks. I will start by exploring the possibilities and the limits of applying the concept of marginality to the Pskov region and – partly – Ivangorod. I will then discuss an alternative discourse – that one of provinciality – and will try to find some explanations the reasons of its attractiveness for the regional actors. In conclusion, I will summarize my findings and frame them theoretically.

1. The Story of Marginality: Pskov between Moscow and Brussels

Pskov and – to a certain degree - Ivangorod constitute different cases located at the interface of two competing cultures and political entities. The search for positive «in-between» solutions is underway as an intrinsic part of a "marginality strategy" that the border territories endeavour to implement. The strategy of marginality implies going beyond the over-dependence on the cores, and contains a great deal of border-breaking potential in a sense of making borders less divisive and more permeable. This implementation of this potential a lot depends upon the role(s) played by identity in border reconfiguration: a strategy of marginality can be a border-breaker through the logic of inclusiveness that is based on involving/engaging with neighbours in a search for mutually beneficial solutions.

It is true that most of the pervious attempts to institutionalize the projects based on a philosophy of being at the same time "in" and "out" have not succeeded to a satisfactory

degree. Historically, the "in-between" location was associated with unsuccessful experiences of countries like Ukraine or Belarus destined to stay in a "gray zone" and play the role of buffer territories. As for more contemporary examples, one can recall President Yeltsin's failed proposal of joint patrolling the Russian – Finnish border, and the idea of a "Baltic Schengen" promoted by the former prime minister Viktor Chernomyrdin. On the other hand, there is the most positive European experience (for example, the cases of Tornio-Haparanda or Valka-Valga) that has clearly shown that neither ethnic nor linguistic cleavages represent an insurmountable problem for de-bordering provided that the management of the whole process is effective and competent.

1.1. IN SEARCH FOR THE MEANINGS OF MARGINALITY

As a chain, a transit territory, a city-guardian, a point where Russia ends up, as well as constituting «almost Europe» - the region of Pskov has repeatedly experimented with all these and some other metaphors in its bid for rediscovering its marginal/in-between identity. Some of these metaphors point to remote – both spatially and temporally - semantic contexts that are reprocessed, transformed and saturated with a variety of new cultural, historical, and political meanings.

For the Russian territories bordering on Estonia and Latvia, pro-European sentiments are remarkably strong, although defensive reactions against what is perceived as threats are also discernible. Governor Mikhailov's articulation of the region's marginal identity is significantly inhibited and complicated by what could be thought of as a pro-imperial ideological background (in particular, in mid-1990s he authored a book entitled "The burden of the imperial nation" in which he articulated his views on how Russia has to start preparing to repel «the threat coming from the south»)[7]. It is quite indicative that the Pskov oblast gained the reputation of a fertile ground for politicians with a "national patriotic" background looking for electoral legitimacy: on the eve of the forthcoming gubernatorial election scheduled for fall 2004 among the prospective candidates are such figures as Alexei Mitrofanov (one of top members of Zhirinovskii's LDPR party) and Viktor Alksnis (known for his close liaisons with Soviet-nostalgic Communists and the restorationists).

Nevertheless, the idea of Pskov as a polity open towards Europe (and therefore having a role of its own) has never been abandoned. The border as such was never perceived, it seems,

[7] "*Narodniy sait*" (People's Site "The Truth about Pskov"), April 22, 2002, http://pskov.com.ua/?id=72.

among the local population as something fundamentally divisive. A peculiar cultural proof for such a state of affairs can be found in the fact that the Ivangorod's historical fortress became a site for a local discoteque[8]. According to Olga Brednikova, it would be equally acceptable for Russians to treat the fortresses of Ivangorod and Narva either as a monument of historical rivalry or as a single tourist complex[9].

The local authorities in Pskov are inclined to perceive the trans-border issues through a non-security-related (basically the geo-economic one) prism. In terms of the mainstream official discourses waged in Pskov, the EU and NATO enlargements would have a positive effect on this Russian border region as it will get a chance to ameliorate its international credentials and attractiveness for international business. A de-securitizing logic, therefore, is quite visible. Mikhail Margelov, speaking in Pskov in 2002, assured that it is much safer for Russians to have NATO in their vicinity than «Al-Quaeda». In another statement he went even further assuming that the local people have to appreciate that in fact NATO will compel Estonia and Latvia to behave as if they were Russia's allies. Instead of deepening the dividing line, they are bound to downgrade it[10]. The vice-governor of the Pskov oblast, Dmitrii Shakhov, proclaiming a readiness to interact with NATO, nevertheless suggested that the alliance may have to consider a changing of its name[11]. This intention may be interpreted as a discursive strategy aimed at de-constructing NATO's military identity in Russian eyes. A trans-national dimension of de-securitization is observable as well – a case in point consists of the alleged "complete disappearance" of the threat of secession in the Northeast Estonia, i.e. a matter of concern for Tallinn still in the early 1990s[12].

Governor Mikhailov has often stressed in his public pronouncements the positive developments in the neighboring Baltic states. It may be illustrated by the release of a Second World War veteran (ethnically Russian) who was initially accused by the Latvian court of committing military crimes[13]. Another example of Pskov's longing to Europe is a proposal to

[8] *Smena*, July 30, 2003.

[9] Brednikova and Voronkov 1999.

[10] *Molodiozh Estonii*, 29.11.2002.

[11] *Pravda.Ru*, 11.04.2003, http://world.pravda.ru/printed.html?news_id=9630

[12] Birckenbach 2000, p.45.

[13] Official web site of the Pskov oblast administration, www.pskov.ru/comments/03102003.html

open an EU office in Pskov. This was one of major political messages of Mikhail Briachak who considers running for governor in fall 2004[14].

In a wider sense, the conceptualization of region's "in-between location" is premised on the two "waves" of policy impulses (both positive and negative ones coming in different combinations) originated, respectively, in Moscow and Brussels[15]. Russia perceives itself not as a periphery of the EU-led integration, but as another core, a self-sufficient one and capable of conducting a foreign policy of its own. This worldview resonates well with the "Europe of Two Empires" concept, one developed, in particular, by Michael Emerson, Alexander Rahr and some other authors. Russian politicians seem to share the basic assumptions of this approach by claiming, for example, that "the great powers rarely join others' unions, they tend to form alliances of their own" to safeguard freedom and autonomy[16]. The "imperial" version of Russian international subjectivity in 2003 has spread even among the right-wing / pro-Western groups within elites, as evidenced by the "liberal empire" slogan advanced by Anatoly Chubais in 2003. Should the "two Empires" scenario come into force, the most acute question would be to keep the areas at peace where the interests of the two cores, Moscow and Brussels, intersect.

It is arguably within this context that one should interpret the meanings that have been ascribed to Pskov having an "in-between" identity and in which also the celebration of the city's 1100 anniversary was grounded. The politically most stimulating message consists of that the Pskov oblast has to become "Russia's face turned towards Europe" (it is quite telling that the local educational books note the fact that for Pskov, Helsinki is located as near as Vitebsk in the neighboring Belarus, Warsaw can be accessed as fast as Vladimir or Ryazan', and Oslo or Copenhagen may be hypothetically reached by plane with the same amount of fuel as Arkhangel'sk[17]). The reiteration that Orthodoxy is but a branch of common Christian faith, a view inscribed into the official political discourse of Pskov, serves the same aims of social de-bordering and cultural inclusiveness.

Economic arguments have also been employed in order to take advantage of Pskov's alleged marginality. This takes place by arguing that the economically dominating actors, according to

[14] *Pskovskoe Agentstvo Novostei* web site, http://informpskov.ru/politics/13432.html, 07.05.2004

[15] *Pskovskoe Agentstvo Novostei* web site, www.infopskov.ru, 11.03.2004.

[16] Ivanov, 2001.

[17] Manakov and Kulakov, 1994.

a business logic, push their competitors from the cores to non-central territories that will then benefit from having more investors approaching them.

Yet the idea of an "in-between" location may also be comprehended as a form of criticism pertaining to the way the border issues have been dealt with by the "core players". The official web site of the Pskov administration refers to the "controversial status" and the "declaratory nature" of the documents signed between Russia, on the one hand, and Latvia and Estonia, on the other. The western neighbors deserve, it is claimed, a certain criticism for their policies towards Pskov. What creates irritation is that, for example, Estonia in September 2000 cancelled facilitated travel to its territory, originally initiated in 1992, when the temporary border crossing procedure was introduced to allow the residents of the border areas to get to Estonia with special permission[18]. The trans-border connections were severed prior to 2004 due to EU's insistence, but the domestic factor should not be, it seems, neglected either. In particular, the relatively unrestricted border passage has triggered economic devastation in Narva because the prices on the Russian side of the border used to be much cheaper. From the Pskov side, the Estonian position provoked criticism verbalized in terms of reference to the "locked border". "Living with wolves" - a title used in one of local newspapers' stories featuring trans-border relations with Latvia stands likewise out as a revealing evidence of this sort of attitudes[19].

It might be presumed that Ivangorod too defines its identity by relating (in one way or another) and/or comparing it to that of the neighboring Baltic countries (for example, it is quite telling that the title of one of local newspapers cover story of constructing the "Aqua-park" in Ivangorod reads: "To the envy of Estonians"[20]). In the meantime, the initiatives to separate it from Russia and merge it administratively with Narva have not received strong support among Ivangoroders[21].

As far as more practical things are concerned, the Euro-region of "Pskov – Livonia" has figured as a result of two (competing) "in-between" strategies, one offered by the Pskov administration and the second one by the Council on Cooperation of Border Regions

[18] *Segodnia*, September 12, 2000

[19] «*Politpskov*» Online, October 9, 2003, www.politpskov.ru/print/209.html

[20] *MK v Pitere*, http://mk-piter.ru/articles/539.htm

[21] *Molodiozh Estonii*, 16.03.2004, www.moles.ee/04/Mar/16/9-1.php

(CCBR). In the end, it was established on the basis of the CCBR vision[22], although a number of implementation problems are still there. *The first* of them is premised on that the record of joint initiatives designed and promoted by the sub-national units to form the Euro-region is very scant. The most skeptical voices among the Russian analysts do not hide their attitudes in labeling the Euro-regions as "a roof for bureaucratic tourism" and regard them as a senseless pumping out of EU money (Russians feel comfortable to be able to judge that foreign funds might be spent more effectively[23]).

Secondly, some Russian politicians (for example, the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Federation Council Mikhail Margelov) remain skeptical about the idea of Euro-regions. They see it as constituting "a pre-school exercise", arguing that Russia is ripe for much more mature and essential forms of strategic cooperation with the EU. Besides, in Margelov's reasoning, Euro-regions would eventually fail unless the neighboring countries agree on long-term solutions as to free and unrestricted travel across the border. In other words, the establishment of a Euro-region is not seen as a substitute for a political solving of "the real issues"[24] which brings us to the Russian understanding that *political* and not merely *technical* measures are needed.

For a deeper comprehension of the discourse of marginality as pertinent to the Pskov oblast, we have to find out what is the outside core, apart from the domestic one (i.e. Moscow), and what it looks like. Does the outside environment offer enough space for any "in-between" maneuvering? Does it contain sufficient incentives for the Pskov's prospective "marginality"? These and related issues will be discussed below.

1.2. THE EUROPEAN UNION AS AN OUTSIDE CORE

The changes occurring in the EU neighboring territories are usually related to a process called Europeanization, one encompassing both formal and informal transformations of domestic structures in adjacent countries towards democratic values and institutional standards. Yet there are different interpretations of the nature of Europeanization: Estonia tends to equate it with EU membership, while Russia is eager to push Estonia to apply the EU standards for fixing the border issues and remedying minority problems.

[22] Mikenberg 2004, p.5.

[23] Krashevskii 2003.

[24] Margelov 2003.

In Europe itself, Europeanization is conceptualized as "the cultural, legal, institutional and economic impact of European integration on domestic structures" of the neighboring countries and their parts. Europeanization may be treated as an instrument of conflict resolution, and as a normative process, with the EU institutions working as actors to reorient the direction of local policies to the degree that Brussels-centered political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of policy making in adjacent countries[25]. However, this highly formalized interpretation seems deliberately vague and fails to take into consideration various discursive frameworks that touch upon the "fabric" of transformative processes in the context of trans-border milieu.

The "Europeanization approach" is reminiscent of various attempts to relate the "EU trademark" to much wider (perhaps global-scale) processes, with the non-European actors deeply involved as well (including the U.S. and some international non-governmental organizations like Greenpeace). The EU is by no means the only force that impacts and redirects the policies of neighboring territories. For example, in the Pskov oblast the major institutional transformations were stimulated by establishing the Euroregion "Pskov – Livonia", that was to a large extent designed and intellectually nurtured by the East – West Institute, the Soros Foundation and the Eurasia Foundation, all non-EU based «global» NGOs. The East – West Institute, by the same token, has sponsored a project pertaining to reforming of the budgetary relations in Pskov[26]. The U.S. State Department and the National Endowment for Democracy have funded some of the NGO activities in the trans-border territories.

It would be erroneous, therefore, to equate all integrative developments in the regions bordering on EU members only with Europeanization as many non-European actors are involved to an equal extent. In particular, to properly understand the policy priorities of Latvia and Estonia one has to recall that both of these countries are heavily influenced by the United States. In preparation to the EU and NATO accession, Estonia has made some efforts to stretch its foreign priorities beyond the Baltic and Central Europe, and has shown some preliminary signs of establishing closer links with the Caucasian states, in particular with Georgia and Azerbaijan[27]. The U.S. is interested in contributing to shaping the trans-border

[25] Coppieters, Huysseune, Emerson, Tocci, Vahl 2003, pp. 12-13.

[26] *Pskovskaya pravda – Veche*, 22.05.2003.

[27] Interview with Eldar Efendiev, Regnum Information Agency, www.regnum.ru/forprint/224053.html

relations of the new NATO members with Russia. This has been evidenced by choosing Narva as a site hosting the first American Information Office located in the Baltic countries[28].

The points raised above deal with the question of how Europeanization is comprehended. In a narrow sense, it ought to be equated with adopting the *acquis*, yet in this case the question of influence upon Russia's border regions has to be dropped due to mere two facts that these regions, the Pskov oblast included, are neither legally able nor politically willing to plug into the EU legislation. Of course one may accept a wider interpretation of Europeanization as all kind of measures that lead to democracy, open society, transparency, accountability, good government, environmental values, gender equality and so forth. However, the problem looming large at this juncture is that under the guise of Europeanization one may discover pivotal elements to be attributed to a process known as globalization.

This is of course not to deny that the EU does exert a great deal of impact on the state of Russia's trans-border relations with Estonia and Latvia. Departing from the matrix elaborated earlier[29], several comments may be added.

For the first, as far as a "*compulsory impact*" is concerned, it has basically been the political elites of Estonia and Latvia to whom the EU has addressed its offers of both "positive" and "negative" incentives. The EU policy has been in this regard a success because it ended in Estonia and Latvia dropping their territorial claims. On the other hand, these two countries' decline to insist on territorial concessions from Russia was interpreted in Moscow – and arguably for good reasons – as indicatory of a Russian success in linking the accession matters with a settlement of the border issues. What stems from this is that Russia might claim its subjectivity in exerting the "compulsory impact" upon Estonia and Latvia with noticeable de-securitizing effects: to foster the EU accession, the elites of both countries starting from 1990s have refrained from "saying the word 'security' aloud"[30].

Secondly, the "*enabling impact"* has produced very mixed political results. The identity changes at the elite level in the two Baltic republics have evolved from being "a bridge" / "a land of contacts" / "a mediator" self-conceptualizations to a more restrictive and disconnecting positioning of "a bridgehead of the Western civilization" and further on to "an outpost of

[28] *Molodiozh Estonii*, 25.03.2004, www.moles.ee/04/Mar/25/9-1.php

[29] Diez et al., 2004.

[30] Aalto 2000, p.4.

Europe"[31]. De-securitization is still a promise for both Estonia's and Latvia's foreign policy thinking: both countries have, after their "double accession" in 2004, been willing to engage themselves with the highly sensitive and potentially explosive issues, including the encouragement of a pro-Western orientation in Ukraine, Belarus, and the Caucasian countries This is so as Russia will in all probability regard these as a security challenge.

Thirdly, a "*connective impact*" displays some observable success as to policy transfer practices that have much more – in comparison with the two above mentioned types of influence – applicability for Russia. For example, the St.Petersburg-based «Strategia» Center commissioned in 2003 a study on "Soft Security Challenges in Russia's North West". Pskov was included as one of regions studied in order to assess the local conditions through the prism of such liberal concepts as transparency in the sphere of public authority, human rights, political participation and trans-border cooperation. The study advocated a number of changes in the federal policy toward Pskov to include facilitation of the procedure of concluding agreements between Russian border regions and their partners abroad, expansion of the rights of local authorities to grant tax privileges to foreign investors, simplification of the process of receiving the residence permit by foreign nationals, releasing the information concerning the property ownership, creation of unified electronic system of customs documentation, etc.[32]

The most pro-EU oriented non-governmental organizations in Pskov include: in the educational sphere – the Volny (Free) Institute; in environmental protection issues – the "Chudskoy Project" established in 1997 as a branch of Tartu-based Peipsi Center for Transboundary Cooperation which, in particular, develops the ideas of public participation in managing the local environmental resources[33], and the creation of a geo-information databank. In the sphere of human rights the group of the leading agencies consists of the local Council of Soldiers' Mothers (working basically to defend the rights of the draftees and soldiers), the Independent Social Women Center, the "Veche" Movement (involved in a number of human rights projects, like monitoring the elections in Belarus, participation in the Pax Christi

[31] Miniotaite 2003, pp. 214-215.

[32] Information package for participants of the round table at Moscow Carnegie Center on «Institutionalization of Public Participation and Account of Regions' Interests in Formulating the Federal Security Policy», March 16, 2004.

[33] http://www.ctc.ee

International Route, etc.[34]), the "Niyso" Society of Russian – Chechenian Friendship. As to trans-border issues one has to mention the "Vozrozhdenie" Center, the Foundation for Transborder Cooperation (conceptually designed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark[35]), the Bureau of Inter-regional Partnership "Pskov – Novgorod" and the Center for Sustainable Development. The most important aggregate effect of these organizations' operation in Pskov consists of their contribution in initiating various practices of charity, volunteering, environmental education[36], advocacy of human rights and equal opportunities for socially vulnerable groups and civil control over the military[37].

1.3. OUTSIDE MARGINS: THE NORTHERN AND THE EASTERN DIMENSIONS

The two poles (Brussels and Moscow) find themselves under a growing influence emanated from those actors which are interested and able to "play on the margin" in their own ways. A set of rather nuanced and balanced policy frameworks that have emerged at the vicinity of Pskov and Ivangorod offered even more inclusive opportunities for trans-border interactions. Both of these Russian border localities have something in common with different patterns of trans-national regionalism being developed at Europe's margins.

According to one set of opinions, there is a certain degree of exclusion present in both the Northern Dimension (ND) and the Eastern Dimension (ND). This vision is based on the understanding of "dimensionalism" as a by-product of the successive rounds of EU's enlargement: "the emergence of new dimensions is in a sense an (unintended) external manifestation of the limits of expanding"[38]. Yet an alternative reading is also possible: the ND is comprehended by many in Europe as "an imagined empty space"[39] which ought to be filled with concrete projects. This is why the "dimensionalist" mindset implies options and alternatives, signaling that either of them is only one of possible variants/types/models of spatial interaction between numerous actors involved. Another important asset of the ND is its potential of ironing out the distinction(s) between «the united part of Europe» and what is

[34] «Veche» web site, http://ngo.pskov.ru/veche/index.php?topic=belmon

[35] http://www.fresta.ru/2a.htm

[36] Lundqvist 2003, p.52.

[37] See «*Biulleten' dlia NKO*» («NGOs Newsletter»), http://www.ngo.pskovregion.org

[38] Haukkala 2002, p. 2.

[39] Cronberg 2003.

called «the neighborhood area». «The underlying idea of the ND is inclusiveness... In a way it is almost a replica of the Council of Baltic Sea States»[40].

The Nordic countries are important gravitation poles for Pskov and Ivangorod due to a number of reasons. For the first, these countries are rather helpful in offering assistance and services in different fields. The Nordic Council of Ministers has held some of its activities in Pskov[41]. Secondly, the Pskov administration is interested in gaining access to sea transportation routes[42] and in attracting tourists from the Nordic countries (in particular, a Helsinki – Tartu – Pskov tourist road is under discussion). There are some historical reasons for this since Pskov used to be a part of the Hanseatic League and might anticipate inclusion into a project of reviving it. Moreover, Pskov is part of a Sweden-sponsored «Baltic Tigers» business promotion project[43], which, in the opinion of local policy makers, might make the regional economic environment more competitive and demanding.

Despite a variety of discourses, it would be fair to assume that Pskov and Ivangorod – unlike Estonia - have (re)interpreted the "Nordic message" predominantly as a story pointing to commercial and inter-cultural communications between "West" and "East". To some extent, the "Nordic lesson" has been accepted and acknowledged in Pskov and Ivangorod in terms of reconciliation and pacification, which, historically speaking, is rather appealing taking into account that both of these cities have been many times seized and dominated by western powers, including Sweden (and Germany too)[44].

Another important factor influencing the surroundings of Pskov consists of the «Eastern Dimension» (ED) and the Polish policies behind this initiative. Warsaw is eager to present itself as a source of innovative approaches applicable to a variety of countries bordering on the EU. The Polish goal is believed to "demonstrate to the EU countries the diversity of the area lying in the immediate neighborhood of the enlarged EU, together with the resulting necessity to conduct a differentiated policy in that area»[45]. Yet what kind of diversity is at stake and what role(s) Poland ought to perform in sphere of East – West communications (an

[40] Huisman 2002, p. 20.

[41] Rosbalt Information Agency, www.rosbalt.ru, 12.01.2004.

[42] *Molodiozh Estonii*, 27.06.2002.

[43] Rosbalt Information Agency, www.rosbalt.ru, 05.09.2001.

[44] http://bn.bsn.ru/articleshow.shtml?481_3

[45] Gromadzki and Osica, 2002.

intermediary, a transmitter of reforms, or something else) – these are the main interpretative questions pertaining to the Polish stand. The whole debate is about interpretation of what exactly should be meant by the policy of acknowledging the diversity among the EU neighbouring countries, and what kind of differentiation – as a key element in the future implementation of the neighborhood policy - is on the agenda.

At some point Polish spokesmen forecasted that the ED will turn even larger in scope and become more multilateral than the ND. Thus, experts from Warsaw made it clear that the enactment of the Schengen *acquis* may have a detrimental effect on the relationships of the candidate countries with their immediate eastern neighbors… They claim that the enforcement of visas will not constitute a barrier for organized crime but may potentially become an insurmountable obstacle for thousands of ordinary citizens»[46]. In the opinion of influential Polish experts, Europe needs immigrants at a growing pace, up to 500,000 per year[47].

Pskov's administration has some useful connections with Poland, and has attended the Krynica Economic Forum to be able to inform about Pskov's intentions to be considered in the context of Eastern and Central European regionalism as well[48]. Pskov and Bialostok are twin cities, and the Catholic parish in Pskov is administered by a Polish priest. Yet politically speaking, the importance of Pskov for the "Eastern Dimension" may be somehow related to Poland's interest in having its say in eventual political transformation in Belarus. It is hard to say whether the "Pskov – Minsk axis" may be regarded as a factor facilitating Poland's strategy. According to a geographical interpretation found on the official web site, Pskov's territory is situated at the intersection of two cultural sub-regions – the north gravitates more to the Baltic and Nordic Europe, while the southern one has much in common with Central Russia and Belarus[49]. For governor Evgenii Mikhailov, Russia and Belarus are but "one country, one people"[50], a contestation highly questionable both from legal and foreign policy points of view but quite rewarding in terms of domestic consumption. However, Pskov's interest in Belarus stretched far beyond identity-related issues in encompassing economic considerations as well, especially against the background of growing attractiveness of Belarus

[46] Boratynski and Gromadzki, 2001.

[47] Iglicka 2003.

[48] *Pskovskaya Pravda – Veche*, 11.09.2003.

[49] www.pskov.ellink.ru/geo/lend/index.html

[50] Official web site of Pskov oblast administration, www.pskov.ru/comments/020401.html

as a transit country due to existing procedural complexities in Russian – Latvian and Russian – Estonian borders.

The idea of "dimensionalism" (either in its "Northern" or "Eastern" formats), as applicable to the areas of EU – Russia's direct touch, has much to do with the idea of Europe as an entity consisting of a set of "Olympic rings" (i.e. more horizontal, network-oriented, and region-specific). The EU seems to be interested in using "dimensionalist" frameworks to transform Russian border regions in a way that may be beneficial for the EU. "Dimensionalism" thus becomes a new type of a policy of accommodation and reformation of the "Euro-East" to the extent that it could become acceptable partner of the "European core". Therefore, "dimensions" offer to Russian regions some perspectives of moving "from the outside towards the inside" and through inclusion-laden articulations incite "the learners" to join "the European self"[51].

To conclude this chapter, it has to be noted that there are some opportunities embedded in Pskov's relations with the ND- and ED-related countries, but the scope of roles that may be tried by this Russian region is rather limited. Both dimensions offer some chances to the Pskov oblast, yet a number of factors restrain its possibilities to "play on the margins". In terms of political attention, Pskov certainly loses to other Russian regions located at the doorstep of the EU, including St.Petersburg, Kaliningrad, and Karelia. The matter of fact is that Latvia and Estonia, two of Pskov's Baltic neighbours, basically employ strategies of exclusion that will be discussed below in more details. The strategy of marginality, therefore, faces serious challenges and constrains, the most important of which appears to be exclusionary perceptions of Russia and its territories strongly embedded in the dominant European attitudes.

2. The Story of Provinciality: Inward-oriented Identity Markers

Understanding oneself as a province is rather different from comprehending oneself in terms of a margin. The discourse of provinciality places the region in a domestic context. This is done through rediscovering the local identity as compared and even contrasted with other

[51] Wennersten 1999, pp. 273-281.

Russian cities, including Moscow, St.Petersburg and Novgorod. Before further elaborating on this perspective, let me address the issue of whether the external actors allow sufficient room for Pskov to stay on a marginality track. What I will try to argue is that the policies of the European countries, including the two Baltic neighbours of Pskov, is one of major factors preventing this Russian region from developing as a margin and, concomitantly, pushing it to provinciality domain.

2.1. EXCLUSIONARY EUROPEANIZATION?

The "Europeanization approach" - seen from regions like the Pskov oblast - raises a number of substantial issues. First of all, the dominant European attitudes as to a whole set of Russian – Estonian and Russian – Latvian border troubles have to be viewed through a wider geo-cultural perspective. In this context, the policy of the EU can be interpreted as stimulating the formation of a collective identity between the Baltic states and the Europe's core "through a (re)construction of boundaries between the European/Western inside and outside"[52]. The EU in fact breaks up and diversifies what could have been called "the East" into a more developed Central / Baltic Europe and less developed Eastern periphery, the latter to be treated as a subject only to the extent to which it conforms to the so called 'western values'. To follow the logic of Merje Kuus, one can distinguish between "Europe's internal East"[53], and its "external East", with the boundary between the two roughly coinciding with the Russian – Latvian and Russian – Estonian borders.

The EU seems to have a number of reasons to recourse to a verbal "othering" of Russia. In cultural terms, as Sergei Medvedev argues, "the historical lack of an institutional relationship with the Orthodox East shapes a specific exclusive mentality within the EU, a subconscious reluctance to open up the integration project"[54]. The EU frequently adheres to the argument of an allegedly non-European background of Russia: for example, having stated in 2000 that the intra-European split is over, the European Parliament has explicitly alluded to Russia's de facto exclusion from what is considered to be an integrated Europe. The main reasons for this are to be found in alleged bad governance, ineffectiveness of the local industries and widespread corruption.

[52] Wennersten 1999, p. 273.

[53] Kuus 2004, p.9.

[54] Medvedev 1998, pp. 44-61.

Against this background, the Pskov oblast and the town of Ivangorod are certainly located on the other side of what could be symbolically called "Europe Proper". Russian localities would in such a context be described as "forgotten outskirts" of an "improperly looking and chaotic" Russian space. The Estonian Narva and the Russian Ivangorod are thus viewed as contrasting with each other like "the earth and sky, an economic miracle and military disaster"[55]. This is a typical version of the media-driven exercise in "othering": "The Estonian side (Narva. – A.M.) … is a clean, industrious town of 80,000 with boutiques, newly paved streets and McDonald's. The Russian side (Ivangorod. – A.M.) … is shabby and potholed and has no big Macs…While Ivangorod languishes, Narva showcases a success story… Narva is so wonderful, so much better developed and Western-feeling compared to Ivangorod"[56]. That sort of black-and-white style implying exclusion ignores the fact that Narva has a "reputation as a criminal capital" and "a city with no future"[57]. Yet even against the background of this gloomy appraisal, the guilt for this alleged state of affairs may however exclusively be ascribed to the Russians. The Russian community of Narva is depicted in the Western media as one of being "unable to learn Estonian language", "drug- and alcohol-addicted", "incapable of figuring out was is going on", "not willing to get out of the morass", and serving as an mediator in all kind of illegal trade operations[58]. The Russian side of the borderland is regarded as a "deserted periphery" full of homeless people that have to be treated with a certain degree of leniency[59].

The argument that sheds some critical light on the Europeanization thesis is that the regions bordering on the EU – arguably as a discursive reaction to the exclusionary policies practiced by some of EU countries - are not themselves inclined to define their geo-cultural images in strict Euro-centric terms. For example, one of the strongest and most appealing metaphors pertaining to the Kaliningrad oblast's future consists of "the Baltic Hong Kong", and the Pskov governor has deliberately compared his region with Japan having in mind a strategy of applying the best of outside experiences on the local soil.

[55] *Die Tageszeitung*, May 30, 2001, www.inopress.ru/print/archive/2002/05/30/13:15:49/arc:taz:peace

[56] Tarm 2001.

[57] Roman 2003.

[58] *Le Temps*, December 7, 2000, www.inopressa.ru/print/archive/2000/12/07/16:01:09/arc:letemps:peace

[59] Donat, Klaus-Helge. New and Old Fortresses (translated from German), *Die Tageszeitung*, www.inopressa.ru/print/archive/2002/05/30/13:15:49/arc:taz:peace

2.2. ESTONIA'S AND LATVIA'S VERSIONS OF EXCLUSION

In this part of my paper I will dwell upon the power that the margins on the EU side might have in granting recognition or not to the claimed status of Pskov. Estonia and Latvia develop their own "marginality strategies" that, in my view, seem to tend towards more modern discourses of "othering". To a certain degree one margin may thwart the attempts of the other[60].

In the Russian border discourse, it is not rare that Estonia and Latvia, as countries having a contestable practice as to the treatment of ethnic minorities, are contrasted with the EU as the allegedly ultimate authority that may impact these Baltic countries to abide to various democratic and human rights norms. There is a surprisingly rare unanimity among the Russian commentators that the policy of a «cultural distancing» (if not "cultural revenge") turned against the Russian-speaking residents conflicts with the European humanitarian legislation. In other contexts one can come across rather strong appeals to the U.S. (to downplay Estonia's intransigent criticism of Russia's military operation in Chechnya) and to NATO (to compel Tallinn and Riga to improve its relations with Moscow and, presumably, even concede to some of the Russian demands in trans-border relations). Sometimes Russian analysts lump the Western countries – along with Russia - into the same group of actors that have to "contain the Baltic offensive"[61].

Exclusion as a form of shaping the identity implies different patters of distancing and border-strengthening, from temporal (Russia is perceived in Estonia and Latvia as a country unable to get rid of its malign past, still struggling with the historical «demons» that the Balts have themselves successfully defeated and left behind) to geo-cultural moves (the cultural gaps between Protestant Estonia and Latvia, on the one hand, and Catholic Lithuania, on the other, fade in comparison to the cleavages between all three Baltic countries and mainly Orthodox Russia). The implementation of a "policy of exclusion" may take different forms. It appears that he elites of the Baltic states are committed to rather stringent ways of excluding Russia from their "circle of trust" not only culturally but also in an administrative sense, while Russia recourses to somewhat softer forms of exclusion that are basically intellectually and/or mentally rooted. Perhaps, the Russian military discourse – in comparison with more balanced discourses pertaining to the mainstream academic and political communities - contains the harshest attitudes to Estonia and Latvia, the two countries that are stigmatized in the

[60] I am thankful to Christopher Browning for helping me with clear formulation of this thesis.

[61] Trynkov 2000.

"Krasnaya zvezda" newspaper (which is an official media outlet of the Russian Defense Ministry) as pseudo-democratic, discriminating, challenging Russia and untrustworthy[62].

Yet, even having deep disagreements with its western neighbours over a number of political and security issues, Russia has never seriously revoked – one may argue - its centuries-long European commitments. Russia's discursive strategy of "soft exclusion" and border-drawing may take the form of labeling the Baltic states "false Europe", implying that they, in Russian eyes, do not match the "real" European criteria as belonging to the treatment of minorities and human rights protection. According to Russian conceptualization, Estonia and Latvia are geo-culturally placed into the category of "false Europe", albeit, as Viacheslav Morozov anticipates, with some potential of moving towards becoming a part of 'true Europe'[63].

The paradox is that it appears to be mainly Russia, with its scant and somewhat unconvincing record of openness and freedom of movement, that has pushed for less restrictive and more inclusive/de-bordering solutions (the economic argument here seems to be rather important: the Russian border regions are keenly interested in attracting shoppers and tourists from the neighboring countries that are priced significantly higher[64]). In the meantime, the countries with arguably more liberal traditions of policy-making, tend to opt for a prioritization of border safety over transparency and cooperation. One of the feasible explanations for this seemingly paradoxical state of affairs is that the Baltic countries, having identified themselves with the democratic "club of nations", do not feel obliged to build their relations with those actors who do not belong to this "club" on the basis of liberal approaches. Besides, Russia itself has done little to persuade its western neighbors that it deserves the same treatment as the EU countries. Another possible explication suggests that the "open borders" agenda is not that much linked to the liberal mindset but rather stands out as an instrument of those countries that wish to join what could be called "a space of attraction". It is indicative, for example, that Estonia having consistently established a full-fledged visa regime with Russia,

[62] See, for example, a series of publications of Alexei Liaschenko: "NATO osvaivaet Pribaltiku" (NATO settles in the Baltic), October 29, 2003; "Bazy NATO v Baltii" (NATO Bases in the Baltic Sea), March 13, 2004; "Tallinn ne vypolniaet obiazatel'stv" (Tallinn fails to fulfill its obligations), February 19, 2004 ; « Baltiiskiy vyzov » (The Baltic Challenge), January 30, 2004.

[63] Morozov 2004.

[64] *Molodiozh Estonii*, 05.01.2004, www.moles.ee/04/Jan/05/1-1.php

granted in the beginning of 1990s a visa-free access to its territory for U.S. citizens, although it failed to gain reciprocity from the American side[65].

In a way, all major strategic aims that both Latvia and Estonia were painstakingly aspiring to push through during the 1990s (EU and NATO membership), were in 2004 formally achieved. This, then, raises the fundamental question of how the foreign policies of these two countries will look like in the post-accession era. One of the most logical and natural priorities would be for them to reinvigorate their Eastern policies in terms of investing more efforts and resources into building a new type of relationship with Russia and its western regions. Yet, in practice, many voices from the Estonian and Latvian side keep supporting the divisive "no-exceptions-for-Russia" policy. Estonia is discursively presenting itself as a "model pupil" of Europeanization[66], but by and large this country (as well as Latvia) has failed to become a generator of positive impulses for the adjacent Russian territories. "The Estonian 'mental window' has been more open to the North and West than to the East"[67], and the Estonian security identity has been initially constructed as being under threat. A group of Estonian intellectuals claimed in "Postimees" newspaper in 2003 that Estonia's historical service to the West consists of holding the border of the European civilization during thousands of years[68]. There is hence little surprise that Estonia is one of those countries where the Huntingtonian ideas of the "clash of civilizations" appear to have found a fertile ground (with some exceptions from this dominating trend, of course[69]). According to Stefano Guzzini, "Huntington's fault line between Western Christianity and the rest has become a major issue in the identity imagination"[70] of Estonia and, perhaps, to a lesser extent in Latvia as well. In Pami Aalto's interpretation, Estonia is quite sensitive to issues pertaining to its eastern border. This is so because the whole debate has not been that much about the territories as such (the pieces of land contested by Tallinn in the beginning of 1990s lack strong economic potential and are mostly populated by ethnic Russians), "but about the perception of the Estonian elites that the Tartu Peace Treaty, with all its clauses on Estonia's borders, was the 'birth certificate' of Estonia"[71], i.e. relates to Estonia's understanding of itself.

[65] Regnum Information Agency, 24.03.2004, www.regnum.ru/forprint/236699.html

[66] Raik 2003, p.34.

[67] Berg 2001, p.271.

[68] Kuteinikov 2004.

[69] For dissidents' voice see: Lepik 2004.

[70] Guzzini 2004, p. 14.

[71] Aalto 2001, p. 48.

The close cultural association with Finland has been understood in Estonia in a similar divisive and exclusionary way, even if this appears to be in contrast to the Finnish ideas pertaining to the Northern Dimension as seen from de-bordering perspectives. The conceptualization of a "post-modern North" as a "post-sovereign" meeting place and "the third space" skipping the East – West gaps by moves of social de-bordering, was either misread or rejected in Estonia. Estonia's orientation towards Finland might in many spheres – from arts to trade - have been beneficial in terms of fostering and enhancing trans-border cooperation[72]. However, despite what is labeled Estonia's "exclusive relations with Finns", Tallinn has failed to share one of most important elements of Finnish foreign policy – the non-alignment exemplified in the unwillingness to joint NATO, at least in the foreseeable future. Even the cultural arguments – like Finno-Ugric language and folklore shared with Finns – are often used by Tallinn in divisive geopolitical terms, as instruments that "helped Estonians maintain an inner distance from the Soviet-Russian forms of everyday practices"[73]. The arguments of this sort are apparently inconsistent and sound weak due to the mere fact that a significant segment of the Finno-Ugrian world lives alongside and within Russia, which implies the necessity of inclusive approaches to the issues of cultural identity (one may note here that the name of Pskov is believed to be of Finno-Ugrian origin). Departing from an assumption that the world might relatively smoothly be divided into opposing geo-cultural dichotomies (like "Western individualism" vs. "Eastern collectivism"), some of the mainstream Estonian analysts and opinion-makers seem to choose facile answers to much more complicated challenges. Parenthetically it could have been also mentioned that the Estonian state, being geopolitically very much U.S.-oriented, failed to borrow and reproduce such basic elements of American social policy as cultural integration of minorities and, when appropriate, bi-lingual arrangements.

Another interesting twist is that in spite of fixing the geo-cultural and political barriers with Russia, Estonia and Latvia tend to accentuate the "southern vectors" in their policies. Prior to 2004 the attention of these two countries was overwhelmingly focused on accession to NATO and EU, while afterwards Riga and Tallinn have reoriented their foreign strategies to play the roles of promoters of democracy in Ukraine, Belarus and even the Caucasus/Black Sea region. Downplaying Russia's belongingness to the European civilization, the two Baltic states appear to display a rare inclination of promoting European values in Azerbaijan, Georgia and

[72] Vihalemm 1997, pp. 139, 145, 148, 151, 161.

[73] Lauristin 1997, p.35.

Armenia, the countries that are even further away from Europe not only geographically but also in cultural terms.

It is of little surprise then that the Latvian and Estonian policy makers can hardly find a common language with Russian politicians of nationalist tapping; what is really remarkable is the extent of fundamental disagreements between the elites of these Baltic states and the Russian liberal political community. At the core of divergences rests Latvia's and Estonia's (mis)perception of Russia as a straight-forward extension of the USSR. This is very much in conflict with Russia's self-perception as a country that got rid of the Communism exactly the same way as the Balts did. According to the liberal interpretation of Russia's identity, all post-Soviet countries were in a way victims of the Communist tyranny, and Russia deserves much credit for its decisive contribution to the destruction of the Soviet regime. Yet the dis-agreements between the Russians and the Balts appear to be even wider since the Latvians and the Estonians tend to think of Russia as a looser in the Cold War and a country still bearing the historical guilt for the occupation of the Baltic states. Even most pro-democratic Russian policy makers would certainly rebuff the alternative perspectives drawn by the Latvian President for the ethnic Russians living in this Baltic country: they are expected either to "turn into the Latvians" or "go to Russia"[74]. An almost anecdotic – though still rather sinister - manifestation of Estonia's interpretation of the Soviet past as the time of the Russian occupation rather that the common tragedy could be found in the demand to give up and hand over the Novosibirsk oblast (located in Siberia) to Estonia as a "compensation for the crimes committed by the Soviet regime". This peculiar, in the mildest terms, idea announced in May 2004 was proclaimed by the chairman of Estonia's state committee on investigation of the Soviet repressive policies[75] and was never officially repudiated by Tallinn. Of course, some encouraging examples of common approaches could be found (for instance, in 1993 both Moscow and Tallinn were interested in preventing the political linkages between the leaders of Narva and Russian "Red/Brown" radicals[76]), but these joint crossings of strictly drawn social and political borders are certainly rare exceptions.

It is this complicated policy framework that largely defines the parameters of tackling the so called "border problems" (Russians prefer, it seems, to avoid labeling them as conflicts) as related to the subject of this study. The *first* of these uncertainties deals with the dispute over

[74] *Argumenty i fakty*, N 19 (1228), May 12, 2004, http://aif.ru/online/aif/1228/08_01?print

[75] *Gazeta*, May 12, 2004, www.gzt.ru/print.gzt?rubric=novosti3&id=6405000000006321

[76] Melvin 1995, p.49.

the Pechory district, a territory of some 2,000 square kilometers that Estonia obtained in 1920 and lost in 1944, and which was re-claimed by Tallinn at the beginning of 1990s. By the same token, starting from 1991 Latvia has made some efforts to claim the Pytalovo district that was transferred to the Russian Federation in 1948. Thinking in economic terms, the crux consists of the control over navigation and fishing in the Chudskoe Lake, and the possession of important railway routes[77].

At some juncture the government in Tallinn started to issue Estonian passports for the Pechory area residents having family ties in Estonia. This stood out in Russian eyes as one of tools for restoring the borders that Estonia deemed to be hers[78]. The distribution of Estonian passports led to the possession of two different identity documents by a significant part of the local population (parenthetically one may note that Russia has used a similar practice in Abkhazia granting Russian citizenship to a local population that legally belongs to Georgia). The possession of two passports may speak for both the attractiveness of an Estonian citizenship and the unimportance of the passport formalities as such for a bulk of the local population.

Nowadays the debates on Pechory are, formally, discontinued due to a rational calculation from the Estonian side concerning the fact that, as the Estonian Foreign Ministry has acknowledged, "the lack of a bilaterally recognized border treaty began to affect achieving" the goals of NATO and EU memberships[79]. Yet there are two uncertainties left: the first consists of the inability to conclude an official inter-state border agreement between Russia, on the one hand, and Estonia and Latvia, on the other. The second source of uncertainty pertains to the clause in the Estonian Constitution stipulating that the land border of Estonia shall be established by the Tartu Peace Treaty of February 2, 1920, i.e. a temporally devised issue of border-drawing.

The *second* contested issue is the border between Narva and Ivangorod (a part of the Leningrad oblast) which during the Soviet times used to be a united city with common infrastructure for living and joint "rules of the game". In the European practice there are some instructive precedents of resolving similar problems (the cases of Tornio - Haparanda between Finland and Sweden and Valka – Valga between Estonia and Latvia). What would be treated

[77] Chichkin 2003.

[78] http://www.rtr-vesti.ru, 01.07.2002.

[79] Estonia and Russia … 1999.

as practical disagreements within the family of likely-minded people amounts to a principle issue in the case of Russian-Estonian relations. Both sides have managed, in the two above mentioned cases, to establish rather effective institutional frameworks for tackling the issues of bilateral concern (Provincia Bothniensis and ESTLA, correspondingly). Unfortunately, no such an institutional platform exists in case of Narva – Ivangorod.

The *third* – and most important, in my view - aspect of the border problematization contains a broad set of managerial and organizational issues (like, for example, the lengthy discussions concerning the legitimacy of the Pskov regional authorities' decision to charge the Estonian lorries for using the local roads[80]). This notwithstanding, the most important issue seems to be that the establishment of new borders augments the cognitive, affective and mental distances[81] between the Pskov oblast and the neighboring Latvian and Estonian localities. Such a growing distance is indicated by the emergence of increasingly time consuming and costly procedures of border crossing (for example, Russia for quite some time imposed double taxation of the Estonian merchandise[82] introduced in reaction to an alleged mistreatment of the Russian-speaking population), and even by the fact that the time zones on the two sides of the border are different.

For sure, the trans-border managerial issues are economically very demanding. The most obvious illustration may be found in the failure of the Ivangorod municipality to pay the bills for their water usage to the Narva city authorities. This then led to water shortages on the Russian side of the border and, as a gesture of retaliation, to a massive leakage of non-purified water into the Narva river[83].

It is hard to say in which way(s) Estonia's and Latvia's membership in NATO is bound to affect the state of trans-border relations with Russia. On the one hand, the increased importance of geopolitical issues related to NATO's enlargement in 2004 can sharpen the divides between Russia and the Baltic states. NATO expansion was interpreted, in large segments within the Russian political community, as signaling "Russia's defeat". Pskov's governor Mikhailov has ascertained that NATO's proximity changes nothing in the Pskov

[80] *Molodiozh Estonii*, 13.01.2004, www.moles.ee/04/Jan/13/2-1.php

[81] Houtum 2000, p.69.

[82] Regnum Information Agency web site, 17.03.2004, www.regnum.ru/forprint/233201.html

[83] *Russkii zhurnal*, www.russ.ru/politics/articles/99-09-06-madison.html

region[84]; yet on a different occasion he presumed that there is nothing good in being located in the vicinity of a powerful military alliance that might eventually become a source of menace for Russia[85]. The Pskov officials, like many people in Moscow, remain convinced that by now there are no legal guarantees preventing NATO from deploying its tactical and strategic weapons in Estonia or Latvia, including the nuclear arsenals[86].

The logic of securitization has resurfaces in March 2004 when Tallinn publicly accused Moscow of multiple violations of Estonia's airspace by Russian military aircrafts[87]. In the meantime, non-military issues might also be (re)securitized, as demonstrated by the issues of ecological security in the Baltic Sea area. It initially gained a highly conflictual profile in the dialogue between Russia and the Baltic countries, Estonia included[88].

By the same token, identity is a big issue to be always taken into consideration. Therefore, identity conflicts have to be treated not as one of possible stages of a conflict evolution[89] but as its more or less stable ingredients, issues that pop up in different ways and in multiple constellations. At least two of them can be singled out as relevant for further exploring. The first one consists of a merger between issue and identity conflicts. This nexus offers perhaps a proper description of the Pskov-Estonian and Pskov-Latvian border relations: the identity-related divide is still there, but the political agendas usually pinpoint technical problems in the first place (like the launching of a ferry link, and the sharing of responsibilities pertaining to cargo transportation, and so forth). There exists also a combination of identity and power conflicts. Borders are usually treated as peculiar segments of the "space of power", and seen as results of either colonization (in the Russia's East) or geopolitical struggles[90] (in the case of the more western regions). The simultaneous usage of identity and power arguments may be proven by the Pskov security discourse which underlines the geopolitical importance of the Pechory district, initially contested by Estonia, as the western-most outpost of Russian Orthodoxy[91]. No less indicative is in this regard that Estonia has also used identity-related

[84] Official web site of Pskov oblast administration, www.pskov.ru/iview.php/action=show&id=16

[85] Evgenii Mikhailov's interview to GTRK-Pskov, 28.10.2002

[86] Interview with Vadim Laptev, 04.12.2002, http://world.pravda.ru/printed.html.html?news_id=3890

[87] «Rosbizneskonsalting» Information Agency web site, 24.03.2004, http://top.rbc.ru/news/daythemes/2004/03/24/24104335_pv.shtml

[88] Regnum Information Agency web site, 29.03.2004, www.regnum.ru/forprint/238654.html

[89] Diez et al., 2004.

[90] Koroliov 2002.

[91] Manakov 2002.

arguments in claiming the Pechory district, referring to the Setu ethnic group (called "Orthodox Estonians"), one residentially split by the border and bound to be reunited[92].

2.3. REDISCOVERING PROVINCIAL IDENTITY: DOMESTIC LOGICS OF DEBATE

As we have seen above, there are several factors that hinder Pskov's marginality policy. *Firstly*, Estonia and Latvia, the two neighboring countries, as well as the EU in general, do not always allow and encourage Pskov to play a full-fledged role of a margin. *Secondly*, Moscow is also rather suspicious as to all kind of outward activities that the region might pursue. In Kremlin these might be interpreted as moves of undermining Russia's geopolitical position and seen as being detrimental to the overall Russian security interests. *Thirdly*, as the most recent study of "Vozrozhdenie" Center reveals, despite the fact that many local experts tend to deem that the connections with the EU are the only reliable source of the region's successful development in a long run, most of regional-level decision-makers appear to have rather vague knowledge about what the EU is as an institution, what is useful in the practice of Euroregions, and how the concepts of Wider Europe or Neighborhood Policy are linked to the Pskov oblast[93]. Social attitudes of the Pskov oblast residents is characterized in terms of lumpenization, fear of innovations and a complex of perennial dependence on external poles of power (the former vice governor of the Pskov oblast has brilliantly expressed this "philosophy of a poor relative" by suggesting that the authorities of this region "must approach its neighbors and explain to them the perspective of having in close vicinity a hungry and underdeveloped neighbor")[94].

This is why the reinvention of a provincial identity of Pskov contains a number of messages that seem to be appealing mainly to different *domestic* audiences. On the one hand, there is a strong nationalist background to be traced in numerous writings pertaining to Pskov's intellectual heritage. In particular, prince Alexander Nevsky, being one of the local heroes, is referred to as one of most appealing symbols of the emerging Russian statehood of the 13th century (despite his fidelity to the Golden Horde) in providing military resistance to the invaders from the West (Swedes and Germans in particular). The Pskov region is proud of being a home to monk Filofey, known as one of most cherished spiritual thinkers of 15th century Russia and an author of the concept "Moscow as the Third Rome", in other words – the most loyal successor and heir of the Europe's origins. Nowadays this concept displays

[92] Nikiforova 2002.

[93] Porog Evropy 2004, p.26.

[94] Pskovskaya oblast v kontekste … 2004.

clear connotations with the debates on "true" and "false" Europe and Russia's positioning of itself in this dichotomy as a country that managed to preserve in purity the spirit of Europeanness lost by some other nations.

On the other hand, there are strong liberal conceptualizations embedded in today's reading of Pskov's political and social pedigree. For properly fulfilling its mission, the Pskov region's valuable democratic experience and the heritage of local self-government dating back to medieval times has to be revived as a strategy of temporal de-bordering, i.e. retrieving and revitalizing the most precious elements of the past for the sake of dealing with current issues. In the 19th century, especially during Alexander the Second's reign, the Pskov's *zemstvo* (locally elected administrative body) was an important institution capable of exerting some influence upon the decisions taken in the Russia's capital. "The Culture of Pskov's Land" web site[95] gives prominence to the traditions of charity widely practiced before the revolution in 1917 by local merchantry. Pskov is then praised for having developed such elements of market capitalism as the insurance system and the so-called Consumers' Societies (prototypes of the cooperatives). It is also believed that Pskov was the first Russian city to ban capital punishment in the middle ages, thus referring to some resources that point in a socially inclusive direction.

A good addition to the liberal interpretation of the Pskov's identity consists of its presumed tolerance, a characteristic which has to be seen in the context of multiculturalism and intensive inter-ethnic communications[96]. The story of the Lithuanian prince Dovmont who in the 13th century was elected the Grand Duke of Pskov, forms a reliable historical proof of the traditions of openness and cross-border tolerance in one of Russia's western-most regions. Interestingly enough, the tolerance could be interpreted in a rather gendered context, bearing in mind that in the year 903, princess Olga married in Pskov. This fact has been used to furnish the anniversary discourse with meanings consonant with feminine dignity, family values and motherhood[97]. In the meantime, religious connotations also play a role, since Olga was known as the first Russian princess to be baptized. The border-breaking quality of these narratives may be assumed.

[95] http://culture.pskov.ru

[96] *Pskovskaya pravda – Veche*, 26.06.2003.

[97] http://1100.pskovcity.ru/otdel/1100.htm

Presumably, the search for identical markers is a reaction vis-à-vis the multiplying challenges regarding the very subjectivity of the Pskov oblast as a federative unit within Russia. There are serious economic and political tendencies that are inimical to Pskov's alleged "marginality strategy". Maxim Orlov from the Moscow-based Agency for Strategic Communications argues that the Pskov elites have missed all the options of attracting any interest to the region, even in negative sense like playing the autonomization game or using the anti-Kremlin and anti-Western rhetoric characteristic of Zhirinovskii's LDPR party which brought Mikhailov to power[98]. It is not surprising to find that some experts forecast that within a mid-term perspective, the whole region will disappear as a subject of the Russian federation. This arguably takes place in order to administratively merge it with one of the more successful Russian territories. Mikhailov's administration is blamed for relying too much on the federal funds coming from Moscow[99], which might be explained by the fact that Pskov oblast is usually referred to as the poorest and economically most depressed region in the whole of western Russia[100]. Some analysts deem that from the global economical perspectives, the Pskov oblast is gradually loosing its subjectivity[101]. In fact, its agriculture and food industry are apparently the only economic areas which still maintain their relatively competitiveness[102]. As a reaction to these trends, a number of public actions have been undertaken, including the establishment of the organization "The Union for the Salvation of Pskov"[103], a move inspired by the local authorities.

In the discursive battle for an "inside subjectivity", many in Pskov wish to draw some domestic lines of cultural demarcation. One of the easy targets consists of Moscow which - as the nation's capital, according to the traditions of Russia's provincial discourse - is conceptualized as being "infected by foreign influences" and standing out as "culturally hegemonic"[104]. Historically, Pskov's attitudes to Moscow have been marked by a sort of a complex of becoming the victim - for centuries Pskov was the first town to contain the attacks of Russia's foes from the West, but eventually the city was neglected, allowing it to turn into "Russia's deep outskirts"[105]. Local historians seem to share the idea that the medieval

[98] *Pragmatika* Bulletin for Information & Analysis, May 2003, N 5, http://pragmatik.ru/prime/132.html

[99] Rosbalt Information Agency, www.rosbalt.ru, 05.04.2002.

[100] Oldberg 2000, p.13.

[101] Mezhevich 2003.

[102] Chesnokov 2004.

[103] Konstantin Minaev, Spasiteli nashi (Our saviours), August 28, 2003, http://pskov.com.ua/?id=225

[104] Smirniagyn 2000.

[105] Belogorov, Artiom (2002), Na zadvorkakh Rossii (At Russia's Outskirts), *Panorama*, September 4.

Pskov – that used to be "a God's house on the earth" - has lost its spirituality and moral authority as soon as it gave up its independence and formed a single polity with Moscow[106].

The accent on Pskov's "centrality" (a substitution to any real «importance»), easily identifiable in the official regional discourse, stands out – one may argue – as another form of finding the region's niche in different domestic contexts. For example, Vladimir Blank, the deputy governor of the Pskov oblast, has positioned this region at the "*center* of integration between Russia and Europe"[107], while the region's chief executive himself has described it as "the *center* of a Slavic settlement"[108] located in Russia's west. According to the governor's reading, Pskov has traditionally performed the role of an innovation *center*, this referring to the opening of the first Russian bank as well as one of the first customs offices in this city. In 2003 Pskov proudly announced itself to be the "library *capital* of Russia", turning the award gained at an all-Russia contest into a public relations campaign[109]. Yet in another context, the officials of Pskov have tried to elevate the region's "centrality" to the level of St.Petersburg and even higher, offering a peculiar reinterpretation of St.Petersburg's history as one premised on a constant imitation of Europe through revolutionary and violent means. In contrast, the heritage of Pskov, according to this logic, is based on "reprocessing of the foreign experience and gradual adaptation of it to fit the national traditions"[110]. Some foreign authors joined such a "centrality discourse" by arguing, for instance, that "Pskov has played a *central* role in the long Russian tradition of resisting Western influence"[111].

As far as more practical things are concerned, the federal center is frequently represented in the regional discourse as being more inclined to harbour a restrictive stand on border control issues, while the regional authorities, in contrast, are seen as lobbying for a more liberal approach[112]. The whole procedure of border-crossing is perceived as being bureaucratized and corrupted due to inefficiency of the Russian frontier-guards and custom officers[113]. There has also been some rare instances of lobbying for regional solutions – one of these cases consisted

[106] Interview with an Orthodox priest Andrey Taskaev, *Pskovskoe agentstvo informatsii* web site, February 25, 2004, http://infopskov.ru/interviews/12099.html

[107] *Chas* (Latvian newspaper), N 251 (1277), October 25, 2001.

[108] Evgenii Mikhailov's interview to GTRK-Pskov, 07.04.2003.

[109] *Pskovskaya pravda* – Veche, 05.01.2003.

[110] Official web site of Pskov oblast administration, www.pskov.ru/iview.php/action=show&id=77

[111] Mikenberg 2000.

[112] Report on Pskov oblast administration, 1996-2003, www.pskov.ru/2002-2003/tourism.htm

[113] *Gazeta* web site, April 6, 2003, www.gazeta.ru/travel/34068.shtml?print

of the Pskov administration's support for the old proposal of passing a federal law stipulating special powers for border territories, including the right to grant customs exemptions to a selected group of merchandise. However, Kremlin has so far been quite reluctant to make any moves in this direction[114]. In particular, the turning of Pskov into a free-trade zone was never implemented due to Kremlin's resistance.

Apart from "anti-Moscow" feelings, one of most interesting elements of Pskov's identity-building consists of the attempted "cultural rivalry" with St.Petersburg, a city that does not only stand out as the administrative center of the North West Federal District, but also forms an economic gravitation pole and an incarnation of Russia's European vocation. In the local media, St.Petersburg tends to be presented as an "infant" in comparison to Pskov[115]. In one of most remarkable interpretations of Pskov's self-definition vis-à-vis and through St.Petersburg, Lev Shlosberg tries to draw the contours of an assumed «cultural revenge». In his reading, Pskov's centrality in the context of the Russian – European relations was destroyed by the appearance of St.Petersburg, a city which, arguably, still bears some symbolic guilt for the marginalization of Pskov and the exhaustion of its resources pumped instead into the new Russian capital. Yet, in Shlosberg's interpretation, St.Petersburg – despite the preferential treatment that it currently gets from Moscow – is but a "junior brother of Pskov". This is so as the latter was the city where Peter the Great took the decision to erect the "new (Northern) Russian capital". The contest is watered down, however, by the argument that Pskov constituted "St.Peterburg's predecessor"[116]; but still, the Pskov anniversary celebrated in 2003 is seen as being culturally different from the festivities on the occasion of 300 years jubilee of St.Petersburg, a city that incarnates, unlike Pskov, the spirit of "imperial Russia".

As to other, less notorious, discursive contests, one may also discern a kind of tacit competition between Pskov and Novgorod, a city that historically used to earn the somewhat negative "elder brother" reputation. The research of some of the local historians focuses on deconstructing the historical image of Novgorod as a city superior to Pskov[117]. Even the small

[114] Evgenii Mikhailov's interview to GTRK-Pskov, 27.01.2003.

[115] «Navigator» Political Information Agency web site, www.navigator.pskovregion.org/?1&code=53&subcode=54

[116] Shlosberg 2002.

[117] Nekrasov 2003.

town of Ivangorod has entered the identity-related battlefield by arguing that it managed to turn into "Russia's window to Europe" much earlier than St.Petersburg[118].

Closing Remarks

In this paper, I have analyzed the dynamics of the Pskov region of trying to play on its own position on the Russian border with Estonia and Latvia, and to gain subjectivity vis-à-vis Moscow, but simultaneously attempting to get a certain amount of leverage with Brussels. Having joined the group of trans-border actors, the Pskov oblast has found itself in a rather controversial though stimulating and rewarding environment, under multiple and sometimes conflicting external influences. By the virtue of its location the region of Pskov is destined to find its identity niches in a complex system of different spatial and temporal orders. It has not only to distinguish itself from those spaces where it does not seem to belong, but also to adopt the best of the "new geometries of regionalism" that pertain to Europe-building.

In this paper I have emphasized the importance of normative structures that may be seen as shaping regional actors' identity-based policies. In this sense, ideas, beliefs and values proved to be meaningful structural characteristics of all regional arrangements. All patterns of spatial and temporal ordering are about determining the rules of belonging and exclusion, of contact and separation. Subsequently, the space that surrounds the Pskov oblast resembles a multi-tier patchwork which contains "varying degrees of Europeanness and Eastness"[119] and harbors a considerable innovative potential to be explored further.

The ideas of "border provinciality" and "border marginality" that may eventually become an important part of the Russian regionalist discourse entail the analysis of the concepts of exclusion and inclusion that I have endeavored to develop in this paper. Both the EU and Russia are still in search for most adequate visions of their "near abroads" and most efficient instruments to influence the territories situated on the border between these two cores. What is at stake is a set of issues that includes preventing conflicts, managing diversity at the EU external borders, stimulating networking practices in multi-actor environment, and balancing inclusive and exclusive policy impulses.

[118] "Krasnaya kniga krepostei" web site ("The Red Book of Fortresses"), www.rusfort.ru/encyclopedia/fort.php?name=ivangorod&part=events

[119] Kuus 2004.

Both of the discourses that I have analyzed – those on marginality and provinciality – send certain signals to the outside world and contain profound identity-related components. Concomitantly, the identity factor has strong connotations with a variety of security issues. Each of the different discourses that circulate in Russia's western regions is based on a peculiar combination of securitization and de-securitization, exclusiveness and inclusiveness, involvement and disengagement. The issues discussed above imply that identity in its de-securitized version is conducive to proliferation of inclusive practices, while a securitized identity fosters the logic of exclusion. More specifically, de-securitization as a discursive strategy can be widely applied at different junctures in the context of marginality strategy. On the contrary, a securitized discourse – making accent on protective functions against foreign transgressors - deprives the regional actors of operational space of their own and therefore fosters the inward-oriented logic of provinciality.

Both marginality and provinciality as discursive strategies are mentally constructed on the basis of certain bifurcation, or "binary identification". Margins and provinces are two examples of zones characterized as "double belongingness"[120], and in this sense they may be regarded as two sides of the same coin. However, these two strategies are different in terms of their vectors: marginality discourse is externally oriented and is by and large about borders, while provincial discourse is directed towards one's own core. There is another difference as well: margins look for a niche of their own in-between two competing centers of power (which, in most radical version, might signify a pattern of "double non-belongingness"), while provinces tend to remain politically loyal to their own centers but at the same time manifest distinct cultural originality.

The region of Pskov, as it was shown in this paper, is rather constrained in conducting a strategy of marginality of its own and playing in two different directions. It might be assumed that a policy of exclusion practiced by the EU-related actors would most likely turn the Pskov oblast into a *province* that would have to be politically loyal to yet culturally different from the domestic core, and would reinvent its identity as a tool for *distinguishing* itself from other parts of the political entity it belongs to. Provincial type of discourse in a way abstracts and/or distances itself from the outside milieu that is implicitly assumed to be either inimical or irrelevant. This is why the extrapolation of European lifestyles and social/political standards and practices onto what constitutes a province in Russia is most likely to be met with

[120] Kaganskii 1996.

resistance[121]. Having culturally opposed itself vis-à-vis Europe, Pskov wishes to present itself as a useful province without apparent border-breaking potential, as a hotbed of "Russianness" that may considerably contribute to the revival of national spirit in the whole country. However, Moscow seems to be not so much interested in recognizing and legitimizing such a self-ascribed role of Pskov. In fact, there is no any real discourse on Pskov in Moscow, the fact that displays a lack of any serious and systematic attention and interest to this region from the part of the federal-level elites. Moreover, a significant part of Kremlin's decision makers that share security-centered and geopolitical approaches, seem to be rather insensitive to Pskov's cultural mission and its identity policy (perhaps this might be called a sort of "cultural imperialism"[122]), and hence treat the Pskov oblast as a mere voiceless and existentially weak periphery, which is a dependant of Moscow yet in the same time a potential object of malign influence and interference from the outside, NATO and EU included.

Should the EU and the Russian federal center opt for more inclusive approaches to a group of border-located regions like the Pskov oblast, the chances of these regions to pursue a strategy of *marginality* – one that envisages exerting some influence upon the cores and re-shaping their attitudes and policies - would certainly soar. My assumption is that a strategy of marginality becomes conceivable whenever a region starts to treat the outside world as a source of opportunities instead of being fearful or suspicious of its neighbours. Pskov's prospective in-between position implies that it wishes to present itself as "a European region of Russia", implying that can't be separated from the EU. The story of marginality is a part of post-structuralist and – to a certain extent – anti-Wallersteinian set of conceptualizations of territoriality. Being on the margin underwrites some specific potential of having an impact upon neighboring areas. Tensions between cores and margins are inevitable, but what is most important is that a marginal position might turn into an advantage in a variety of ways. Margins always have a choice to make, and the cores are not rare to compete with each other to seek and gain their loyalties. A territory premised on marginality may enjoy greater freedom because of the mere possibility that it might exist outside the centers' spheres of influence. This is definitely an incentive to be considered and exploited.

[121] Barzilov, Chernyshov 2002, p.40.

[122] Kaganskii 1997b, p.1.

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