



Master's Degree in International Relations

Major in Security

Russia and the International Order: History and Challenges

**The Russian Bastion of Kaliningrad:
Reflection of Historical Multi-Dimensional
Security Dynamics with EU/NATO in the
Baltic Sea Area**

SUPERVISOR

Prof. C. De Stefano

CO-SUPERVISOR

Prof. B. Zaccaria

CANDIDATE

Hugo Rebeyrol

Student n°655652

Academic Year 2024/2025

ABSTRACT

The oblast of Kaliningrad is a Russian territory surrounded by Poland and Lithuania, both members of the European Union and NATO, but also home to an important military deployment directly facing the members of the two organizations in a context of security-related tensions. This paper aims to assess the role played by the exclave in the context of the Baltic Sea area, which witnesses military tensions but also economic and demographic/political interactions throughout the second half of the twentieth and the first quarter of the twenty-first century. Uncovering diverse historical dynamics in these interconnected three dimensions allows for a better understanding on how Russia tries to defend its interests in the region by playing on several fronts, thus not only military-speaking. Deeper analysis of the three dimensions show that, if the military dimension is still favorited, the economic and demographic/political are playing a significative role, underlining how the defense of its interests and influence still forces Russia to follow different schemes than during the Cold War, while placing Kaliningrad in a central position as a bridgehead into the Baltic Sea.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	2
TABLE OF CONTENTS	3
ABBREVIATIONS	5
INTRODUCTION	6
Relevance	6
Literature Review	7
Analysis.....	8
Object and Subject	9
Objective and Tasks	9
Research questions	9
Hypothesis	10
Theories and Research Methodology	10
Significance.....	11
Structure	11
CHAPTER 1: KALININGRAD, HISTORICAL FOCAL POINT FOR RUSSIA'S RELATIONS WITH THE WEST	13
1.1 - Kaliningrad during Soviet times (1945-1991)	14
1.1.1 - Rebirth of the city under Stalin (1945-1953)	14
1.1.2 – Development in post-Stalinist times (1957-1991)	20
1.2 - An exclave in post-Soviet Russia (since 1991)	22
1.2.1 – Decline and opening to the West (1991 to mid-2000s)	22
1.2.2 – Return of tensions and isolation (since the mid-2000s)	27
1.3 - Conclusions.....	30
CHAPTER 2: KALININGRAD, WESTERN SENTINEL AGAINST NATO'S BALTIC SEA EXPANSION ...	32
2.1 – A territory historically coveted for its military significance	33
2.1.1 – A history of change of ownership reflecting the area's importance	34
2.1.2 – The use of the oblast in the Russian military developments since 1945	39
2.2 – Kaliningrad in the contemporary Russia military architecture	44
2.2.1 – Kaliningrad in the global Russia – NATO confrontational context	44
2.2.2 – An increasing military deployment reinforcing the exclave's position.....	48
2.3 – Conclusions	51
CHAPTER 3: KALININGRAD, AN ECONOMIC GATE TO THE WEST LIMITED BY STATE INTERESTS	53

3.1 – A stark contrast in Kaliningrad’s economic development between the 1990s and the 2000s onwards	54
3.1.1. – Explaining the exclave’s economic opening during the 1990s.....	54
3.1.2 – 2000s: a turning point marking the limitation of its insertion into the Baltic economy	60
3.2 – Kaliningrad’s place in recent Russian economic developments and interactions with the West.....	63
3.2.1. – An exclave that still maintains a certain attractiveness in the eye of the Russian public	63
3.2.2. – A territory still very sensible to regional tensions due to its specific geography	67
3.3 – Conclusions	71
CONCLUSIONS AND FINDINGS	73
Conclusions	73
Findings.....	74
BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SITOGRAPHY	76
Bibliography – Main publications	76
Bibliography – Other publications	77
Bibliography – Institutes’ notes	78
Bibliography – Newspapers	78
Sitography	78

ABBREVIATIONS

EU: European Union

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

USSR: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

SEZ: Special Economic Zone

NPP: Nuclear Power Plants

KSA: Kaliningrad Special Area

LNG: Liquefied Natural Gas

INTRODUCTION

Relevance

For more than two decades, the Baltic Sea area has become a more discrete but still relevant ground for security tensions between NATO/EU countries and Russia to develop. The adhesion of Sweden and Finland to the EU in 1995 and NATO in 2004, then that of the Baltics to both institutions in 2004, sent a clear signal to Moscow that European/transatlantic institutions could reach their borders as a response to what is deemed its “aggressive” policies.

Moscow answered by reinforcing its presence in strategic locations, for example with the installation of long-range missiles parallelly and foreign factories closures in Kaliningrad, while parallelly leading a policy of intervention in Ukraine, ultimately leading to a full-scale war in 2022. Similarly to the Ukrainian case, Russian foreign policy in the Baltic Sea area is not only the result of conjunctural elements, but also structural ones, as the tensions opposing Russia to its western neighbors have been present for multiple centuries.

If these tensions were exacerbated in the last years with the modification of the power balance in the Baltic region, notably regarding the foreign and military policies of Finnish or Polish governments for example, they also result from the existence of a territorial margin directly surrounded by some of these countries: Kaliningrad. As such, an outlook on Kaliningrad’s role in this multidimensional context of security-related tensions seems appropriate to understand what generates such conflictual interactions.

As such, understanding the importance of security-related tensions which modelled the history of the area is essential to grasp the essence of both sides’ current policies. According to Williams and McDonald (2023), the notion of security refers to the “alleviation” of a threat to a common and cherished object with the help of power, relations or emancipation, depending on the adopted perspective¹. Here, they specifically refer to the action of both state and non-state actors to protect people, society or state. In this regard, Kaliningrad as the last remnant of the Russian territorial control of the Baltic Sea area can fit in the definition of a cherished territory to be protected from an influence that already imposed itself in the neighboring states. Also, it would allow for the protection of the Russian state as an actor in the region.

¹ Williams, P.D., & McDonald, M. (Eds.). (2023). *Security Studies: An Introduction* (4th ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003247821>

This definition's relevancy for the Baltic Sea region lies in the need to treat security issues beyond the sole military perspective: both sides clearly articulate diverse tools to expand their control over key territories at their respective borders. Here, Kaliningrad constitutes an interesting case study thanks to its unique military, economic, societal and political position. In this light, the idea is to take advantage of existing literature that is often specialized in very particular issues to bring about a more general and exhaustive understanding, based on historical perspective, on current issues affecting the region's stability.

Such a perspective would require a search for historical examples for each dimension, as they may uncover the roots of many persisting tensions still present as of today.

Literature Review

To study Kaliningrad's role in the Russian security policies in the Baltic Sea area, and even more globally, the focus has been put first on understanding the history of the oblast itself. As such, the first sources used for this research regards the interaction of Russia with its Western direct or indirect neighbors, but also the image and the perception they had of each other. Nonetheless, these sources only provided for a global context to better understand all the dynamics characterizing the exclave, thus why the necessity of using the security dimensions is the theoretical basis of my research.

This definition of security notably joins the one of Buzan (1983), which without being innovative, brings a good basis to study security tensions with its five dimensions: military, political, economic, societal and environmental². Out of these, four of them appear particularly relevant to Kaliningrad's case while two of these four can only constitute one: military, economic and political/societal. These dimensions constitute the basis for the analysis of this research: they allow for specific consideration of the different sources regarding the history and role of Kaliningrad.

Unfortunately, there are not many available sources from scholars about Kaliningrad's economy and society, nonetheless this lack of sources could be completed by some information provided by newspapers or encyclopedia for more general concerns. The sources regarding the military dimension were though more numerous, considering the importance of the oblast in

² Buzan B. (1983), *People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf).

the Russian military dispositive, placing it at the heart of the current geopolitics. As such, qualitatively speaking, a certain amount of good quality elements were available but still completed by less reliable ones, such as newspapers.

To compensate for this, it was decided to some history-oriented materials, even if not always scholar's ones, allowing for more elements to emerge and thus help in characterizing dynamics that were potentially still valid for the current times. This is where the use of institutes' notes, although not as qualitative as research papers, played a role in providing insights into these underlying ideas. Finally, the use of encyclopedia is justified by the need to remind of some general events that structured the regional context, before passing on more precise notions.

In the end, this paper, while following this existing knowledge, aims at expanding this limited local scope to a bigger one including the whole region to foster global understating of the roots of these current security issues. In this case, it aims at using the local Kaliningrad case studied to envision a more global historical perspective of the region-wide conflict that takes place on the eastern side of the Baltic Sea area, with the help of an internal analysis of strategic and political decisions from the inside of both sides.

Analysis

The analysis led in this paper uses the multiple security dimensions (military, economic, political/societal) to evaluate how their variable consideration by a state influences its place in the historical dynamics of its nearby international environment.

The aim of this paper is to consider the historical and current situation of the oblast and exclave of Kaliningrad regarding the policies implemented there by the national government, whether Soviet or Russian, to ensure the complete fulfillment of its role as a security provider. The exclave's situation allows for the study of both military and non-military dimensions that made it an object influencing international relations in the Baltic Sea area until present days.

Considering this, this dissertation relies on a historical analysis, not only of the security dimensions precedingly described, but also of the whole local environment in relation to its international surroundings, leading to the formulation of arguments explaining the dynamics that characterize the immediate area but also more globally the tensions between the actors.

Object and Subject

The object of this research is the historical dynamics of international relations as they are analyzed in theoretical framework according to the notion of security and its dimensions as defined by the existing literature. As such, the induced subject is the influence of the different security dimensions considered by a state on the historical dynamics of an international environment, with a focus on a specific case.

Objective and Tasks

The objective is to uncover the different security dimensions-related arguments that, in the end, explain from a historical point of view the dynamics of EU/NATO – Russia relations in the Baltic Sea area. Thus, the tasks are the following:

- To explore the different security dimensions (military, economy, society/politics) to have a complete view of all the factors considered by local and national authorities in their policy decisions
- To use a historical perspective to uncover the short and long-term dynamics that characterized the exclave's evolution throughout the decades
- To extend the horizon of the policymaking behind these evolutions beyond the sole exclave by integrating national and international factors
- To combine the exploration of security dimensions, historical perspective and surrounding context to hypothesize the different factors behind the dynamics
- To formulate clearly in what way these security factors explain the capacity of the exclave but also Russia to persist as an important actor in the Baltic Sea area

Research questions

The first research question is: **how does the role of Kaliningrad as a focal point of tensions between Russia and EU/NATO countries demonstrate a certain evolution of the Russian control on the Baltic region since 1991 through the multiple security dimensions it previously used?**

The second research question is: **how the example of Kaliningrad reflects the historical challenges for Russia to get its multi-dimensional security interests considered by other European countries in the Baltic region since 1991, leading to the current tensions in the region?**

Hypothesis

The hypothesis at stake here is that a state like Russia, when confronted to the management of a territory like Kaliningrad which is surrounded by countries relatively hostile to it, will prioritize investments in the military-related dimension of security rather than the economic and societal/political ones. This is based on the logic of realism, where the objective is to maintain a territory in its current borders, thus a power balance in the area as favorable as possible to the implicated state. Considering this, the interest in maintaining the local economy or society under control should follow the guidelines traced for military development as decided by the national government with regard for the country's foreign policy. This way, the authorities would aim at maintaining the country's place and interests in the Baltic Sea area, while ensuring a certain internal control over the local economy and population.

Theories and Research Methodology

The theory used in this thesis is the existence of several dimensions of security as defined by Buzan, of which were retained three: military, economy and society/politics (that is partially considered under the angle of demographic development in relations to the political center). These dimensions are combined with a realistic vision of international relations and the theory of historical institutionalism, which means that time constitutes the independent variable and public policies the dependent one, both influencing the events occurring in the designated area.

The use of qualitative sources, completed by some quantitative ones, is meant to ensure the scientific nature of this work. To this end, the most significant ones are the results of both scholars' work in historical and contemporary international relations fields, completed by more general contributions such as an encyclopedia or a few journalistic sources for the illustrations. The quantitative data, despite having sometimes inherent bias, is used to better understand the interests of the actors, thus the decisions and policies that shape the dynamics studied.

This should allow for a clear understanding of the accumulation of events and the dynamics that they created, clarifying Kaliningrad's role in the Baltic Sea area, along that of its neighbors, as Russia is leading a **policy of stiffening in face of its decline of regional influence** on the EU/NATO, while at the same time **continuing a historical ambition to reaffirm its interests against an "invasive" actor**.

Significance

This thesis is meant to contribute to the understanding of the role of Kaliningrad in the Russian military but also economic and societal policies in the Baltic Sea Area. It aims at providing a window on how the current decisions made in relation to the context of confrontation between Russia and EU/NATO are the result of historical dynamics linked to defense of varying interests potentially conflicting with each other. What makes this research particularly relevant is the increasing use of Kaliningrad as a tool in the recent tensions emerging from the war in Ukraine that started in 2022. Thus, clarifying the key factors in current Russian policies may help in understanding the future ones to be applied from now on.

Structure

This dissertation aims at affirming or infirming the two hypotheses described above, thus leading to its articulation around the following structure.

The first chapter is dedicated to the history of the exclave itself, from the end of World War Two in 1945 to the current days (after 2022). Description of the different steps of the oblast's history is meant to underline how the different security dimensions interacted with each other in the context, creating specific dynamics to be further analyzed as the international environment of the exclave is being set. In this order, are considered separately the reconstruction under Stalin, the post-Stalinist Soviet era, the 1990s transition and finally the contemporary Russia since the 2000s.

The second chapter focuses on the military dimension of security in Kaliningrad by underlining the oblast's historical importance in the area's history, from its structure during the Prussian times to the end of the Cold War. This first outlook is divided in two parts, one on pre-Soviet times and one on Soviet times, to underline the importance of the exclave for the all the actors, including non-Russian ones. The dynamics revealed there are then contextualized in a second part with the role of Kaliningrad in the Russian contemporary military policies and the precise deployments described.

The third chapter underlines the economic aspect of Kaliningrad's history as it constitutes a territory at the crossroads of Central, Eastern and Northern Europe. To uncover the underlying dynamics, this chapter focuses on the economic opening of the 1990s then the progressive deterioration of it during the 2000s in a first part. Following this, in a second part,

it assesses the positives and negatives of the current situation, opening the door on potential evolutions induced by current policies.

The conclusion is meant to summarize all the dynamics that were revealed throughout the three chapters in the first time, before confronting them with the hypotheses in a second time. Once the confrontation is affected, a third part is stating all the findings and what can be deduced from them.

CHAPTER 1: KALININGRAD, HISTORICAL FOCAL POINT FOR RUSSIA'S RELATIONS WITH THE WEST

If Kaliningrad holds today a significant place in the imaginary of Russia – EU relations, it is the result of its specific history of bridge between different parts of Europe that never stopped interacting with each other, even to the point of outright confrontation. As such, studying the different aspects of security in the Baltic Sea region leads to underline the specific case of a territory that was progressively Russified from 1945 onwards³. In this regard, the development of military, economic and social life in the exclave constitute a good basis to pinpoint at the Russian current security policies in the Baltic Sea area, Kaliningrad ending up being a lasting significative lever of power.

This chapter aims at providing a historical background necessary to understand the different security dimensions that will be later detailed. In a first time, will be described the progressive development of the exclave under Stalin, the main protagonist of the territory's annexation. Following this, will be assessed how the post-Stalinist Soviet governments confirmed the military character of the territory while enhancing its industrial vocation. In a second time, this chapter will focus on the political and economic opening of the exclave to the West, with the induced consequences for the local population in the 1990s and early 2000s. Finally, will be underlined the progressive closure taking place until our days with the return to a more conflictual posture of Russian foreign policy, a change that limits the exclave's economic development.

This review of the exclave's recent history aims at demonstrating how the successive policies adopted by the Soviet then Russian government shaped the use of Kaliningrad as both a weapon against and a bridge towards its Western neighbours. The exclave is here playing the role of an outpost of Russian interests facing the end of the Cold War and the subsequent expansion of EU/NATO in the former Soviet sphere, remaining an opportunity for Russia to affirm its interests in the regional balance of power⁴. Consequently, the history of the exclave

³ Eaton, N. and Malinkin M.E. (2016). Building a Soviet City: the Transformation of Königsberg. *Wilson Center*.

⁴ Loizzo, C. (2023). Kaliningrad : une exclave territoriale russe à haute valeur stratégique. *Géoconfluences*.

allows for a better understanding of how Russia aims at preserving its influence and interests in the region, but also at what price for its population and economy.

1.1 - Kaliningrad during Soviet times (1945-1991)

In this part, the history of the exclave during the Soviet era will be examined as it constitutes the basis of the modern Kaliningrad as it stands nowadays. In a first time, the Stalinist era will be described as the founding phase of the new history of the territory, in rupture with its Prussian identity dating from the Middle Ages. Will be underlined demographic changes, economic reconstruction and political guidelines that allowed for the progressive assimilation of the territory into the Soviet system despite the lack of historical control over it. Parallely, this will help underline how quickly the government assessed the strategic nature of such a territory in the emerging context of the Cold War.

Following this, the post-Stalinist era than ensued until the collapse of the Union in 1991 will serve as a basis to understand how the exclave was used as a military strategic point in the midst of the Cold War, while developing a specific demographic and economic character that ended up being dependent on global variations in the state policies. This puts in place the elements that will later explain the complete transformations that occurred in the 1990s, underlining the difficulty for the territory and its population to persist despite a complete system change that was profiling out.

1.1.1 - Rebirth of the city under Stalin (1945-1953)

Kaliningrad as it is known today would not exist if the destiny of the city had not been definitively changed in the last days of World War Two. The region that was then known as Eastern Prussia and its capital city Königsberg constituted one of the last bastions of resistance of the German Army on the Eastern Front, a resistance that following the order of the head of the Nazi regime included the prevention of any population displacement towards today's Germany⁵. Nonetheless, the declining force of the German army led to mass exodus of the population, this same order not being enforced under humanitarian considerations. This sole fact constitutes the first step towards the transformation of the exclave's socio-political

⁵ Beevor, A (2002). *Berlin: The Downfall 1945* Penguin Books. p. 91.

structure: the expulsion of its hundred years-implemented population, and along it, of any trace of German nationalism that may impact the future owner of the territory⁶.

On May 9th, 1945 (Moscow time), Nazi Germany signed its reedition to the Allies, allowing for the definitive occupation of Eastern Prussia by the Red Army, but also leaving its destiny to the ensuing Potsdam Conference (August 1st). This same reunion of the main Allied leaders ended on the redefinition of the German territory: the country as known today would be occupied by the Allies, while the Eastern territories would be annexed by Poland and USSR⁷. Consequently, Eastern Prussia got itself divided in two parts: one Polish and one Soviet, the latter constituting an interesting outpost for the victorious Soviet Union. Indeed, the country not only reclaimed what was left in terms of economic structures to be exploited but also a yearly ice-free port able to expand the military intervention range of its Baltic fleet but also of its merchant fleet (something to be proved useful during the Cold War)⁸. Somehow, by taking control of the enclave, the Soviet leadership guaranteed a control over the Baltic Sea but also an access to wider horizons yet to be controlled entirely.

⁶ Eberhardt, Piotr (2018). "Kwestia podziału Prus Wschodnich w okresie II wojny światowej". *Przegląd Geograficzny* (in Polish). 90 (4): 610.

⁷ Eaton, N. and Malinkin M.E. (2016). Building a Soviet City: the Transformation of Königsberg. *Wilson Center*.

⁸ Loizzo, C. (2023). Kaliningrad : une exclave territoriale russe à haute valeur stratégique. *Géococonfluences*.



The division of Germany and the annexation of East Prussia (including Königsberg) in 1945 (upper-right corner). Source: Germany is split up. *Anne Frank Stichting*.

<https://www.annefrank.org/en/timeline/229/germany-is-split-up/>

Despite previous population movement occurring at the end of the now terminated war, the German population was allowed to remain on the exclave's territory in the immediate aftermath of the armistice. As such, even the arrival of the soldiers of the Red Army and their suppletive forces did not prevent the Germans to still form the majority of the local population for the two and a half years to come⁹. It is also to be noted that the territory contained a small Lithuanian minority, generally integrated in the German-speaking population itself, something that would not help the Soviet authorities in their politics of searching the “enemy within”, the one responsible for the ensuing lagging development of the territory. Indeed, the failure of the public policies (described below) called for the search of a “pre-packaged enemy”¹⁰.

⁹ Eaton, N. and Malinkin M.E. (2016). Building a Soviet City: the Transformation of Königsberg. *Wilson Center*.

¹⁰ Ibid

This policy of a common enemy to identify and punish in fact led to the definitive expulsion of the German population between 1947 and 1948 and its replacement by one deemed more reliable by the state, i.e., one originating from the heart of the Union itself and who would not forcibly have particular ties to the territory itself¹¹. In this regard, the Lithuanian minority constituted an interesting case, as their massive integration into the German speaking-majority could expose them to the same fate. To avoid this, they had to demonstrate their proficiency in Lithuanian language, official idiom of the recently annexed Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic. This led also a certain number of Germans to fake speaking Lithuanian in order to stay, the Lithuanians being “redeemed from fascism”¹².

After this expulsion policy was implemented, only a few “bourgeois specialists”, as the regime called them, were authorised to remain until the early 1950s. The main reason was economic: these specialists were used in the industries that once made the wealth of this territory, notably the extractive ones¹³. As such, it was possible to find a German in the mining industry for a few years, despite the harsh living conditions they shared with their neighbours (almost to the point of starving). This could refrain them to work as hard as the Soviet authorities would expect from such indispensable elements, and as such, justify their later expulsion to the under excuse of not being cured from ‘fascism’, contrary to the people they were supervising¹⁴.

Parallely to these expulsions, the regime replaced the demographic losses in the exclave with the arrival a more reliable population originating from the core of the country, meant to sustain the fragile economic situation of the post-War period. Organised from Moscow itself, thousands of people from central Russia but also Ukraine and Belarus arrived in the exclave¹⁵. This influx is reflected in the statistics: in October 1945, they were only 5,000 Soviet civilians plus a few Red Army administrators and half-mobilised troops, while in 1948, the total population already reached 400,000¹⁶. Due to its strategic nature, the military-related populated

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

contributed to a significant extent to the repopulation, the rest of it being the result of a non-negligible input of civilians coming from collective farms from the rest of the country.

Some of these civilians came voluntarily, as they were promised many advantages: tax break incentives, free cows, free housing, grain and travel passports. However, many of them used the passport to leave the exclave's collective farms and move to other Russian cities or back home, somehow benefiting of a kind of loophole¹⁷. Also, local collective farms in mainland Russia could receive a quota of people to be sent to the exclave, generally inciting them to send their less useful elements: pregnant women, alcoholics, less educated people, etc. This way, the exclave found itself populated by a mix of people from different parts of the country (but still overwhelmingly Russian and to a lesser extent Belarussian or Ukrainian) but generally with a similar rural background, which ensured a certain level of available workforce to rebuild the exclave¹⁸.

Indeed, the economic situation in the exclave was far from ideal as World War Two brought high levels of destruction in a territory that was still fought for in the last months of the conflict. The combined evacuation and expulsion of local population meant that the land was not cultivated while the bombardments had destroyed the industrial potential and the infrastructures of the region. As such, the new population was expected to rebuild everything from what was left, a gigantic effort that may explain the leniency on some Germans until the early 1950s as explained above. The presence of the army from 1945 was a good point as it created employment in areas where it was based (mainly the city of Kaliningrad and Baltiisk) due to logistical reasons, although this aspect of Kaliningrad's economy would only come to full exploitation after Stalin's death.

In fact, the economic situation of the exclave stayed rather deteriorated as, from 1946, Stalin did not include it in any of the state's post-war budget or Five-Year plan: the exclave only constituted a special line item on the country's budget¹⁹. This explains the difficulty for the population to strive on a territory where they are expected to build everything with very little support of state. An illustration of this is the urbanism of the city of Kaliningrad itself: while the suburbs were built following traditional Soviet patterns, the historical centre just lied in

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

ruins²⁰. In the end, political preoccupations about controlling this territory without any certain future may have hindered the development of the local economy in the first years, the state seemingly wanting to stabilise the political perspectives first of all.

The political situation remained a bit uncertain in the years following World War Two, the presence of a German population until 1947 being particularly symbolic of the debate on whom to attribute this territory to. After the war, it was for sure impossible to give it back to Germany, as the country just surrendered and found itself without functioning government²¹. Another choice could have been to just annex it to the neighbouring Lithuanian SSR, something sensible considering the presence of the “fascism-free” Lithuanian minority and the absence of geopolitical threat. Nonetheless, a combination of opposition from the Lithuanian government and repopulation choices, mainly from Russia, may have pushed the Kremlin to officially make it part of the RSFSR, creating a literal exclave within the USSR territory²². In this regard, the renaming of the main city in Kaliningrad in 1949 and the destruction of the castle’s ruins in 1957 definitely anchored the exclave in the Russian sphere²³.

In 1957, Stalin had already been dead for four years while destalinisation was launched after Khrushchev’s speech, but this symbolic destruction can be seen as the epilogue of a demographic and political takeover of a former German territory that would become an integrant part of modern Russia²⁴. The new population, assigned with the rebuilding of the exclave’s economy, started living in a context that would get increasingly closer to that of the rest of the country, making this 1945-1957 timeframe a both formative and transitional passage of the exclave’s history, one that definitely tied Kaliningrad to Russia’s history.

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Rumler, Frank (21 November 2012). "Rebuilding Post War Germany: A Century-Long Project". *Berlin Germany Life: City Info Guide*.

²² Milan Bufon (11 April 2014). *The New European Frontiers: Social and Spatial (Re)Integration Issues in Multicultural and Border Regions*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing. p. 98.

²³ Eaton, N. and Malinkin M.E. (2016). Building a Soviet City: the Transformation of Königsberg. *Wilson Center*.

²⁴ Sukhankin, S. (2021). Kaliningrad in the Post-Crimea Russia. A Bastion or a Weak Link?. *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 124, *Ifri*.

1.1.2 – Development in post-Stalinist times (1957-1991)

The death of Stalin will inaugurate a time of relative regularisation for the exclave. As stated above, the efforts towards its reconstruction contributed to aligning the territory's destiny to that of the country more globally, which does not prevent one from looking at the evolution of the three different aspects described above throughout what witnessed the progressive decline of one of the two major geopolitical power of the Cold War.

Indeed, the war itself revealed the central role the enclave could occupy in a confrontation with NATO, something that appeal to a historical confrontational relationship between Russia and its Western neighbours. During World War One, the territory was site of battles between the German Empire and its Russian counterparts²⁵. At the end of it, as USSR tried to spread revolution not only in Germany but also to the rest of Central Europe, the territory could represent a fragility that only the following one could really turn into an advantage for the Soviet ambitions. Indeed, after World War Two, the country deployed troops in the newly under influence Central Europe but also the exclave itself²⁶. The idea here was to consolidate an isolationist Russian way, in competition with the West.

As such, the fortress character reappeared: the oblast gets heavily militarised and forbidden to foreigner while Baltiisk itself becomes a “closed city” until 1991 because of its even more strategic role as an on-the-sea port and industry centre²⁷. More concretely, the presence as an ice-free port makes it perfect to host the headquarters of the Soviet Baltic fleet, something that will lead to the progressive building during the Cold War of a total of six aeronaval bases, one of marine infantry and two antisurface missile launch sites for example. Between 100,000 and 200,000 soldiers will be stationed there, along with many people linked to the military's need (engineers, technicians, families, etc.), leading this specific population to dominate the exclave's demographics, especially in the post-Stalinist times²⁸. Such an important presence on such a reduced territory was meant to ensure quantitative supremacy over NATO's

²⁵ See the famous Battle of Tannenberg in 1914 for example: The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica (2025, August 19). *Battle of Tannenberg*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Tannenberg-World-War-I-1914>

²⁶ Eaton, N. and Malinkin M.E. (2016). Building a Soviet City: the Transformation of Königsberg. *Wilson Center*.

²⁷ Loizzo, C. (2023). Kaliningrad : une exclave territoriale russe à haute valeur stratégique. *Géoconfluences*.

²⁸ Eaton, N. and Malinkin M.E. (2016). Building a Soviet City: the Transformation of Königsberg. *Wilson Center*.

forces stationed in the western part of the Baltics, but also to reaffirm the country's power in front of potential dissidences within the bloc²⁹.

Consequence of this high-level of militarization and the ensuing demographical balance induced, the local economy was heavily deformed in favour of serving military needs, as the domination of such related jobs among the inhabitants can indicate. This marks change compared to the reconstruction phase, where agriculture and extractive industries (like amber) were valued, indicating a certain take over decided by the party³⁰. Indeed, what would later be a severe fragility, is the high dependency of this same economy to the economic centre of decision (Moscow) and reliance in the integration in a well-coordinated planned economy shared it neighbouring territories. In this regard, the exclave does not differ much from the rest of the country, except that the banning of foreign contacts and restriction of movements within the oblast itself created a seclusion that would not survive well in the post-Cold War situation³¹.

All of this control, in fine, was also illustrated by a strict control of the information flow, something essential in such a strategic territory for the Soviet authorities in order to avoid any societal perturbations. It cannot be ignored that the exclave has a specific history that ties it to Western Europe, the 'false Europe' in the adversary camp of the Cold War³². Wanting to avoid such an influence, the authorities continued in the way of the expulsions by prohibiting foreign contacts and closing Baltiisk, ensuing a control normally simply assured by the presence of the Party itself³³. In this regard, the territory did not differ from the rest of the country, something that can be justified by its relatively undifferentiated demographics compared to the rest of the RSFSR, although it witnessed the mounting liberal ideas in the late 1980s surrounded by entities in a process of independantizing (as illustrated by the *Via Baltica* in 1989)³⁴.

²⁹ Benjamin Weiser (2005). *Ryszard Kukliński. Życie ściśle tajne*. Warszawa: Świat Książki.

³⁰ Sukhankin, S. (2021). Kaliningrad in the Post-Crimea Russia. A Bastion or a Weak Link?. *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 124, Ifri.

³¹ Loizzo, C. (2023). Kaliningrad : une exclave territoriale russe à haute valeur stratégique. *Géococonfluences*.

³² Neumann, Iver. (2016). *Russia and the idea of Europe: A study in identity and international relations*, second edition.

³³ Loizzo, C. (2023). Kaliningrad : une exclave territoriale russe à haute valeur stratégique. *Géococonfluences*.

³⁴ See the events of the Baltic Chain in 1990: Taagepera, Rein (1993). *Estonia: Return to Independence*. Westview Series on the Post-Soviet Republics. Westview Press. p. 157.

Considering the exclave's history under all these aspects, the timelapse between destalinisation and the fall of USSR constituted de facto more of a time of normalisation, of alignment with the rest of the country. Nonetheless, it cannot be denied the geostrategic importance of the territory in itself led to a deep militarisation that, interacting with the sociopolitical change of the 1990s, will strongly influence its later development with regard to the central state but also its neighbouring territories.

1.2 - An exclave in post-Soviet Russia (since 1991)

Following the analysis of the exclave's reconstruction and management during the Soviet era, it must be discussed the deep changes that occurred following the geopolitical changes emerging from the Cold War. The idea here is to describe how the Russian governments tried to apply their global aspirations to the West to the exclave, to the point of changing its destiny as time was passing. In this regard, the contrast between the two phases (1990s/early 2000s and since the 2000s) should indicate how the governmental interests allow for more or less economic and social liberty depending on the primary military objectives in the region to be followed. Thus, why these security dimensions will be connected to one another along those two steps in the modern history of the exclave.

Considering all of this, will be explained first how the liberal political orientation of the Yeltsin government in the 1990s led to a complete opening of the exclave from an economical point of view, as a way to compensate the decline in military presence in a period of economic difficulties. Secondly, starting from this project of bridge towards the West, will be characterised how Putin governments progressively favoured the military aspect of the exclave to the detriment of the economy and society, in order to align the exclave's use with the more confrontational context with the West. Indeed, this should lead to the current situation where the territory geostrategic character took precedence over the rest, in contrast to the 1990s and their overture.

1.2.1 – Decline and opening to the West (1991 to mid-2000s)

The progressive dissolution of the central authority within USSR during the ultimate years of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s coincided with a phase of liberalisation in both economic and sociopolitical structures, one that would generate a certain level of chaos

and decline also hurting Kaliningrad as an integrant part of the emerging Russian state. Similarly, the tendency of the country in the ensuing years, under the Presidency of Boris Yeltsin, to open to Europe and its economic and political systems would be a motor of change in the relationship of the exclave with its neighbouring territories³⁵.

The first consequences surrounding Kaliningrad regards geostrategic challenges linked to its military nature. From 1990, the three Baltic states took their independence from the central power while Poland got itself out from Moscow's control imposed after World War Two. This constitutes obviously a key point, as this matter of fact alone transforms the territory into an exclave surrounded by foreign countries³⁶. As such, ensuring the continuity with the rest of the national territory becomes impossible, rendering the control of the government more fragile than previously conceived. Indeed, even with the formal renunciation of Germany to recuperate the exclave in 1990, a rumour (later debunked by Gorbachev) emerged that the Soviet government proposed its restitution, illustrating how difficult change was to manage for the central government in the midst of a political and economic chaos (described below)³⁷. In the end, the Yeltsin government managed to find an adequate solution via the diplomatic channels: the newly independent Lithuania and Belarus agreed on a principle of free circulation of persons between the exclave and the rest of the national territory. This did not prevent the appearance of actual barriers at the border with customs controls and visa fees for Poland or further removed countries that became time and money-consuming with time³⁸.

³⁵ Neumann, Iver. (2016). *Russia and the idea of Europe: A study in identity and international relations*, second edition.

³⁶ See map

³⁷ Berger, Stefan (31 July 2010). Rusbridger, Alan (ed.). "Should Kant's home once again be German?". *The Guardian*. London, England, United Kingdom.

³⁸ Richard, Y. and Sebentsov, A. and Zotova, M. (2015). The Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. Challenges and limits of its integration in the Baltic region. *Cybergeogeo: European Journal of Geography*.



Kaliningrad in the new geographical context that emerged in 1991 following the dissolution of the USSR.

Source: Tetart, Frank (2007). Symétrie spatiale et temporelle d'une enclave : la Prusse-Orientale (1919-1939) et Kaliningrad (1992-2004). *Revue géographique de l'Est*. <https://journals.openedition.org/rge/207>

Underlining the emergence of these juridical barriers reveals how the exclave maintains a certain level of not only physical but also economic isolation against odds, as the statute of closed city and restricted access were removed by a central authority not really in measure of financing completely the military dimension of this geostrategic fortress³⁹. Indeed, one of the main interests in the exclave during the Cold War was its ability to mass troops and dispositive close to NATO countries, but the collapse of USSR and the opening to the West made this aim

³⁹ Żyła, M. (2019). Kaliningrad oblast in the military system of the Russian Federation. *Security and Defence Quarterly*, 25(3), pp.99-117.

disappear. As such, although the military presence will remain enough influent to slow down the economic opening to the Westernizing neighbors, it nonetheless goes through a crisis shared with the rest of the military complex during the 1990s. An indicator of this can be the level of delinquency of the city of Kaliningrad during this same decade: it had the highest HIV rate, narcotics problem and poverty impacting more than half of its population⁴⁰. As such, the emergence of barriers only partially bypassed in diplomatic terms by the government amplified the national problems at the local scale of Kaliningrad itself.

As hinted at above, the economy plays a central role in explaining such a decline during the 1990s. The decline of investments in the military because of the crisis of the central state was a first major hit as the city's economic structure was built around this same sector during the Cold War to the point of deforming it. This revealed to be a factor of aggravation, as the other sectors (agriculture and industry) also declined due to the loss of the connection via the traditional networks, notably to the Russian markets⁴¹. Parallely, this isolation increased with the progressive of Poland and Lithuania in the EU, one that required the raise of standard in matters of customs in order to achieve a certain level of uniformity within the community. As such, importing also became difficult despite the need for it due to the lack of resources, notably the lack of self-sufficiency of local agriculture and the dependency in terms of power and fuel supply⁴². This contributed to an economic decline faster than in the rest of the country, as illustrated by the deep recession in the vital industries (mechanical engineering, pulp and paper industry, fisheries, etc.), thus triggering a response from the government.

To counter these effects, the government tried to use the potential of Kaliningrad as a costal territory close to Europe in the wake of its liberal economic and diplomatic policies. For example, it could potentially attract new trade partners, including remote ones, with goods carriage by the sea. Nonetheless, it was rather decided in 1996 to turn the oblast into a special economic zone (SEZ) that would allow for the installation of foreign companies able to maintain the precedent level of industrial output: the Yantar SEZ was born⁴³. To concretise it, tax provisions and labour costs difference were exploited, allowing for the installation of new

⁴⁰ Eaton, N. and Malinkin M.E. (2016). Building a Soviet City: the Transformation of Königsberg. *Wilson Center*.

⁴¹ Richard, Y. and Sebentsov, A. and Zotova, M. (2015). The Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. Challenges and limits of its integration in the Baltic region. *Cybergeo: European Journal of Geography*.

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid

contributors to the local economy, including Avtotor as a subcontractor of BMW, Kia and Hyundai. The “Hong Kong of the Baltic” still had strong links to the motherland via the building of a NPP, the start of a ferry connection with Saint-Petersburg or the presentation of free-zone advantage as a compensation for the territory’s remoteness⁴⁴. This presence of a central state will start becoming an issue towards the turn of the millennium the combined EU-Russia investments that constituted a certain help declined due to political difficulties that were only to increase afterwards.

These tensions do not only stem from the military considerations described above but also from the evolution of the local sociopolitical landscape during the decade. The opening up to the neighbouring democratising countries (Poland and Lithuania first and foremost) created a fear of emancipation due to a too heavy Westernisation of the population⁴⁵. It is to be reminded that the central government is facing secessionism in the Caucasus after witnessing the effects of the Baltic one on the Soviet institutions: as such, it is not surprising that Moscow dislikes the potential dangers of the free circulation of persons between the exclave and Lithuania. This same freedom will only be maintained in extremist by a provisional agreement in 2003, in prevision of Lithuania’s accession to the EU⁴⁶. This time, nonetheless, a multi-passage authorisation is required so that the flow stays relatively manageable, whether it be for economic, touristic or medical reasons. Somehow, this step marked a kind of control demonstration from Moscow: beyond the simple measures of support and advantages, the mitigation of exclavisation also requires a stricter control (here via travel documents as an example) over the exclave’s population to avoid further issues undermining the Russian control over the territory⁴⁷.

This return to a wider control from the authorities joins well the context of the late 1990s and early 2000s: these years would indeed mark a return to more traditional views of civilisation within Russia, liberalism appearing as an increasingly marginalised opinion that needed a resented move of Yeltsin against the parliament to survive among the Russian government’s

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Loizzo, C. (2023). Kaliningrad : une exclave territoriale russe à haute valeur stratégique. *Géococonfluences*.

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Sukhankin, S. (2021). Kaliningrad in the Post-Crimea Russia. A Bastion or a Weak Link?. *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 124, *Ifri*.

guidelines⁴⁸. In the ensuing years, proponents of nationalism and big state started gaining importance, with the election of Putin as their momentum in 1999 that would definitely put the country on a way impacting cooperation with its neighbours, especially in the case of Kaliningrad. In this regard, the cooperation instituted with the European neighbours became a secondary object compared to the ensuring of control over the military fortress against the expanding NATO⁴⁹. As will be described in the following part, this decline in cooperation will mark the overtaking of the military dimension over the economic one following a policy change that would also restrict the possibilities of interborder relations for the local population.

1.2.2 – Return of tensions and isolation (since the mid-2000s)

After having shown a certain level of cooperation with the EU and accommodated with the expansion of NATO in 1995, the now Putin-led Russian government started to toughen its position regarding its western neighbours from the mid-2000s onwards. This change can be explained by the disillusion of the Russian political elites in face of the 2004 NATO expansion in the former Eastern Bloc countries but also its controversial influence over political events in both Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004). Considering this, Putin switched to the idea of facing a “decadent” Europe and act in accordance with its decisions⁵⁰.

Consequently, the policies of economical opening and cooperation related to Kaliningrad started suffering from this changing context of the late 2000s. The territory started losing its attractiveness as the different circulation agreements could be threatened by the possibility of a frozen conflict, the exclave becoming once again thorn in the side of EU and NATO⁵¹. This strategic change hinders the possibility stated in the 1990s to transform the territory into a “Hong Kong of the Baltic”: the economic stronghold to be created is now to become a fortress countering the “Western expansionism”. From the 2000s, in line with a more global trend, military investments started increasing parallelly to the adoption of a new strategy: the focus becomes the defence, meaning a policy of territorial limitation aimed at withstanding

⁴⁸ Neumann, Iver. (2016). *Russia and the idea of Europe: A study in identity and international relations*, second edition.

⁴⁹ Fedorov, G. M. (2020). On the economic security of Russia's Kaliningrad exclave. *Baltic Region*, 12(3), 40-54.

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Eaton, N. and Malinkin M.E. (2016). *Building a Soviet City: the Transformation of Königsberg*. *Wilson Center*.

an initial attack from outside and coordinated disruptions from this inside⁵². This realignment induces the increase of the role of the military in the exclave's management, thus inducing an even greater level of isolation necessary to ensure the expected level of state control.

This new dynamic decided by the Russian government itself has concrete consequences on the local society. The population of the exclave was used to go to Poland or Lithuania for different reasons, but above all economic ones. After 2005, and the signature of a definitive agreement with the EU, the passport was once again required to use the multi-passage authorisation for transit through foreign countries (thus excluding direct flights and ferries)⁵³. Progressively, customs procedures became more significant, diminishing the potentiality for a cross-border integration with neighbouring societies, something wanted by the government in order to ensure a certain level of political control. As such, the isolation meant a higher control from institutions permanently dominated by the presidential party, despite failures in terms of urban planning for example. Still today, the city of Kaliningrad lacks a proper historical centre, the only concrete actions taken being the destruction of the never finished House of Soviets in 2023-2024 and the recurring debate about the rebuilding of the castle⁵⁴. It still remains a mostly suburban city dating back from the 1940s to 1970s. Somehow, the militarisation induced by the new governmental policies did not really allow for a deep modernisation of the oblast's infrastructures or public services.

Still, the exclave maintained a certain level of economic and demographic attractiveness, but one oriented towards people from the rest of the country or the ex-USSR. This is particularly true among ethnic Russians originating from Caucasus or Central Asia wanting to enjoy new economic opportunities in a place where they would not feel put apart for cultural reasons⁵⁵. Globally, the exclave remained more liveable and affordable than many other places in Russia until recent times, including due to its lack of integration into the Russian economy. Indeed, the government is particularly meticulous when it comes to food price control, sustaining the economy and pumping artificial investments these last years in order to keep the population

⁵² Sukhankin, S. (2021). Kaliningrad in the Post-Crimea Russia. A Bastion or a Weak Link?. *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 124, *Ifri*.

⁵³ Richard, Y. and Sebentsov, A. and Zotova, M. (2015). The Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. Challenges and limits of its integration in the Baltic region. *Cybergeo: European Journal of Geography*.

⁵⁴ Eaton, N. and Malinkin M.E. (2016). Building a Soviet City: the Transformation of Königsberg. *Wilson Center*.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*

satisfied with the current authorities. This is for example reflected by investments in state or state-controlled companies forming clusters of automotive, electronics and elector-technical factories benefitting from the special privileges given to the exclave by the state (ones that generated 70% of the regional output before 2022)⁵⁶.

Nonetheless, things started to fragilize after the adoption of economic and political sanction against Russia by the EU in 2014, following the occupation of Crimea. The cooperation started dissipating, leaving the governmental support alone to institutionally and financially support the exclave's economy⁵⁷. This new economic insecurity reflects the new important military statute of the exclave, as the recentring of the Russian geostrategic deployment focused more on the Baltic-Black Sea axis. As such, Kaliningrad becomes the object of remilitarisation and nuclearization processes in order to counter growing NATO presence in the neighbouring states, leading to regular provocations based on the fear of those processes but also missile crisis and regular exercises⁵⁸.

Eight years later, the war in Ukraine will end up impacting directly the mobility of persons and goods through the borders after another pack of sanctions: transport and environmental restrictions are being adopted along the new military and security approaches adopted all around the Baltic Sea. restraining transports and environmental cooperation⁵⁹. Also to be mentioned, the redeployment of a part of the 30,000 men stationed in the exclave (est. 2019) to Ukraine which goes along the use of the territory as a base for monitoring and intelligence operations in the context of the "hybrid war"⁶⁰. As described here, Kaliningrad continues to be a territory at the forefront of all the instabilities of modern Russian history. Its role as a military base was not long forgotten after the collapse of the USSR, which the authorities see as an essential part of the defense dispositive to be controlled, even if it has detrimental effects on the economy and society within the exclave itself.

⁵⁶ Richard, Y. and Sebentsov, A. and Zotova, M. (2015). The Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. Challenges and limits of its integration in the Baltic region. *Cybergeog: European Journal of Geography*.

⁵⁷ Fedorov, G. M. (2020). On the economic security of Russia's Kaliningrad exclave. *Baltic Region*, 12(3), 40-54.

⁵⁸ Loizzo, C. (2023). Kaliningrad : une exclave territoriale russe à haute valeur stratégique. *Géococonfluences*.

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Ibid

Nonetheless, this general trend must not hide the possibilities of regional integration or cooperation brought during the first years of contemporary Russia, ones that somehow still impact the territory's economy, society and military to this day.

1.3 - Conclusions

The history of Kaliningrad from 1945 reveals how the different security dimensions evoked (military, economy and society) are tied together and in fact made co-dependent by the specific context of the exclave. From the Stalinist era to the fall of USSR, the imposition of a new demographics and policies oriented towards the military and its supplying industries led to the existence of a restrained access and thus limited contact for the population⁶¹. This constatation itself underlines how the rebuilding of the exclave followed mainly its use as a geostrategic point in controlling Central Europe but also opposing NATO forces on the side of the Baltic Sea, thus ensuring a consequent advantage from a military point of view to the USSR⁶².

The economic and societal impact of these policies would reveal to be negative in the 1990s, following the collapse of the USSR and the beginning of a deep economic crisis. This would also mean that the central government tried to use the opportunities of cooperation as much as it could to improve the local situation, to ultimately progressively moderate them in face of growing tensions with the West⁶³. From this point of view, the exclave seems to be more sensible to external variations resulting from colliding foreign policies in the Baltic Sea area, something that would only increase during the late 2000s and 2010s. This way, it shows the limit Moscow can give to economic cooperation but also to foreign influence in what stays an important military site.

Indeed, the 2010s marked with the invasion of Crimea then the war in Ukraine will contribute to the return of the military role of Kaliningrad, once again as a political threat to the

⁶¹ Sukhankin, S. (2021). Kaliningrad in the Post-Crimea Russia. A Bastion or a Weak Link?. *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 124, Ifri.

⁶² Żyła, M. (2019). Kaliningrad oblast in the military system of the Russian Federation. *Security and Defence Quarterly*, 25(3), pp.99-117.

⁶³ Fedorov, G. M. (2020). On the economic security of Russia's Kaliningrad exclave. *Baltic Region*, 12(3), 40-54.

expanding West⁶⁴. With this came a reduction in cooperation transforming the territory and its population into tools of defence of Russian interests in the Baltic Sea region. As such, examining the military dimension more accurately would reveal itself very necessary as it justifies economic restrictions but also a more severe local climate from a political and societal point of view, although following the general trend witnessed elsewhere in Russia.

⁶⁴ Żyła, M. (2019). Kaliningrad oblast in the military system of the Russian Federation. *Security and Defence Quarterly*, 25(3), pp.99-117.

CHAPTER 2: KALININGRAD, WESTERN SENTINEL AGAINST NATO'S BALTIC SEA EXPANSION

After giving a global overview of the history of Kaliningrad exclave from its annexation by the USSR in 1945 to the current crisis of the early twenty-first century between Russian and EU/NATO, the objective is to detail more the three different security dimensions, as defined by Buzan (1983)⁶⁵, on which the tensions emerge. The military one is the most visible one, historically focusing on a significant part of public interests. This proves to be still an important component of today's attempt from the part of the Russian state to counter the decline of the regional influence it acquired in the Baltic Sea but also of its more global ambition to reaffirm its interests in front of an increasingly coordinated EU/NATO component.

It is in this context that all the data related to the remilitarization process of the exclave described beforehand is to be understood. The country longs for being the one defining, at least on an equal foot compared to EU/NATO, the security architecture of the region via its hard power and the threat it represents in the eyes of the neighboring countries⁶⁶. Meanwhile, the situation of growing isolation noted in the first chapter also indicates that this policy of remilitarization constitutes a transversal tool to ensure from the inside to support the perpetuation of Russian influence on the exclave's surroundings.

Consequence of this, this chapter aims at exploring the historical military significance of the exclave to justify the existence of the current policies of the Russian governments, notably by underlining the transformation occurring following the transfer of control in 1945 then the concrete advantages obtained by the country in its confrontation with the Western Bloc and EU/NATO. After describing the influence to be maintained, the focus is shifted on how Russia concretely acts with this objective in mind, meaning what tools are being deployed by the government then how it impacts both internally and externally the exclave in the confrontation context with NATO since the 2000s.

This leads us to conclude about how Kaliningrad constitutes a practical western outpost both militarily and psychologically speaking in the context of tensions with NATO. This finding

⁶⁵ Buzan B. (1983), *People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf).

⁶⁶ Żyła, M. (2019). Kaliningrad oblast in the military system of the Russian Federation. *Security and Defence Quarterly*, 25(3), pp.99-117. <https://doi.org/10.35467/sdq/105636>

is underlined by the use of the exclave as an indispensable part of the reconfiguration process of Russian military in order to counter NATO local expansion but also by the presence of ballistic missiles to reaffirm Russian interests in the Baltic Sea region, even to the point of using them as psychological threat to the EU/NATO.

2.1 – A territory historically coveted for its military significance

If Kaliningrad has always constituted such an important location in the eyes of the successive Russian governments, it can be attributed to its specific location compared to the rest of the Russian territory⁶⁷. Indeed, as it will be further developed in this chapter, the little exclave historically constituted an encounter point between the German and Russian sphere of influence, with all the military consequences induced during the conflicts that took place between the two Empires⁶⁸. As such, what used to be the heart of East Prussia was already the object of a significative defense from the part of successive German governments, especially after World War One and its separation from the mainland⁶⁹.

Understanding this matter of fact, such a behavior from the current Russian government towards what is now a geographically separated entity is understandable: the military and geostrategic advantage is to be preserved at all costs. It is to be remembered that in Russian eyes, the territory represents a door to Central Europe but also a basis for its projection capacity in the Baltics, something unachievable with its shores on the Gulf of Finland. Here also, this chapter aims at detailing what military strategic advantages Russia gained and wants to preserve in a context of EU/NATO enlargement in neighboring countries of the region, to the point of defending a *status quo* in terms of national interests balancing by exploiting the historical infrastructure developed on the territory, its opportunities offered in terms of terrestrial and maritime intervention, and the potential issue it represents for the adversary.

⁶⁷ Loïzzo, C. (2023). Kaliningrad : une exclave territoriale russe à haute valeur stratégique. *Géococonfluences*.

⁶⁸ See the battles in the Eastern Front: The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica (2025, February 14). *Eastern Front*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Eastern-Front-World-War-I-history>

⁶⁹ See the Germanisation campaign of toponyms in 1938: Neumärker, Uwe; et al. (2007). "*Wolfsschanze*": *Hitlers Machtzentrale im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (in German) (3 ed.). Ch. Links Verlag. [ISBN 978-3-86153-433-4](https://www.links-verlag.de/978-3-86153-433-4).

2.1.1 – A history of change of ownership reflecting the area's importance

Considering Kaliningrad's geographical specificity, one that made it so coveted by the Soviet then Russian governments, reminds of its specific location on the European continent⁷⁰. As indicated in the first chapter, the exclave is a Russian territory at the northern end of the Vistula Lagoon, bordered by the Baltic Sea to the west, Poland to the South and Lithuania to the north and east. This corner of the Baltic Sea is free of ice during winter, facilitating navigation on the Baltic Sea, but also a place of transit between the Baltic countries, Eastern and Central Europe.

All these geographical facts transformed this territory into a highly coveted one all through the history of the region, especially for its military potential. Indeed, Königsberg emerged as the bastion of the Teutonic knights charged with converting local populations to Christianity⁷¹, underlining how this dimension was from start an important factor in the territory developments. For the successive occupiers of the area, the territory constituted a good basis for the development of defense infrastructure required by the regular changes in political subordinations⁷². As could be expected for many strategic territories, the different regional power tried to claim rights on it as the century passed by. Poland-Lithuania and Sweden tried both to take control of it to assess greater control over the Baltic Sea and its commercial flux, an enterprise that failed as Prussia managed to retain control over its history bastion still⁷³.

The 19th century approaching, once Poland was once and for all dismissed as a power then even as a country, the coveting became mainly a conflict opposing Prussia and Russia, the former finding itself in a defensive position the latter is assuming nowadays. Here again, the control of an ice-free part of the Baltic coast was the main object of this coveting along the access position on the way to the heart of then Mitteleuropa. Still, a balance managed to persist despite the Napoleonic Wars and other radical political changes of the century, although the

⁷⁰ See the map below

⁷¹ See the Prussian Crusades (1230-1283): Spires, S. (2025, April 30). Northern Crusades. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Northern-Crusades>

⁷² Żyła, M. (2019). Kaliningrad oblast in the military system of the Russian Federation. *Security and Defence Quarterly*, 25(3), pp.99-117. <https://doi.org/10.35467/sdq/105636>

⁷³ Małek, Janusz (1992). "Polityka miasta Królewca wobec Polski w latach 1525–1701". *Komunikaty Mazursko-Warmińskie* (in Polish). No. 3–4. pp. 254–255.

territory was a key part of the German Eastern policy after 1871⁷⁴. Beyond solely being the symbolic cradle of the modern German state, one meant to insert itself in the tradition of European powers via its historical filiation, it was also a tool of military but also political penetration in its direct Eastern neighbor: Russia.

World War One came to reveal this matter of fact: after the battle of Tannenberg in 1914, which took place in today's Poland but what was Eastern Prussia at the time, Germany was able to reconquer its bastion then penetrate the westernmost parts of the Russian Empire (Poland and Lithuania)⁷⁵. This, along the regular hosting of Russian revolutionaries on the German territory that was protected by the bastion itself, made Eastern Prussia a real challenge for the Russian army and government in its war efforts⁷⁶. During the interwar period, this role of avant-poste and protection explains the determination of the German government to maintain its presence on this historically central territory, a reliable link to it being necessary to maintain a satisfying defensive deployment on this periphery of the German space. Tensions around this question implying the annexation of the city of Danzig/Gdansk, also the fruit of political and ideological claims, would eventually lead to another conflict in the region afterwards⁷⁷.

⁷⁴ Eberhardt, P., 1996. *Między Rosją a Niemcami. Przemiany narodowościowe w Europie ŚrodkowoWschodniej w XX w.*, PWN, Warszawa.

⁷⁵ See the movements on the Eastern Front: The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica (2025, February 14). *Eastern Front*. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Eastern-Front-World-War-I-history>

⁷⁶ Ibid

⁷⁷ Snyder, Louis Leo; Montgomery, John D (2003). [The new nationalism](#). Transaction Publishers. p. 88. [ISBN 978-0765805508](#)..



Germany in 1919 after territorial losses due to Versailles Treaty - Source: wlu.edu

Indeed, World War Two witnessed the repetition of the World War One's scenario: the Nazi regime used this border territory to launch its expansionist war campaign towards Poland in 1939 then USSR in 1941, while transforming it into a bastion of last resistance until the very last days of May 1945, sparing this way lives in the rest of the German territory⁷⁸. This repetition convinced the Allied powers that the dissolution of Prussia should also mean the transfer of the lands to neighboring countries, Poland and the USSR. This way, and despite the absence of historical occupation of the area, the latter could enlarge its access to Central Europe and its Baltic coast, a geopolitical calculation that managed to convince the other Allies⁷⁹. After presenting its expectations regarding East Prussia in Theran in 1943, USSR agreed with other Allied powers on the entity's liquidation at Potsdam Conference in May 1945, without raising a single doubt⁸⁰.

⁷⁸ Beevor, Antony (2002). Berlin: The Downfall 1945. Penguin Books. ISBN 0-670-88695-5.

⁷⁹ Palmowski, T., 2013. Kaliningrad – szansa czy zagrożenie dla Europy Bałtyckiej?, Wydawnictwo „Bernardinum”, Gdańsk-Pelplin, p. 72

⁸⁰ Eberhardt, P., 1994. Obwód Kaliningradzki. Wczoraj, Dziś, Jutro, Przegląd Wschodni, 3(4).

As indicated beforehand, such insistence from the Soviet Union in taking over the territory was not only merely the result of a defensive strategy against another potential attack from a future rearmed Germany, particularly unlikely after World War Two, but rather the gain of a strategic advantage helpful in consolidating the country's influence scope in Central and Eastern Europe, both politically and militarily⁸¹. On the one hand, the annexed territory offered large seaports with adequate infrastructure and absence of winter freezing. This allowed for a greater capacity for action in the Baltic Sea, giving the Soviets an advantage with their naval and aeronaval units. On the other hand, the above average communication and logistical infrastructures found and/or fixed after the war allowed for the installation of an extensive military complex⁸². This turned the territory into a door to the Central European satellite states during the Cold War, making possible greater control over their political alignment via the threat of invasion by the nearby Red Army.



Map of USSR and the whole Eastern Bloc – Source: economist.com/graphichdetail

⁸¹ Żyła, M. (2019). Kaliningrad oblast in the military system of the Russian Federation. *Security and Defence Quarterly*, 25(3), pp.99-117.

⁸² *Ibid*

This duality of strategic advantage *de facto* turned the territory into an essential part of the military organization of the country, as it allowed for both control within the Eastern Bloc itself and power demonstration against NATO troops stationed on the opposite shores of the Baltic Sea (in Germany or Denmark) but also against states to be kept out of NATO's influence (Sweden and Finland). In the end, the benefit for the USSR from a strategic point of view was immense: it replaced Germany as the keyholder at the border between the Central, Eastern and Northern European worlds, although this came to be particularly true for the Central one due to political reasons⁸³.

With the integration of the exclave in the Soviet territory, the country gained control over a key territory that has long been the object of diverse revindications from the different regional powers. As previously described, it gave the USSR a strategic advantage in the post-World War Two world order, notably by allowing for the exploitation of a new ice-free year-round port for the Baltic Sea fleet. This explains the decision of Stalin to move the headquarters of the Soviet Baltic fleet to Kaliningrad instead of Kronstadt, at the end of the Gulf of Finland⁸⁴. This would mark the start of the reconfiguration of the territory under Soviet administration, one that would maintain the historical military character of the area, even reinforce it in the new geopolitical context.

This reconfiguration eventually concretized itself in the form of a heavy militarization of the oblast during the Cold War, the logical consequence of the combined presence of the Baltic Sea fleet and other terrestrial units⁸⁵. As such, the fortress character was reinforced by the numerous restrictions regarding the access to exclave, especially for foreigners or the closed city of Baltiisk (from 1952), justified by the presence of military-industrial complex in what was the country's westernmost outpost. The numbers speak for themselves: the military personnel were estimated to reach a scope of 100,000 to 200,000, all to serve in the six naval air bases, the marine infantry base or the two anti-surface missile sites⁸⁶. To this must be added

⁸³ Żyła, M. (2019). Kaliningrad oblast in the military system of the Russian Federation. *Security and Defence Quarterly*, 25(3), pp.99-117.

⁸⁴ Loizzo, C. (2023). Kaliningrad : une exclave territoriale russe à haute valeur stratégique. *Géococonfluences*.

⁸⁵ See chapter 1

⁸⁶ Żyła, M. (2019). Kaliningrad oblast in the military system of the Russian Federation. *Security and Defence Quarterly*, 25(3), pp.99-117.

the fact that most of the new inhabitants happened to work in relation to this military presence (as engineers, technicians, etc.).

As such, the collapse of the Union in 1991 and the ensuing changes in world order came as a shock/significative change for the exclave's population. There was no more justification for such a heavy military presence, especially in times of economic crisis, which led the Yeltsin administration to cut the number of men from 100,000 to 9,000⁸⁷.

Nonetheless, the territory was still seen as regional threat by the newly independent Baltic states and Poland, now bordering a territory completely separated from its mainland. The situation got even more complex after the accession of these states to the Euro-Atlantic alliances, generating new potential for tensions, including related to other indirect fields of confrontation (Georgia, Ukraine, etc.). Indeed, this new situation eventually motivated the remilitarization process launched by the different Putin administrations, one that is still ongoing nowadays and will be further detailed afterwards.

2.1.2 – The use of the oblast in the Russian military developments since 1945

As underlined previously, annexing the region of Kaliningrad and turning it into a heavily militarized was motivated by the strategic nature it represents from a military point of view. The combination of its location facing NATO and the good infrastructural basis that has been developed during Soviet times turned the territory into an effective military fortress but also projection base to the West⁸⁸. Among these gains, the maritime ones (ice-free ports notably) would constitute the basis for the maintaining of the Russian power in the Baltic Sea, inheriting part of the range of action of the Soviet Navy in terms of access to deep waters and defense from attacks from the West⁸⁹.

With this geographical advantage, both the Soviet Union then Russia tried to build an extensive buffer zone able to refrain any invasion like that of Germany during World War Two⁹⁰.

⁸⁷ Ibid

⁸⁸ Żyła, M. (2019). Kaliningrad oblast in the military system of the Russian Federation. *Security and Defence Quarterly*, 25(3), pp.99-117. <https://doi.org/10.35467/sdq/105636>

⁸⁹ Ibid

⁹⁰ The Eastern Bloc constituting this buffer zone: Kulik, R.M. (2024, August 7). Eastern bloc. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Eastern-bloc>

This buffer zone used to include the possibility for USSR to retain Central European satellites under military control, via the direct use of the Warsaw Pact (1955) as seen in 1956 in Hungary or 1968 in Czechoslovakia for example. Without reaching this point, the sole threatening presence of the Red Army, ready to intervene steadily in case of political troubles, may have successfully deter some other diverging aspirations, such as in Poland in 1981. In this case, it can be hypothesized that martial law was declared to prevent a direct intervention⁹¹.

The collapse of USSR changed the whole geopolitical context: the independence of Baltic states notably, leading to a Euro-Atlantic presence on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea bordering Russia terrestrially, while Kaliningrad became an exclave, a part of Russia detached from the mainland. This matter of fact increased the strategic value of the territory for the Russian Army and Navy, as they were evacuating their other ports in the Baltic states. As such, the downturn in military investment that characterized the 1990s fostered conditions for a détente.

The return of more sane economic conditions in the 2000s under the presidency of Vladimir Putin, combined with the resurgence of a more civilizational vision of the country, allowed for a remobilization of means towards the army⁹². This would allow for a better exploitation of the oblast's strategic position in the post-2003 geopolitical context, with the accession of the Baltic states to NATO in 2004 marking the reduction of Russian influence in the Baltic Sea area. It could be hypothesized that the successive investments in the exclave's military infrastructure in the 2000s are part of the development of the Baltic-Black Sea defense axis, thus combining precedingly cited NATO's progression with the management of events in Ukraine and Georgia that Russia accused of being fed by Western powers members of the same alliance⁹³.

From this point of view, the events (Rose and Orange Revolution in 2003-2004) in the two countries that led to a Russian intervention, in 2008 and since 2014 respectively, showed a decline of political and military influence in the post-1991 protective glaze that Russia tried to

⁹¹ Benjamin Weiser (2005). *Ryszard Kukliński. Życie ściśle tajne*. Warszawa: Świat Książki. [ISBN 8373916733](https://www.isbn-international.org/view/title/8373916733).

⁹² Neumann, Iver. (2016). *Russia and the idea of Europe: A study in identity and international relations*, second edition. 10.4324/9781315646336.

⁹³ Cordesman, A. (2014). *Russia and the "Color Revolution"*. Center for Strategic & International Studies. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russia-and-color-revolution>

contain it as much as it could⁹⁴. Following a logic of the Baltic-Black Sea axis, it can be hypothesized that these events also motivated Russia to act in order to keep its role in the Baltic Sea region, notably by using Kaliningrad in overcoming the limitation of the hardly accessible Kronstadt happened to be neutralized by the presence (the now-NATO member) Finland and Estonia⁹⁵.



The Color Revolutions – Source: from Wikimedia Commons, created by Aris Katsaris and under Creative Commons license (2005).

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Color_Revolutions_Map.png?uselang=fr

In a similar way, if Russia could intervene directly in neighboring Georgia and Ukraine, without forcibly relying on an ally, it can be conceived that a military presence in Kaliningrad would allow for a direct intervention on neighboring Polish and Lithuanian territory as a response to an attack from the NATO, while an intervention on the Baltic Sea could also be launched against the alliance's ships and installations⁹⁶. From this perspective, it gives Russia the ability to threaten of intervening in NATO member countries, not only on non-member ones, in case the context requires it. As such, with its previous experience from Georgia and Ukraine, this military fact should be enough powerful to allow for Russia to continue to influence the

⁹⁴ Kryzhanivsky, S.A., Zasenka, O.E., Stebelsky, I., Makuch, A., Hajda, L.A., Yerofeyev, I.A. (2025, September 15). Ukraine. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine>

⁹⁵ Sukhankin, S. (2021). Kaliningrad in the Post-Crimea Russia. A Bastion or a Weak Link?. *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 124, Ifri. <https://www.ifri.org/en/papers/kaliningrad-post-crimea-russia-bastion-or-weak-link>

⁹⁶ Loizzo, C. (2023). Kaliningrad : une exclave territoriale russe à haute valeur stratégique. *Géococonfluences*.

regional and European politico-military situation from its bastion at the junction of EU/NATO's eastern borders⁹⁷.

More concretely, the importance of Kaliningrad for eventual offensive or defensive operation in the Baltic Sea, and as a tool of political influence and defense of national interests, is reflected in the particularly autonomous structure of command present in the exclave. The KSA (Kaliningrad Special Area), relying on the subordination of all units to the commander of the Baltic Fleet, combines both elements of military system and non-military subsystem thanks to the large network of coastal infrastructure, shipyards, military airports and dense rail and road infrastructure⁹⁸. The possibility for a high capacity of building, renovation and reception of ships of all classes should allow for an efficient transfer of troops, weapons and equipment in case of conflict situation, presumably more defensive one as the focus shifted recently to smaller surface vessels meant to paralyze adversary navigation and infrastructure⁹⁹.

However, the training provided, which includes the realization of tasks far from the base, would theoretically allow for a "swift operation on the scale of the Russian-Georgian war"¹⁰⁰. This could possibly underline a will of the Russian military to be able to intervene as it did previously in Georgia or Ukraine to prevent a further deterioration of the protective glaze Russian influence maintained since 1991. Also, regular coordinated exercises implicating both the Baltic Fleet and terrestrial units of the Russian Army are organized, primarily in preparation for a potential invasion but also possibly also in case of deployment westward, if necessary, as hinted at by Sergey Shoigu in 2017¹⁰¹.

Nonetheless, another contiguous aspect to this is not to be underestimated: the position of the exclave in the Russian imaginary. Since the integration of the Baltics and more recently of Sweden and Finland in the NATO, the Russian government emphasizes the idea that there is an attempt from the part of these countries to reduce Moscow's grip on the exclave as part of a

⁹⁷ Żyła, M. (2019). Kaliningrad oblast in the military system of the Russian Federation. *Security and Defence Quarterly*, 25(3), pp.99-117. <https://doi.org/10.35467/sdq/105636>

⁹⁸ Ibid

⁹⁹ Ibid

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

¹⁰¹ Ibid

more global marginalization process started in other border regions¹⁰². The origin of such perceived aggressivity still generates debate.

According to Kivimäki, it originates in the lack of understanding between EU/NATO and Russia regarding the ideological and legal ground the former had used to justify its expansion eastward, one that may motivate the Russian government in emphasizing Kaliningrad as symbol of opposition¹⁰³. Based on this assumption, it can be hypothesized that Kaliningrad, as a ‘precious war reward taken to Germany’, can constitute a good tool in promoting the persistence of Russian presence in this increasingly EU/NATO-influenced part of Europe.

Otherwise, for Neumann, Russia is engaged in building its own a civilizational order, one against a ‘decadent’ Europe, but also one that relies on getting the authorities to propagate this idea into people’s imaginary via different means¹⁰⁴. For example, the Russian authorities have enforced laws against ‘LGBT propaganda’ to fight against Western ‘decadent values’, leading not only to judicial procedures but also advertisement directed towards the population to influence its views¹⁰⁵. Even if not necessarily in the same field, the question of the strategic use of Kaliningrad in a show of force against the West because of its nature as a strategic military bastion won over the enemy from the West can be asked.

In both cases, Kaliningrad may reveal itself a practical tool in Russian governmental advertisement against both the expansion of EU/NATO and the values it threatens to infiltrate the Russian society with. Being a military bastion won over the German enemy in 1945, Kaliningrad may hypothetically symbolize a Russian island in a NATO ocean, somehow in mirror to West Berlin being a capitalist island in a Communist ocean during the Cold War. It is however too early to really measure how much does this use of Kaliningrad specifically can

¹⁰² Sukhankin, S. (2021). Kaliningrad in the Post-Crimea Russia. A Bastion or a Weak Link?. *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 124, Ifri. <https://www.ifri.org/en/papers/kaliningrad-post-crimea-russia-bastion-or-weak-link>

¹⁰³ Kivimäki, T. (2024) ‘Theoretical Premises of Support of and Opposition to NATO Enlargement’, *Geopolitics*, pp. 1–33. doi: 10.1080/14650045.2024.2352569.

¹⁰⁴ Neumann, Iver. (2016). *Russia and the idea of Europe: A study in identity and international relations*, second edition. 10.4324/9781315646336.

¹⁰⁵ Katsuba, S. (2023). Russia's "Gay Propaganda Law" and Anti-LGBTQ Violence. *Russian Analytical Digest*, 300, 5-8. <https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000631043>

impact the motivation of the population in supporting the current indirect confrontation with EU/NATO in Ukraine, which would allow for a better assessment of its impact.

2.2 – Kaliningrad in the contemporary Russia military architecture

Consequence of this strategic location, Kaliningrad constitute an important element of the Russian governmental policies regarding military matters, hosting the headquarters of the Baltic fleet currently mobilized as a response to the current tensions with NATO forces. Also, its proximity to the European members of NATO makes it a perfect field for different military exercises supposed to demonstrate the country's capacity to defend itself against potential foreign invasion or expansion. This particular use of the exclave poses the issue of how the advantages coming along the annexation of the territory during Soviet times are being exploited in more recent times.

Considering this, the context of military tensions between NATO and Russia will be first explored to demonstrate how the current Russian military policies are influencing the exclave's role in defending Russian interests in the Baltic region via a reinforcement of the military presence since the 2000s. Later, will be detailed in what consists of the mobilized human and material means and how they can impact Russia's capacity of influence and action in the same Baltic Sea region. This aims at giving a more complete image of what is happening in Kaliningrad about the latest military developments.

2.2.1 – Kaliningrad in the global Russia – NATO confrontational context

If the 1990s witnessed a temporary decline in Russian military presence in the Baltics due to the progressive retreat of Russian forces stationed in the Baltic states but also Poland and East Germany, the 2000s and the cooling of relations with NATO created a more favorable field for a remobilization of the Baltic Fleet and other terrestrial forces in the last Russian outposts, including Kaliningrad. Among the elements of this cooling in relations, can be underlined parallel adhesion of Baltic states to the EU and NATO in 2004, both putting them out of Moscow's political sphere. Strategically, it means these countries were to become a basis for the stationing of NATO troops right at the Russian border, further deteriorating the protective

glaze built during the Cold War¹⁰⁶. Indeed, the potential deployment of an anti-missile system by the Americans at the same time contributed to reinforce this feeling within the Russian government, one that led them to threaten to position Iskander missile, potentially equipped with nuclear warheads, in Kaliningrad¹⁰⁷.

This threat was to be taken seriously considering the military exercises Russia started to conduct at its western edge, including Kaliningrad. An example would be Zapad 99, which simulated a NATO attack on the exclave, an exercise led in the summer 1999 without informing the neighboring Poland and Lithuania¹⁰⁸. This exercise was the occasion to observe that if the renewed militarization of the exclave was effective, it did not follow the same pattern as during the Cold War, the focus being shifted away from quantitative supremacy in terms of locally deployed force to favor the capacity of response to foreign attacks, including from a technological standpoint¹⁰⁹. This logic continued with the ensuing military exercises, as the tensions rose around other points of contact in Ukraine and Caucasus following previously mentioned political events.

This accumulation of tensions would eventually find its climax with the Maidan protests in Ukraine in February 2014. The opposition to President Viktor Yanukovich's policies, including ones favoring closer ties with Russia instead of the EU, led to its ousting from the country. In reaction to this, protests emerged in the South and East of the country, including Crimea and its Russian-majority population, against the new political leadership¹¹⁰. In March 2014, Russia decided to intervene directly in Crimea after the latter declared unilaterally its independence, reattaching it to its territory after a referendum that was not recognized by many countries of the international community due to the circumstances it took place in. As a response, the EU adopted a series of sanctions that came to be later reinforced with the beginning of the war in Ukraine in 2022¹¹¹.

¹⁰⁶ Loizzo, C. (2023). Kaliningrad : une exclave territoriale russe à haute valeur stratégique. *Géococonfluences*.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Sukhankin, S. (2021). Kaliningrad in the Post-Crimea Russia. A Bastion or a Weak Link?. *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 124, *Ifri*.

¹¹⁰ Kryzhanivsky, S.A., Zasenkov, O.E., Stebelsky, I., Makuch, A., Hajda, L.A., Yerofeyev, I.A. (2025, September 15). Ukraine. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine>

¹¹¹ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica (2025, September 5). Crimea. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Crimea>



Vladimir Putin signing the treaty officializing the annexation of Crimea on March 18th, 2014

Source: www.kremlin.ru

This event represents a “turning point” in the Russian geostrategic policies, one that placed Kaliningrad in a more global reconfiguration of the Russian geostrategic system¹¹². As such, after threatening to do it during the 2000s, the Russian army deployed Iskander missile in 2016, but also launched new exercises on the exclave’s territory, such as Zapad 2017 that mobilized between 12,700 and 40,000 depending on the sources¹¹³. This mobilization of means may follow the logic of the Baltic-Black Sea axis, the isthmus being now a line that can be considered increasingly NATO/EU influenced¹¹⁴. Thus, why Kaliningrad holds a certain place in the Russian military organization: it hosts anti-missile defense system, maritime surveillance dispositive and serves as a basis for intelligence missions and hybrid war¹¹⁵.

¹¹² Loizzo, C. (2023). Kaliningrad : une exclave territoriale russe à haute valeur stratégique. *Géocofluences*.

¹¹³ Ibid

¹¹⁴ Ibid

¹¹⁵ Sukhankin, S. (2021). Kaliningrad in the Post-Crimea Russia. A Bastion or a Weak Link?. *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 124, Ifri. <https://www.ifri.org/en/papers/kaliningrad-post-crimea-russia-bastion-or-weak-link>

Indeed, NATO responded to these initiatives: it deployed more forces in the Baltic states or installed Patriot missiles in Poland for example¹¹⁶. If Sweden is included as a member which joined the organization in 2022, it can be noted that the country reintroduced military service¹¹⁷. Parallely, NATO opened numerous (30) “centers of excellence” for strategic communications, energy and cybersecurity in the Baltic states, those fields being ones particularly exploited by Russia in case of missile crisis or other indirect forms of confrontation¹¹⁸. Nonetheless, it does not prevent Russia from wielding the territory as key for the nuclear deterrent, thus limiting the effectivity of this countering to the scope of what reciprocal provocations allow for. These same provocations should be seen as a symbol of Russia using Kaliningrad in its aim of blocking a total Euro-American domination in the Baltic Sea despite the post-2004 and now post-2022 geopolitical configuration where Finland and Sweden renounced their neutrality¹¹⁹.

In the current context, the change of strategy compared to the Soviet era follows the logic of defending the remnants of Russian influence against any potential NATO attack, notably by investing in selected areas to limit the access to the exclave and any operations within if necessary. This led to the efforts to be oriented toward the reduction of the enemy’s offensive capabilities if a crisis ever escalates, notably by increasing capabilities in terms of electronic warfare (intelligence gathering, anti-drone warfare, etc.) for example¹²⁰. As underlined in 2016 by the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, Russia particularly fears a surprise attack with the most up-to-date equipment that would rapidly overrun Kaliningrad’s defense, leaving the country without a strategical bulwark handicapping NATO forces when proceeding further¹²¹.

¹¹⁶ Loizzo, C. (2023). Kaliningrad : une exclave territoriale russe à haute valeur stratégique. *Géococonfluences*.

¹¹⁷ Strand, S. (2023). The Reactivation and Reimagination of Military Conscription in Sweden. *Armed Forces & Society*, 50(4), 1175-1195. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X231164740> (Original work published 2024)

¹¹⁸ Loizzo, C. (2023). Kaliningrad : une exclave territoriale russe à haute valeur stratégique. *Géococonfluences*.

¹¹⁹ Carroué, L. (undated), Danemark/Suède - les détroits danois : verrou stratégique de la mer Baltique et laboratoire de coopération transfrontalière. *Géoimage*, CNES.

¹²⁰ Sukhankin, S. (2021). Kaliningrad in the Post-Crimea Russia. A Bastion or a Weak Link?. *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 124, *Ifri*.

¹²¹ V. Gerasimov, “Po opytu Sirii” [Following the Syrian experience], *Voenno Promyshlennyj Kur'er*, 9 March 2016, available at: www.vpk-news.ru.

2.2.2 – An increasing military deployment reinforcing the exclave’s position

If Kaliningrad holds a particular place in the current conflictual context between Russia and NATO, serving as a bulwark meant to protect the rest of the territory and stop rapidly a potential offensive going eastward from the Baltic-Black Sea axis, this situation is also the fruit of the recent deployment of numerous means of wars in the exclave as described in more general terms in the preceding part. As such, this part aims at describing more precisely the means deployed and how they impact Russia’s capacity of action in the previously mentioned scenarios retained by the country’s military leadership. This way, it would allow for better assess the choice of Kaliningrad as a strategic location in the new Russian geopolitical configuration of the post-2014 years.

Considering the previously described historical demographic evolution of the exclave, it is essential to underline the mobilized human means in the recent years to sustain the military reconfiguration decided by the government. Because of the relocations following the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, the number of stationed troops increased from 169,000 to 295,000 between 1991 and 1992, before being reduced heavily from 1993 onwards with relocations to the rest of the Russian territory¹²². The decline continued intensively all through the 1990s, then until 2010, when the number reached an all-time low of 12,500/13,000 soldiers. From 2012 onwards, the number grew again, as around 20,000 of them were present at that date¹²³, the following years witnessing an increase that would eventually lead to the most recent estimations (from 2019), announcing around 30,000 soldiers, including 12,000 only for the ground and airborne forces¹²⁴.

Year	1991	<i>1998</i>	<i>1999</i>	2000	2010	2016-17
Soldiers	169,000	<i>60,000</i>	<i>32,000</i>	25,000	12,500	15-20,000

Evolution of the number of soldiers in the Kaliningrad Oblast from 1991 to 2016-17, including the brutal decline between 1998 and 1999

¹²² Szynowski, R., 2001. Obwód Kaliningradzki w systemie militarnym Rosji, Rozprawa doktorska, AON, Warszawa, p. 151

¹²³ Galoch, B., 2012. Kaliningradzki Rejon Specjalny a tarcza przeciwrakietowa, Przegląd Sił Powietrznych, 1, p. 8

¹²⁴ Loizzo, C. (2023). Kaliningrad : une exclave territoriale russe à haute valeur stratégique. *Géococonfluences*.

Nonetheless, this recent number does not include the forcible redeployment in Ukraine of parts of the stationed forces since 2022, which is not yet quantifiable, and a certain level of opacity that may put the real number around 15,000 or 20,000 soldiers according to exercise analysis, the number considered corresponding to the regional capacity as a whole¹²⁵.

To optimize this mobilization of human means, many reorganizations were carried out since the 1990s, considering thoroughly the territorial changes following the collapse of the Soviet Union. It can be quoted one in 1997 that led to the creation of a Concentrated Border Forces of the Baltic Fleet (CBFBF) which became necessary with the emergence of new neighboring states, one subordinated to the Commander of the Fleet as for other kind of unit stationed in the exclave at that time¹²⁶. This was followed by a pause in the reforms during the whole 2000s as the human mobilization continued to decline in the exclave.

Corresponding to the all-time low in terms of numerical forces, the 2010 reorganization implicated a change in the command system of armed forces which included Kaliningrad in the scope of command of the Western Military District despite its (previously mentioned) autonomous operational command. This one only regarded the air and land components though, as the financial crisis did not allow for the inclusion of the maritime component at this point¹²⁷. These reforms aim at optimizing the military structures by integrating them more deeply for future combined operations following the scenario mentioned in the precedent part. To achieve this, by 2017, the deployed unit's commandment was divided between the Baltic Fleet (for naval forces and shore-based vessels and air forces) and the MOU (for land, air, and space forces)¹²⁸.

Beyond the sole management of human means and commandment, changes also occurred in terms of infrastructure management. Most of it, consisting mostly of maritime bases and tactical airports, was developed during the Soviet Union itself to ensure the Soviet troops' independence of activity. Despite a temporary decrease in use at the turn of the 1990s following a decline in activity in the region, the loss of their counterparts in the newly independent Baltic

¹²⁵ Żyła, M. (2019). Kaliningrad oblast in the military system of the Russian Federation. *Security and Defence Quarterly*, 25(3), pp.99-117. <https://doi.org/10.35467/sdq/105636>

¹²⁶ *Ibid*

¹²⁷ *Ibid*

¹²⁸ Obwód Kaliningradzki i Krym czyli ufortyfikowane twierdze Rosji, 2017. <https://oaspl.org/2016/01/28/obwod-kaliningradzki-i-krym-czyli-ufortyfikowane-twierdzerosji/>

states made them more essential from a military point of view¹²⁹. Some of these military infrastructures are concentrated in the western part of the exclave, notably the air bases and a port complex, composed of multiple marine bases accommodating up to 160 medium and small ships. This part of the exclave (especially the Taran peninsula) also welcomes air traffic recon and control systems, trying to compensate for the losses in terms of radar recognition and notification after 1991¹³⁰. Including the onshore component distributed all over the exclave, including at the Polish border, it forms a significative infrastructural challenge considering the isolation of the oblast from the rest of the country after the independence of Baltic states¹³¹. It notably induced a restructuring of the supply systems, both by increasing the role of sea and air transport and by the reinforcement of the repair base functions. This way, it would ensure the fixing and upgrading of all military equipment for both land, air and naval forces, the current infrastructure being for example able to most of surface vessels of the Baltic Fleet, an advantage in case of rupture of supply chains from the mainland.

This partial autonomy in infrastructure and commandment, combined with an increased human deployment, appears necessary considering the heavy naval, terrestrial and armaments deployment currently present in the exclave. According to observations¹³², the naval one corresponds to two underwater and fifty-six surface combat units corresponding to an amount of 56 vessels of different kinds (destroyers, frigates, corvettes, missile racers, etc.). The terrestrial one is also of a significative size: 811 tanks, 345 artillery system, 170 aircraft and helicopters, etc. Finally, the armaments deployment comprises ballistic armaments, notably Iskander-M systems with a 500km range and, since February 2022, Kinjal hypersonic missiles with a range of 2,000 km¹³³. Could also be noted the presence of other coastal missile systems (3K60 Bal and K-300P Bastion-P), anti-aircraft/missile defense system with a range of 15 to

¹²⁹ Sukhankin, S. (2021). Kaliningrad in the Post-Crimea Russia. A Bastion or a Weak Link?. *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 124, Ifri.

¹³⁰ The Military Balance 2003–2004, p. 142

¹³¹ Stadtmuller, E., 2003. Pożegnanie z nieufnością? Rozszerzenie NATO i UE a stosunki polsko-rosyjskie w kontekście bezpieczeństwa europejskiego, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław, pp. 154–155 and 160

¹³² Rosyjskie siły zbrojne... 2017

¹³³ Loizzo, C. (2023). Kaliningrad : une exclave territoriale russe à haute valeur stratégique. *Géoconfluences*.

500 km (S-400 and Pantsir-S1) and some electronic warfare (Voronezh-DM UHF early-warning radar, Sunflower-E short-range radar, 2 electronic warfare complexes, etc.).

All this deployment that has been developed throughout the ultimate years is meant to exploit at most Kaliningrad's military potential considering the loss of surrounding territories after 1991 and the increasing tensions with NATO along the 2010s and 2020s. This reinforcement of capabilities both on sea and land via structural reforms of commandment and infrastructure, but also the proliferation of both offensive and defensive armaments, is meant not only to counter a potential NATO attack but also to send a message. Indeed, Russia wants to show its ability to retain a form of relevancy and control in the Baltic Sea region via psychological and political gestures¹³⁴, such as the installation of Iskander-M systems, able to threaten any European capital city, as a response to equivalent initiatives from the United States (European Ballistic Missile Defense System) for example. Combined with reinforced capabilities in terms of intelligence-gathering and surveillance and adversarial disruption among other elements, Kaliningrad as a reinforced military position is truly becoming an indispensable part of Russian military architecture but also political discourse as a showcase of Russia's ability to sustain its influence in front of NATO's expansion in the Baltic Sea.

2.3 – Conclusions

Throughout this chapter, the aim was to demonstrate that the position of Kaliningrad as a western military outpost for Russia was the consequence of a succession of the historical exploitation of its strategic advantage by its different controlling powers, whether it be Germany before 1945 or the Soviet Union then Russia from this same year. In this regard, its continuous exploitation as a bridgehead in the enemy territory but also a mythological object used for psychological purposes confirms this geostrategic nature. In addition to this, the particularity of its geographical location but also of the political context it has inserted itself through the Cold Wars then the recent tension with NATO also shows how much the Russian state and its predecessor had an interest in securing and investing in this territory.

Beyond this sole historical context, Kaliningrad also emerges as an indispensable part of the reconfiguration process of the Russian military in the emerging context of indirect confrontation in face of NATO expansion in the Baltic Sea region, but also as a compensative

¹³⁴ Sukhankin, S. (2021). Kaliningrad in the Post-Crimea Russia. A Bastion or a Weak Link?. *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 124, *Ifri*.

leverage in the countering of this expansion in other regions bordering present-day Russia. As such, the review of all the present deployments in the exclave, notably its armaments such as ballistic missiles, reflects how this reconfiguration placed Kaliningrad as both a strictly military but also relatedly psychological tool to be used by the Russian government to defend its interests in the Baltic Sea region, not to say more globally.

Considering this, along other dimensions such as economical and sociodemographic ones that will be further detailed, the military importance that Kaliningrad has held to this date can be considered one of the elements that contributed in securing Russian multidimensional interests in the Baltic Sea region in front of the NATO/EU expansion but also how the former tries to rely at most of what is left from its direct access to Baltic Sea in order to keep a significative margin of action in the region.

CHAPTER 3: KALININGRAD, AN ECONOMIC GATE TO THE WEST LIMITED BY STATE INTERESTS

If the military aspect of Kaliningrad's current exploitation by the Russian government appears to be the most famous one in both the European and Russian public opinion, it is also important to underline how local people, whether in Kaliningrad or in neighboring areas of Poland and Lithuania, also articulate their lives around the particular economy of this territory, one that has been to the numerous regime changes it has known since the early years of the 20th century. This impact is to be counted among the security elements exploited by the Russian government to assert its influence in the Baltic Sea area.

Indeed, if the exclave's geographical situation makes it a perfect spot to protect the Russian territory from a foreign invasion going eastward, it also constitutes a good point of contact with the neighboring countries to develop some sort of economic exchange, thus create relations of interdependence able to assert an apparently declining Russian economic weight in a region where its former satellite used to play this role¹³⁵. As such, it seems relevant to describe the evolution of the exclave's insertion in the region's economic flux but also the public policies implemented in this sense. Indeed, any economic decision is the result of a political decision, leaving the upper hand on what the center, here Moscow, decides to allow considering the political risk it may involve. Any economic opening can have an impact on a population's relationship with the surrounding territories, making it a tool to manipulate with caution to avoid any potential internal backfire¹³⁶.

Considering these preliminary aspects, the objective of this chapter will be to underline how the evolution of Kaliningrad's economy itself, but also of its level of integration with the other economies of the region, reflects a tendency for both the Soviet and the Russian states to tightly control it in order to align it with their primary political objectives regarding the region. To this end, the evolution of the exclave's economic situation will be observed, underlining the contrast emerging between the 1990s and 2000s because of political changes at the head of the state. Later, the consequences of this political control will be detailed through the description

¹³⁵ International Monetary Fund. External Relations Dept. (1984). The realities of economic interdependence: Its benefits and frustrations. *Finance & Development*, 0021(001), A009.
<https://www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/022/0021/001/article-A009-en.xml>

¹³⁶ Ibid

of the consequences of progressive closure to integration in the 2010s. This way, it will be discussed how the Russian government tries to maintain the economy despite its increasing weight motivated by the exclave's military importance in front of NATO.

3.1 – A stark contrast in Kaliningrad's economic development between the 1990s and the 2000s onwards

This part will explore how the changes in the political leadership between the 1990s and the 2000s have impacted the evolution of Kaliningrad's economy through the implementation of economic policies decided in higher spheres. In this regard, it will be underlined how the 1990s represents well the more liberal outlook favored by the Yeltsin government, one that would end up disgraced in front of the resurgence of more nationalist and conservative guidance under Putin's presidencies during the 2000s. This way, it underlines how this territory counts in the eyes of the Russian government to the point of being more dependent to leadership variations.

3.1.1. – Explaining the exclave's economic opening during the 1990s

If the 1990s were marked by a significant economic opening for the whole country, Kaliningrad emerged during this decade as one of its concretizations point thanks to its geography. After the fall of USSR in 1991, the territory found itself surrounded by newly independent countries adopting a capitalist system, one that would also become the norm for the following years in Russia. This western location compared to the rest of the territory, combined with its access to the sea, makes it an important potential logistical outpost at the crossroads of Northern, Eastern and Central Europe. In this regard, the choice of turning the territory into a special economic zone to exploit this particularly can be understood, as the government was looking for any possibility to escape the ongoing economic crisis¹³⁷.

It is to be remembered that the territory already witnessed a significant development before its annexation by the USSR in 1945, the Germans leaving behind them good quality infrastructure and a certain number of industries and military installations that could be deemed

¹³⁷ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2025, September 18). *special economic zone*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/money/special-economic-zone>

essential for the Soviet leadership in the years come¹³⁸. Among them, ore extraction constituted a good basis for a certain level of industrialization in diverse fields, although East Prussia was still considered a relatively poor and agrarian region in the 1930s, one that would indeed fall rapidly to national-socialist policies. These same policies to the territory's annexation in 1945, one that witnessed the expulsion of the German population¹³⁹ where it was not deemed necessary to ensure the survivance of the existing economical heritage in the exclave.

These "bourgeois specialists", as described previously, were meant to temporarily ensure the good functioning of the existing industries, a role they will keep until the early 1950s and their final expulsion. Meanwhile, the Soviet leadership ensured a military and civilian demographic influx that was meant to contribute to the reconstruction and transformation of the territory¹⁴⁰. This took the form of collectivization of the abandoned lands and the rebuilding of the industrial network, a consequent part of it being dedicated to the specific military function of the territory. This process took place without any significant support, as the exclave was not included in the Five-Year Plan of 1946, the heart of the planned economy that characterized USSR until its dissolution in 1991¹⁴¹.

This situation would lead to a specific development marked by a military-centered planification of the economy where most of jobs are linked to it, a particularity that will become increasingly problematic as the Cold War approached its end. In the 1980s, the race to armaments with the United States stimulated the need for military resources, including ones in Kaliningrad, but also considerably deteriorated the financial and economic situation within the country¹⁴². Later, the reforms impulse by Mikhail Gorbachev, if they allowed for more freedoms, also initiated an economic opening to the world that would be continued by its successor, one that nonetheless considerably modified the life of ordinary Soviet citizens, then later Russian ones in Kaliningrad's case¹⁴³. This situation of economic crisis pushed the government to find solutions

¹³⁸ Żyła, M. (2019). Kaliningrad oblast in the military system of the Russian Federation. *Security and Defence Quarterly*, 25(3), pp.99-117.

¹³⁹ See chapter 1

¹⁴⁰ Eaton, N. and Malinkin M.E. (2016). Building a Soviet City: the Transformation of Königsberg. *Wilson Center*.

¹⁴¹ Dabrowski M (2023) Thirty years of economic transition in the former Soviet Union: Microeconomic and institutional dimensions. *Russian Journal of Economics* 9(1): 1-32. <https://doi.org/10.32609/j.ruje.9.104761>

¹⁴² Ibid

¹⁴³ Ibid

to address the causes of this economic turmoil, including the exclavization of Kaliningrad at the local level.



The opening of the first McDonald's in Moscow, symbol of a change in the economic system and Soviet citizens' life – Source: AP

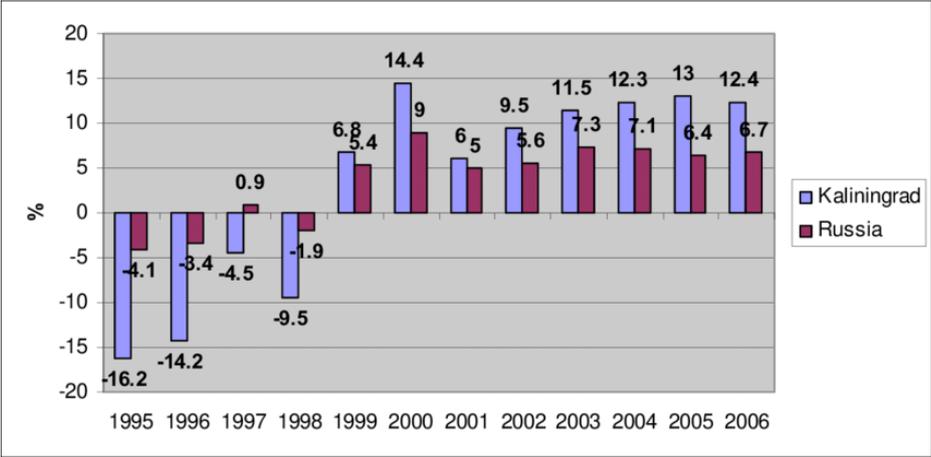
Indeed, the exclavization process that would eventually make Kaliningrad isolated from the rest of the Russian territory would come with economic consequences. In addition to the economic turmoil the country was experiencing, the introduction of border and customs control were added, and with them of duties and fees¹⁴⁴. The main consequence of this was an increasingly time- and money-consuming import and export process, the products being forced to cross one or two borders to reach the rest of Russian territory or its former satellite states under the USSR. The complexity induced also amounted to a rupture in international production ties¹⁴⁵, the supply chains being considerably slowed down by the new administrative procedures induced. Considering the high dependence of the region on imports, including power and fuel, at the basis of every production, this fact led to a deep recession for the main industry in the region, whether it be mechanical engineering or fisheries for example¹⁴⁶.

¹⁴⁴ Richard, Y. and Sebentsov, A. and Zotova, M. (2015). The Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. Challenges and limits of its integration in the Baltic region. *Cybergeog: European Journal of Geography*

¹⁴⁵ Ibid

¹⁴⁶ Ibid

Combined with the previously described demobilization of the military forces in these years, which had a lasting impact considering the importance of military sector for local economy since the 1950s, the population lost a lot economically speaking, maybe more than in the rest of the country as the region is more susceptible to external variation due to its layout¹⁴⁷. This particularly harsh economic decline compared to the rest of the country, the GRP declining of 16.2 % compared to 4.1% at the national level for example, could not naturally be balanced without the intervention of the central government, notably when it came to restore the links with the neighboring countries. As such, from the start, the Russian – Lithuanian border remained open for the inhabitants of the exclave, something that unfortunately did not prevent much of the economic decline¹⁴⁸. The government had to go further to mitigate the exclavization process from an economic point of view, including by taking internal measures that would combine themselves with international agreements.



Russian GDP and Kaliningrad GRP evolution between 1995 and 2006 – Source: figure 2 from LAMANDE, V. & Vinokurov, Evgeny. Formation of Trade Specialization of Kaliningrad Oblast.

As an illustration of this governmental response, can be mentioned the opening of the Yantar Free Economic Zone (FEZ) in 1993, which became a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in 1996¹⁴⁹.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid

¹⁴⁸ Ibid

¹⁴⁹ Richard, Y. and Sebentsov, A. and Zotova, M. (2015). The Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. Challenges and limits of its integration in the Baltic region. *Cybergeo: European Journal of Geography*

This SEZ aimed at developing the industries in the region via investments from foreign companies channeled in partnerships with local ones¹⁵⁰. These investments would be generated by favorable tax provisions and the different labor cost along the border with the slowly integrating Poland and Lithuania. Those same investments were to be completed by others stemming directly from the state or state-controlled companies, but also preferences in terms of taxes and customs duties and subventions for transport between the exclave and the rest of the country¹⁵¹. Finally, should be added some diplomatic measures in the continuity of the free circulation on the Russian – Lithuanian border, all to facilitate the procedures at the border (ones that will be renewed with difficulty after 2004)¹⁵².

The impact of the instauration of the SEZ is to be considered under the angle of an aim to transform Kaliningrad into a “Hong Kong of the Baltic”, in reference to the successful model of the soon-to-be-Chinese British colony, whose economy relied on serving as an interface between the Chinese market on the one hand and the international one on the other hand¹⁵³. It can be hypothesized that the impact of such a measure was contrasted, allowing effectively from a transformation of a reorientation of the local economy in a more durable way, but also exposing it more to international variations.

The SEZ was successful in reorienting the local economy in non-military sectors, as the privileges given to the exclave led to the development of automotive, electronics and electro-technical industries based on the import substitution principle¹⁵⁴. An example of this reorientation is the establishment of Avtotot that, until 2022, supplied foreign brands such as BMW, Kia or Hyundai in car production. In 2011, the company comprised 3,500 employees for a year with

¹⁵⁰ Clara Loizzo, « Kaliningrad : une exclave territoriale russe à haute valeur stratégique », *Géoconfluences*, décembre 2023.

¹⁵¹ Richard, Y. and Sebentsov, A. and Zotova, M. (2015). The Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. Challenges and limits of its integration in the Baltic region. *Cybergeo: European Journal of Geography*

¹⁵² Ibid

¹⁵³ Clara Loizzo, « Kaliningrad : une exclave territoriale russe à haute valeur stratégique », *Géoconfluences*, décembre 2023.

¹⁵⁴ “Development strategy focusing on promoting domestic production of previously imported goods to foster industrialization” according to: Bussell, J. (2023, March 20). *import substitution industrialization*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

revenue of approximately 4 billion euros¹⁵⁵. More globally, all the companies in these fields amount to 70 % of the regional industrial output, becoming the motor of the local economy¹⁵⁶.

However, this reorientation suffers from the specific geopolitical context of Kaliningrad: all the industries benefitting from the investments, and not surviving on state subsidies, rely on trade with foreign partners. This dependency led to the instauration of a free-zone mechanism that did not forcibly put it in a more favorable situation than other Russian regions from the inland without this same mechanism¹⁵⁷. This turned the mechanism more into a compensation for the remoteness from the metropole¹⁵⁸. Parallely, the presence of the military may constitute another obstacle, as the return of a more nationalist foreign policy complicates the diplomatic context surrounding the exclave and its economy¹⁵⁹. Thus, the post-1991 economic losses could only be moderately compensated for in the long term, as dynamism only came back in the 2000s (as shown on the graphics above)¹⁶⁰.

Still, beyond these apparent issues, many publications at the time underlined that high expectations could be put on the exclave's future based on a fruitful Russia – EU cooperation¹⁶¹. It is the return of tensions during the 2000s that would transform the future of the exclave's economy owing to a reassessment of the Eurasian nature of Russia which put the country on a path against “a decadent Europe” in the eyes of its president¹⁶².

¹⁵⁵ Brooks, G. (2013). Partners in production in Russia. Automotive Manufacturing Solutions. <https://web.archive.org/web/20160407155340/http://www.automotivemanufacturingsolutions.com/focus/partners-in-production-in-russia>

¹⁵⁶ Richard, Y. and Sebentsov, A. and Zotova, M. (2015). The Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. Challenges and limits of its integration in the Baltic region. *Cybergeo: European Journal of Geography*

¹⁵⁷ Fedorov, G. M. (2020). On the economic security of Russia's Kaliningrad exclave. *Baltic Region*, 12(3), 40-54. <https://doi.org/10.5922/2079-8555-2020-3-3>

¹⁵⁸ Ibid

¹⁵⁹ Neumann, I. (2016). *Russia and the idea of Europe: A study in identity and international relations*, second edition. 10.4324/9781315646336.

¹⁶⁰ Clara Loizzo, « Kaliningrad : une exclave territoriale russe à haute valeur stratégique », *Géoconfluences*, décembre 2023.

¹⁶¹ Fedorov, G. M. (2020). On the economic security of Russia's Kaliningrad exclave. *Baltic Region*, 12(3), 40-54. <https://doi.org/10.5922/2079-8555-2020-3-3>

¹⁶² Neumann, I. (2016). *Russia and the idea of Europe: A study in identity and international relations*, second edition. 10.4324/9781315646336.

3.1.2 – 2000s: a turning point marking the limitation of its insertion into the Baltic economy

In line with the changes in terms of internal political orientation that occurred in the 1990s, the Russian government began to reorientate both its foreign and economic policies along the lines of a reinforcement of the country's role as a Eurasian power, somehow in opposition to its previous opening to the West¹⁶³. This change will impact the then optimistic prospects for Kaliningrad's role in getting Russian and the West closer via economic links by making tensions emerge again over the expansion of EU and NATO in the former Soviet sphere of influence. The objective of this part will be to assess how this geopolitical change along the 2000s ended up limiting the exclave's insertion in the regional economy due to political concerns from both sides.

As stated in the preceding part, the Russian government introduced a free-zone mechanism that went to its complete application from 1996¹⁶⁴ onwards, one that would compensate the additional costs induced by the exclavization¹⁶⁵ while hoping to attract investments from foreign companies into the local industries. This aimed at exploiting the advantageous position of the exclave in relation to nearby more economically developed European countries¹⁶⁶, potentially offering trade partners interested in cheap carriage of goods (notably by the sea) or local industries (fisheries, electronic and electrotechnics companies, etc.). As such, the renewing of the mechanism in 2006 appeared to be a signal in favor of such a system but also economic cooperation with neighboring European countries¹⁶⁷.

The economic opening indeed had positive consequences on the local society: the city improved from the 1990s and its social problems (HIV rate, narcotics and poverty rate) thanks to the

¹⁶³ Neumann, I. (2016). *Russia and the idea of Europe: A study in identity and international relations*, second edition. 10.4324/9781315646336.

¹⁶⁴ Richard, Y. and Sebestov, A. and Zotova, M. (2015). The Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. Challenges and limits of its integration in the Baltic region. *Cybergeo: European Journal of Geography*

¹⁶⁵ Fedorov, G. M. (2020). On the economic security of Russia's Kaliningrad exclave. *Baltic Region*, 12(3), 40-54. <https://doi.org/10.5922/2079-8555-2020-3-3>

¹⁶⁶ Ibid

¹⁶⁷ Richard, Y. and Sebestov, A. and Zotova, M. (2015). The Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. Challenges and limits of its integration in the Baltic region. *Cybergeo: European Journal of Geography*

conjugation of investments from both the EU and Russia¹⁶⁸. Nonetheless, all the advantages given by the government sparked frustration internally because of the “illegitimate” concurrence favoring the Kaliningrad industries, especially in car manufacturing where a factory ended being closed for this reason¹⁶⁹. Combined with country-wide regulations inhibiting the positive effect of preferential support and investments, it can be observed how internal pressures from other economic actors but also the actions of the state ignoring the local reality constitute a first break to economic relief, thus further integration in the regional market.

Beyond this purely internal factor, it can be observed that the main difficulties emerged from the political context in the region, especially as NATO was expanding to Russia’s borders while the latter to push back against it¹⁷⁰. This political context of expansionism further underlined the second issue at stake: the presence of borders limiting circulation between the exclave and its hinterland. The issues of visas to ensure circulation progressively took an important place, as inhabitants of the exclave were progressively barred from visiting neighboring Poland and Lithuania without them. Indeed from 2003 onwards, special visas were required as Poland and Lithuania prepared their entry into the Schengen Area the following year, although free multi-entry visas ended up being delivered¹⁷¹. To this, must be added the special transit documents issued by the Russian authorities for terrestrial transit, and from 2005 onwards the requirements of a foreign-travel passport to effectuate the journey¹⁷².

Even this relatively complex arrangement, isolating and affecting life for residents to a certain extent¹⁷³, constituted a good compromise to a sensitive issue considering the far worse consequences of a hard border. The agreement between the EU and Russia creating this arrangement was signed in 2003 and finalized in 2005¹⁷⁴, despite the growing fear of Russian

¹⁶⁸ Eaton, N. and Malinkin M.E. (2016). Building a Soviet City: the Transformation of Königsberg. *Wilson Center*.

¹⁶⁹ Richard, Y. and Sebentsov, A. and Zotova, M. (2015). The Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. Challenges and limits of its integration in the Baltic region. *Cybergeo: European Journal of Geography*

¹⁷⁰ Eaton, N. and Malinkin M.E. (2016). Building a Soviet City: the Transformation of Königsberg. *Wilson Center*.

¹⁷¹ Richard, Y. and Sebentsov, A. and Zotova, M. (2015). The Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. Challenges and limits of its integration in the Baltic region. *Cybergeo: European Journal of Geography*

¹⁷² Ibid

¹⁷³ Ibid

¹⁷⁴ Clara Loizzo, « Kaliningrad : une exclave territoriale russe à haute valeur stratégique », *Géoconfluences*, décembre 2023.

authorities for the external influence of the EU on the population, notably through economic and cultural cooperation programs launched by both Polish and Lithuanian authorities during the decade¹⁷⁵. As such, beyond the issue of controlling people's movements between countries, a third one appeared with the reluctance of Russian authorities to engage in cooperation too far out of fear for local political situation (risk of secession for example)¹⁷⁶.

A fourth and final one can be added to the others: the existence of semi-legal and illegal business along the border of the exclave. As described previously, the entrance of Lithuania in the Schengen Area in 2004 led to the instauration of a transit regime based on a multi-entry permit that restricted travels without deeply altering the existing movements through the borders¹⁷⁷. These movements correspond to flows of tourists and consumers exploiting the varying price differences along the border, but also the quality of medical infrastructure (in Poland notably)¹⁷⁸. However, they also include people abusing the privileges accorded to the exclave to maintain semi-legal activities, but also those implicated in organized crime¹⁷⁹. As such, this situation deters cooperation with the EU as it retains the image of a territory plagued not only by illegal activities, but also pollution and health issues.

Considering the four issues emerging in the 2000s, Kaliningrad suffered heavily from both an internal sensibility to concurrence and foreign influence, and difficulties to get along with its international partners regarding free circulation and border activity. This fragility to a combination of restraint internal influence and troubled external relations would get even more problematic in 2014, where sanctions stopped much of the existing cooperation and increased the territory's dependency on government support without making it as secure as the rest of the territory¹⁸⁰. With the restrictions on mobility enacted in 2022 at the beginning of the war in

¹⁷⁵ Richard, Y. and Sebentsov, A. and Zotova, M. (2015). The Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. Challenges and limits of its integration in the Baltic region. *Cybergeog: European Journal of Geography*

¹⁷⁶ Ibid

¹⁷⁷ Clara Loizzo, « Kaliningrad : une exclave territoriale russe à haute valeur stratégique », *Géoconfluences*, décembre 2023.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid

¹⁷⁹ Richard, Y. and Sebentsov, A. and Zotova, M. (2015). The Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. Challenges and limits of its integration in the Baltic region. *Cybergeog: European Journal of Geography*

¹⁸⁰ Ibid

Ukraine¹⁸¹, it calls into the question the place of the territory, from an economical point of view, regarding both internal and external political changes that occurred in the 2010s and 2020s.

3.2 – Kaliningrad’s place in recent Russian economic developments and interactions with the West

With the return of tensions in 2014 following the invasion of Crimea, the relations between Russia and the European Union deteriorated even further, leading to mutual sanctioning. Kaliningrad, as an exclave surrounded by the European Union, can easily be conceived as a territory sensible to these geopolitical changes, the military presence on the territory particularly worrying the neighboring countries¹⁸². As such, in this specific context of post-Crimea era, the aim of this part of the chapter will be to describe the place that the exclave still occupies in Russian economy after the above cited political changes, to see in what way it resists or not to a changing internal and external context.

In this regard, will be described first the advantages that the exclave still maintains despite the sanctions, notably in the eye of the Russian public and under the initiative of the Russian government, ones that could reveal themselves useful in the coming years, once the sanctions will have been lifted. Later, it will be stated the numerous challenges would eventually prevent the exclave from really escaping its complex geopolitical environment, underlining the limits of state action in conflicting its political and military interests and the economic development of territory in a context of permanent tension. This way, the weight of state policies in the economic situation of the exclave and living conditions of its inhabitants can be more appropriately described.

3.2.1. – An exclave that still maintains a certain attractivity in the eye of the Russian public

As seen with the description of its history, the exclave and its main town witnessed many highs and lows, which nonetheless did not prevent it from maintaining a certain level of population

¹⁸¹Clara Loizzo, « Kaliningrad : une exclave territoriale russe à haute valeur stratégique », Géoconfluences, décembre 2023.

¹⁸² See chapter 2

over the years¹⁸³. It is under this demographic aspect that it can be considered that the oblast still maintains a certain level of attractiveness to Russians. Even if the project of rebuilding the old Prussian castle never came to be, the city of Kaliningrad left behind its image of a run-down municipality it acquired in the dire times of the 1990s following the loss of its hinterland connections¹⁸⁴. The heavy investments from the EU and the Russian government made it a relatively dynamic place despite this situation, although the recent years got it cut off from the former's investments.

In more precise demographic terms, the immigration from the rest of Russia or former Central Asian Soviet republics can be considered a relatively good indicator¹⁸⁵. In the second case, Russians who stayed in these republics after 1991 do not particularly feel welcome anymore in the independent country, as such consider territories like Kaliningrad like a good place to land in and settle, possibly thanks to the relatively homogenous demographics issued from the 1940s repopulation of the exclave¹⁸⁶. Somehow, it gives the territory a certain advantage compared to other peripheral areas of the Russian mainland who are suffering from depopulation, but also from neighboring countries like Poland and Lithuania which have long suffered from emigration to other EU countries¹⁸⁷. Finally, the territory benefits from a better age-sex balance than its neighbors and some other Russian territories, a small advantage to ensure a future economic development.

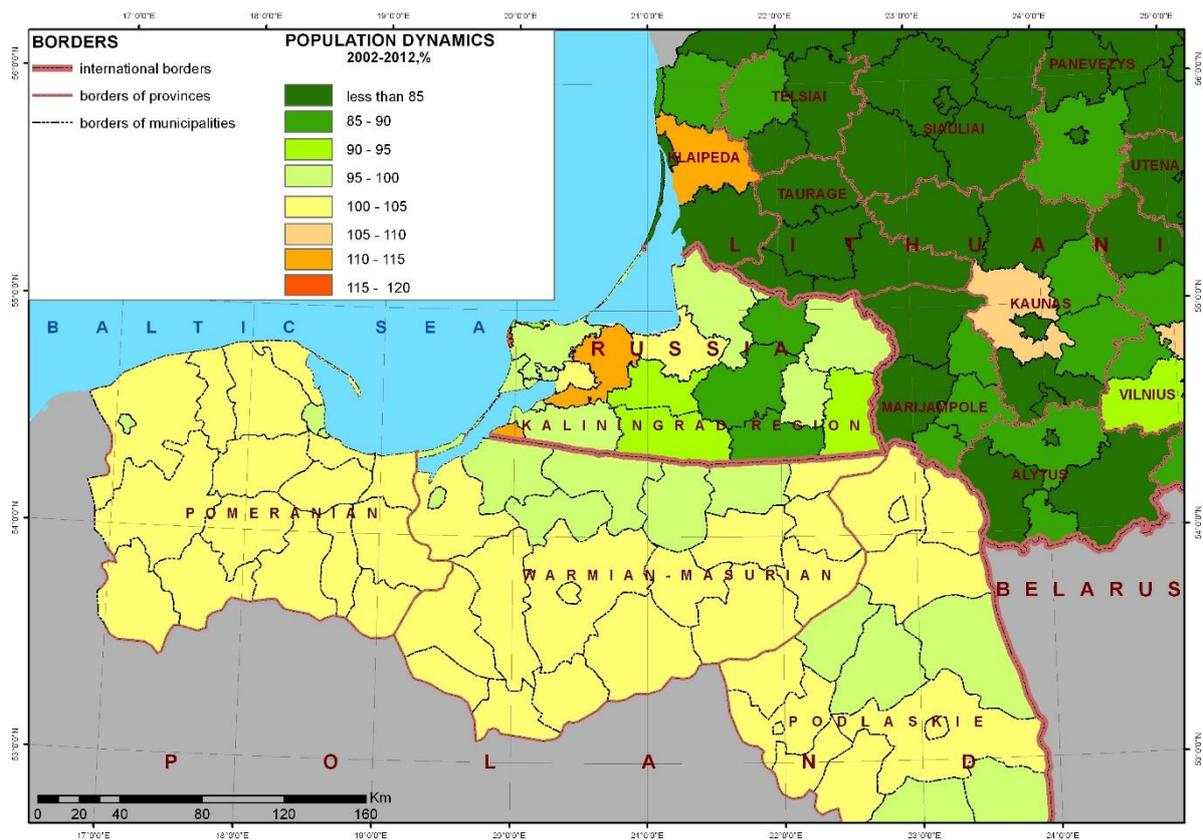
¹⁸³ See chapter 1

¹⁸⁴ Eaton, N. and Malinkin M.E. (2016). Building a Soviet City: the Transformation of Königsberg. *Wilson Center*

¹⁸⁵ Richard, Y. and Sebentsov, A. and Zotova, M. (2015). The Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. Challenges and limits of its integration in the Baltic region. *Cybergeo: European Journal of Geography*.

¹⁸⁶ See chapter 1

¹⁸⁷ Richard, Y. and Sebentsov, A. and Zotova, M. (2015). The Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. Challenges and limits of its integration in the Baltic region. *Cybergeo: European Journal of Geography*.



Population dynamics in Kaliningrad and surrounding areas between 2002-2012 – Source: Richard, Y. and Sebentsov, A. and Zotova, M. (2015). The Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. Challenges and limits of its integration in the Baltic region. *Cybergeog: European Journal of Geography*.

Beyond what is only an indicator rather than a very significant factor of economic dynamic, the territory also offers an acceptable life level for Russian standards. Indeed, it is close to that of its neighboring Polish and Lithuanian regions, while benefiting from more favorable demographics than them, being similar to Leningrad oblast in this regard (see the above section)¹⁸⁸. Similarly, its growth rate is higher than the national average, which compensates for a GRP per capita 20 % below average thanks to more investments and less depreciated infrastructure than for the average Russian territory¹⁸⁹. In completion to the military presence, the territory offers world important reserves of amber, oil, ice-free ports and many

¹⁸⁸ Sebentsov, Alexander & Zotova, M.. (2013). Geography and economy of the Kaliningrad region: limitations and prospects of development. *Baltic Region*. 4. 81-94. 10.5922/2079-8555-2013-4-8.

¹⁸⁹ Fedorov, G. M. (2020). On the economic security of Russia's Kaliningrad exclave. *Baltic Region*, 12(3), 40-54.

industries (agri-food, paper, wood, electronics, assembly, etc.)¹⁹⁰, arguments in making the territory attractive in the long-term as demonstrated by the positive economic results, at least before 2022.

Among others, the economic dynamism can be illustrated by the construction of a regasification terminal in 2019 that secures the LNG supply to the exclave via the sea¹⁹¹. This shows how the Russian government is still interested in investing and creating economic dynamism in the exclave, despite the specific geopolitical context. This underlines how Kaliningrad used to constitute and may constitute in the future a strategic location linking the southern and eastern sides of the Baltic Sea coast from an economic point of view¹⁹². In this regard, the exclave as a real development potential¹⁹³ that was used by Russia through different economic projects, including during the 2010s. Among notable initiatives, the development of industrial clusters can be quoted, such as the Baltic Valley technology park, or the inclusion of the exclave in the Greater Eurasia project, which aims at leveraging internal resources while developing international cooperation to strengthen regional economic security¹⁹⁴.

If the beginning of the war in Ukraine in 2022 put a halt to the continuation of these projects, the Russian government is conscious of the importance of international cooperation in the exclave's economy, constitution both its strength and its weakness (as will be seen in the next section). Indeed, part of the territory's attractiveness before the war was the free circulation negotiated with Lithuania in exchange of the stabilization of the economic activity level across the border¹⁹⁵. This diplomatic policy, parallel to the neighbor's European integration, proved to be successful in attracting foreign companies (as described previously in this chapter) to conserve the industrial output, while still requiring investments and links from and with the motherland¹⁹⁶. As such, the oblast still offers a certain number of positive perspectives that

¹⁹⁰ Clara Loizzo, « Kaliningrad : une exclave territoriale russe à haute valeur stratégique », *Géoconfluences*, décembre 2023.

¹⁹¹ Ibid

¹⁹² Sebestov, Alexander & Zotova, M.. (2013). Geography and economy of the Kaliningrad region: limitations and prospects of development. *Baltic Region*. 4. 81-94. 10.5922/2079-8555-2013-4-8.

¹⁹³ Fedorov, G. M. (2020). On the economic security of Russia's Kaliningrad exclave. *Baltic Region*, 12(3), 40-54.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid

¹⁹⁵ Sebestov, Alexander & Zotova, M.. (2013). Geography and economy of the Kaliningrad region: limitations and prospects of development. *Baltic Region*. 4. 81-94. 10.5922/2079-8555-2013-4-8.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid

could easily be further concretized via policy changes at the Kremlin, ones that could answer to negative aspects that emerged in the last years.

3.2.2. – A territory still very sensible to regional tensions due to its specific geography

If the oblast still presents some perspectives for the near future, it also suffers from its specific geography that both isolates it from the rest of the Russian territory and exposes it to the geopolitical variations in the Baltic Sea region. It is notably the surge in tensions following the 2014 annexation of Crimea that led to a reduction in the cooperation with the European Union, limiting the exploitation of the geographical advantage offered by this same geography (as described in the preceding section). In substance, this political limitation of the long-standing efforts in improving the exclave's situation characterized well how its different economic strengths remain dependent on the central government's political and military decisions¹⁹⁷. It explains, for example, the relatively chaotic urban planning that grew out of its history and that is still not improving¹⁹⁸.

In this context, the combination of the 2008 economic crisis and sanctions imposed by the European Union since 2014, triggering countermeasures from the Russian government, contributed to further degrading the local economic situation by reducing the exchanges through the border¹⁹⁹. It is where the specific place of the oblast in the Russian military organization hurts economically, as it tends to favor the isolation of the territory and consequently slow down its development both on a social and an economic plan²⁰⁰. Beyond the sole military aspect, the lack of decentralization characterizing the political organization of the country, out of limitation of foreign influence, tends to make integration secondary and superficial²⁰¹. As such, the

¹⁹⁷ Eaton, N. and Malinkin M.E. (2016). Building a Soviet City: the Transformation of Königsberg. *Wilson Center*.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹⁹ Fedorov, G. M. (2020). On the economic security of Russia's Kaliningrad exclave. *Baltic Region*, 12(3), 40-54.

²⁰⁰ Richard, Y. and Sebentsov, A. and Zotova, M. (2015). The Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. Challenges and limits of its integration in the Baltic region. *Cybergeo: European Journal of Geography*.

²⁰¹ Ibid

political and military status of Kaliningrad can be considered a first factor that makes the exclave particularly sensible to regional tensions from an economic point of view.

This sensibility to the political and military context is reflected in the indicators for the oblast. Out of 21, it only performs well on 9 but lags in many of them, making the territory less secure economically than the national average²⁰². The great variations in economic development, with increased growth in good times and decreased one in bad times, signals how it is extremely dependent on external factors, such as the exchanges with neighboring territories that are heavily dependent on the geopolitical situation. This sensibility leads to lower innovation rates and income levels, despite the higher housing costs, but also higher crime rates due to the presence of a temporarily less controlled terrestrial border²⁰³. If regional unemployment is low, part of it is due to the higher share of loss-making companies subsidized by the government. Consequently, as have been described here, the exclave suffers from an economic and social structure heavily dependent on external variations, making it an extreme reflection of the global issues of the Russian economy. Thus, a second factor would be the structure itself of the local economy already deformed by the military presence.

Among external factors that are impacting the exclave's economy, one is the lack of a variety of export and import partners. As of 2020, half of the regional production was shipped to mainland territory and not to other countries²⁰⁴. It can be guessed that the sanctions adopted in 2022 only accentuated this trend, as bilateral trade with neighboring Poland and Lithuania has been declining since the 2010. This contrasts with the necessity for the exclave's companies to import raw materials, components and equipment's from those two countries, making the bilateral trade relatively unequal²⁰⁵. This was illustrated by the tensions arising in June 2022 after the temporary ban imposed by Lithuania on rail transit of goods subject to sanctions, this measure which would have apparently diminished by 40-50 % the supplies to the oblast²⁰⁶. Even the opening at the end of this ban did not completely relieve the businesses as the journeys

²⁰² Fedorov, G. M. (2020). On the economic security of Russia's Kaliningrad exclave. *Baltic Region*, 12(3), 40-54.

²⁰³ Ibid

²⁰⁴ Fedorov, G. M. (2020). On the economic security of Russia's Kaliningrad exclave. *Baltic Region*, 12(3), 40-54.

²⁰⁵ Ibid

²⁰⁶ Clara Loïzzo, « Kaliningrad : une exclave territoriale russe à haute valeur stratégique », *Géoconfluences*, décembre 2023.

are still long and costly, while the European airspace stays definitively closed to Russian aircrafts²⁰⁷. Lacking a diversity of partners, the exclave is thus subject to an unequal trade balance with both its neighbors and the Russian mainland, fragilizing even further the interactions of its economy.

This situation also underlines another external factor: the lack of transport links with the rest of Russia that is not compensated by the developments of others with the EU countries. The lack of integration in the local economy, combined with the restrictions that were applied, did not incite to the building of links beyond those towards Russia or Belarus via Lithuania, ones inherited from the Soviet times²⁰⁸. This complex supply chain, that transported around a hundred passengers and freight trains before 2022, also explains the image of a fragile territory in terms of economic viability during border closures²⁰⁹. Once again, the discontinuity from the territory creates a single link that hides the possible trade and maritime opportunities if the different governments engaged in more cooperation²¹⁰. Based on the example of trade balance issues described above, such a policy would stabilize the territory's economic development and better integrate it²¹¹. As such, this unique link to the Russian mainland, treated as a lifeline to the motherland, reduces the positive economic outcomes by its specific nature.

²⁰⁷ Ibid

²⁰⁸ Ibid

²⁰⁹ Ibid

²¹⁰ Fedorov, G. M. (2020). On the economic security of Russia's Kaliningrad exclave. *Baltic Region*, 12(3), 40-54.

²¹¹ Ibid



The main railway linking Kaliningrad to the rest of the Russian territory – Source: Radio Free Europe. <https://www.rferl.org/a/1830626.html>

All these factors limiting the economic development of the exclave have concrete consequences on the practices or projects that would eventually help in its regional integration. For example, before the start of the war in 2022, it was possible to use the 30-days residence loophole to cross easily the border to go shopping, leading to heavy traffic²¹². Parallely, the expansion of Kaliningrad port complex, eventually turning into an outer one of Saint Petersburg, was discussed despite the increased traffic through foreign countries that was required²¹³. As such, the recent restrictions enforced at the border crossing, if they managed to reduce illegal activities at the border, also constitute a real obstacle to realize such ambitious projects but also maintain the population's life level²¹⁴. This contributes to creating division and pessimism among the population that does not incite the local authorities to pursue projects, in

²¹² Richard, Y. and Sebentsov, A. and Zotova, M. (2015). The Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. Challenges and limits of its integration in the Baltic region. *Cybergeog: European Journal of Geography*.

²¹³ Fedorov, G. M. (2020). On the economic security of Russia's Kaliningrad exclave. *Baltic Region*, 12(3), 40-54.

²¹⁴ Richard, Y. and Sebentsov, A. and Zotova, M. (2015). The Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. Challenges and limits of its integration in the Baltic region. *Cybergeog: European Journal of Geography*.

a context of cessation of deliveries by foreign states. Therefore, another factor of development limitation could be the pessimism and division among the population that is persisting due to the geoeconomic context.

The sum of all these factors impacting negatively the oblast's economy indicates that some efforts from the part of Russian authority would be required to further increase the resistance of the local economy and stabilize its perspectives²¹⁵. There is a need to lower administrative obstacles emerging from nationally oriented legislation, henceforth a more favorable governance that does not block economic development in favor of national interest, especially considering the existing concurrence in this strategic region (Gdansk/Gdynia for example)²¹⁶. Beyond this, diplomatic efforts in fostering international cooperation would allow for an easier cross-border traffic, while investments and diversification could consolidate the economic situation that was further fragilized in the years preceding the beginning of the war in Ukraine²¹⁷.

3.3 – Conclusions

Throughout this chapter, the role of Kaliningrad on a military and political plan was demonstrated to have a certain impact on economic and social development from a local perspective. Historically located at the crossroads of Central, Northern and Eastern Europe, the territory has been the object of different policies from the central governments ruling on it, to exploit its potential at most while still respecting its strategic position from a military perspective. As could have been seen in the first place, this policy would be a constant one through the Soviet era, only to be ruptured during the 1990s with the disappearance of a direct military threat in the eyes of Kremlin. The 2000s and their inherent tensions coming, the situation degraded with the decline of cross-border cooperation and investments, reinforcing the isolation of the exclave and thus control of the central state. From this, it can be deduced

²¹⁵ Sebentsov, Alexander & Zotova, M.. (2013). Geography and economy of the Kaliningrad region: limitations and prospects of development. *Baltic Region*. 4. 81-94. 10.5922/2079-8555-2013-4-8.

²¹⁶ Ibid

²¹⁷ ²¹⁷ Fedorov, G. M. (2020). On the economic security of Russia's Kaliningrad exclave. *Baltic Region*, 12(3), 40-54.

that the oblast is indeed more or less in way of integration into the regional economy depending on how the central authorities interpret the external threats from the West.

Consequence of this variation, the economy and by incidence the life levels are suffering from different factors ranging from the pure political control of the center to the lack of multiple partners or transport links, passing by the pessimism and inherent imbalances in the local economic structure. This nonetheless gives room to some positive aspects, such as a high potential for development in periods of global economic growth, an attractivity in the eyes of Russians or the surviving links with neighboring countries despite the heavy limitations imposed after 2022. Thus, the situation remains relatively balanced although more negative than positive, mainly due to political confrontations implicating the Russian government through its exploitation of the exclave's territory. In the end, it is this same government that, via its policies and investments, holds the key to economic and social development, marking how the latter is tied and de facto limited by the former's actions.

As such, the history, and especially the recent one, demonstrates how the fluctuations in terms of economic and social security in the territory are in themselves the result of a state policy more or less benevolent on allowing some autonomy as long as it does not prevent answering to the immediate perceived military threat, making the socioeconomical development a tool of influence in maintaining the Russian influence in the Baltic Sea area, as long as it does not infringe on the military ambitions that remain the main pillar in terms of regional security for the Kremlin.

CONCLUSIONS AND FINDINGS

Conclusions

Starting from the current context of tensions revolving around the exclave of Kaliningrad, it was hypothesized that a state like Russia would be incited to prioritize the military dimension of security, even to the detriment of economic and/or political/society ones if necessary. Following this idea, it was expected that the military constantly occupied a bigger place in the oblast's functioning to the point of influencing the other dimensions more than the opposite. This would have been confirmed by the evolution of the tensions in the Baltic Sea rare, notably surrounding the exclave itself.

Having a closer look at the different dimensions was consequently necessary and revealed a succession of dynamics. From a strict military point of view, the Soviet Union continued to use the oblast's territory as a military bridgehead in its competition with the West, allowing for decisive control of the Baltic Sea. This logic has been coming back during the 2010s with growing investments in the military presence along the idea of a Baltic – Black Sea axis of defense against a potential aggression coming from the West. However, it should be underlined that the 1990s and the 2000s were marked by a fragilization of this military role, at a time where Russia was opening more to the West, thus rendering such military presence less necessary.

From the economic point of view, the Soviet era was dominated by a military presence relying on the preexisting infrastructure and industries, leaving only a reduced place for agriculture or other industries until the 1990s. With the decline of military presence, the economy oriented itself towards its neighbors with the emergence of a local manufactural industry, but also some illegal activities along the borders. The 2000s and 2010s would witness the continuation of this industrial trend, with direct state support, as they are able to attract a new population. However, the continuous conflict with other economic actors from the Russian “metropolis” and the growing sanctions since 2014 led to a reduction of this activity, ultimately leaving some space for the military dimension, although not as much as under the Soviet rule.

From the demographic and political point of view, the complete population change in 1945 ensured a certain ethnic homogeneity that still constitute a basis for the continuous Russian presence on a territory that was not historically belonging to its sphere. The reduction in military effectives and the degradation of life quality in the 1990s marked the oblast, leading

the state to intervene. As investments continued and the economic grew in the 2000s and early 2010s, the oblast gained some attractiveness in the eyes of Russians from Central Asia, ensuring a better demographic perspective than in the neighboring territories in the EU. However, limitations surged in the late 2010s with the sanctions and restrictions affecting the population's perspectives. In this regard, the fact that the exclave followed the general tendency in political matters, partly thanks to restrictive measures against foreign influence, makes it very aligned with the rest of the country from a societal point of view. The exclave still constitutes a war reward to be protected from Western influence in the eyes of the authorities.

Findings

Considering all the dynamics previously described, it can be considered the hypothesis established is only partially valid after thorough study of all the security dimensions. It is true that, during Soviet times, the military function of Kaliningrad rapidly dominated all the oblast's functioning, aligning with the economic, political and societal developments typical from the era. However, the 1990s and 2000s completely changed the balance: as the military dimension was declining, the spot was progressively taken over by the export industries and to a lesser extent other traditional (agriculture, fishing, etc.) or illegal activities.

This shift was nonetheless limited throughout the 2000s and 2010s by political tensions, marking a return of the military function in the exclave. Despite its apparent intensity, as of 2022 and the start of the war in Ukraine, it cannot be considered that Kaliningrad made a complete return to its Soviet state: the oblast rather finds itself at the crossroads between maintaining its economic and societal balance and fully being used in the Russian military dispositive. Thus, the hypothesis cannot be considered fully valid.

As for the role of Kaliningrad as a focal point of tensions, this remains completely true considering the return of an important military deployment that has effectively changed from an offensive to a defensive one. This indeed reflects a change in the Russian influence over the Baltic Sea area: the country now aims at protecting as much terrestrial and maritime presence, even to point of formulating threats as it did during the Cold War. In this regard, the continuous strict political control and the reluctancy in economic cooperation beyond a certain point align with this idea.

From the point of view of the defense of interests against the European countries neighboring the exclave is particularly reflected by that limitation posed to economic exchanges

and movement of people. Despite the development of export-oriented industries, the authorities always aimed at limiting foreign influence, which made the expansion of both economic and cultural partnerships difficult. Combined with the reemergence of military presence in the 2010s, which, along with other points of disagreement further south, only generated more tension due to the inflexibility from both actors to assess accordingly the other's interests. As such, Kaliningrad is indeed representative of the difficulty for Russia to make its interests considered without parallely fostering conflictual situations.

With the tensions rising further from 2022 onwards, Kaliningrad is now being implicated in the indirect confrontation between Russia and EU/NATO, as characterized by the affectation of part of his military effective to Ukraine parallel to the reinforcing of armaments capabilities turned towards its immediate neighbors. The rise of economic sanctions and the reinforcement of administrative barriers contribute to growing isolation that only a complete foreign, military and economic policy change could really revert. Thus, Kaliningrad is set to remain at the heart of the tensions in the Baltic Sea area as long as tensions between Russian and EU/NATO persist.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SITOGRAPHY

Bibliography – Main publications

Williams, P.D., & McDonald, M. (Eds.). (2023). *Security Studies: An Introduction* (4th ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003247821>

Buzan B. (1983), *People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf).

Sebentsov, Alexander & Zotova, M.. (2013). Geography and economy of the Kaliningrad region: limitations and prospects of development. *Baltic Region*. 4. 81-94.

Richard, Y. and Sebentsov, A. and Zotova, M. (2015). The Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. Challenges and limits of its integration in the Baltic region. *Cybergeo: European Journal of Geography*. <http://journals.openedition.org/cybergeo/26945>

Neumann, Iver. (2016). *Russia and the idea of Europe: A study in identity and international relations*, second edition. 10.4324/9781315646336.

Żyła, M. (2019). Kaliningrad oblast in the military system of the Russian Federation. *Security and Defence Quarterly*, 25(3), pp.99-117. <https://doi.org/10.35467/sdq/105636>

Fedorov, G. M. (2020). On the economic security of Russia's Kaliningrad exclave. *Baltic Region*, 12(3), 40-54. <https://doi.org/10.5922/2079-8555-2020-3-3>

Sukhankin, S. (2021). Kaliningrad in the Post-Crimea Russia. A Bastion or a Weak Link?. *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 124, *Ifri*. <https://www.ifri.org/en/papers/kaliningrad-post-crimea-russia-bastion-or-weak-link>

Loïzzo, C. (2023). Kaliningrad : une exclave territoriale russe à haute valeur stratégique. *Géoconfluences*. <https://geoconfluences.ens-lyon.fr/informations-scientifiques/dossiers-regionaux/la-russie-des-territoires-en-recomposition/articles-scientifiques/kaliningrad>

Kivimäki, T. (2024) ‘Theoretical Premises of Support of and Opposition to NATO Enlargement’, *Geopolitics*, pp. 1–33. doi: 10.1080/14650045.2024.2352569.

Bibliography – Other publications

- Małek, Janusz (1992). "Polityka miasta Królewca wobec Polski w latach 1525–1701". *Komunikaty Mazursko-Warmińskie* (in Polish). No. 3–4. pp. 254–255.
- Taagepera, Rein (1993). *Estonia: Return to Independence*. Westview Series on the Post-Soviet Republics. Westview Press. p. 157.
- Eberhardt, P. (1996). Między Rosją a Niemcami. Przemiany narodowościowe w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej w XX w., PWN, Warszawa.
- Szynowski, R. (2001). Obwód Kaliningradzki w systemie militarnym Rosji, Rozprawa doktorska, AON, Warszawa, p. 151
- Beevor, A (2002). *Berlin: The Downfall 1945* Penguin Books. p. 91.
- Stadtmüller, E. (2003). Pożegnanie z nieufnością? Rozszerzenie NATO i UE a stosunki polsko-rosyjskie w kontekście bezpieczeństwa europejskiego, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław, pp. 154–155 and 160
- Snyder, Louis Leo; Montgomery, John D (2003). *The new nationalism*. Transaction Publishers. p. 88. [ISBN 978-0765805508](https://doi.org/10.1080/08915620308839167)..
- Weiser, B. (2005). *Ryszard Kukliński. Życie ściśle tajne*. Warszawa: Świat Książki. [ISBN 8373916733](https://doi.org/10.1080/08915620308839167).
- Benjamin Weiser (2005). *Ryszard Kukliński. Życie ściśle tajne*. Warszawa: Świat Książki.
- Neumärker, Uwe; et al. (2007). "*Wolfsschanze*": *Hitlers Machtzentrale im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (in German) (3 ed.). Ch. Links Verlag. [ISBN 978-3-86153-433-4](https://doi.org/10.1080/08915620308839167).
- Galoch, B. (2012). Kaliningradzki Rejon Specjalny a tarcza przeciwrakietowa, *Przegląd Sił Powietrznych*, 1, p. 8
- Milan Bufon (2014). *The New European Frontiers: Social and Spatial (Re)Integration Issues in Multicultural and Border Regions*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing. p. 98.
- Eberhardt, Piotr (2018). "Kwestia podziału Prus Wschodnich w okresie II wojny światowej". *Przegląd Geograficzny* (in Polish). 90 (4): 610.
- Dabrowski M (2023) Thirty years of economic transition in the former Soviet Union: Microeconomic and institutional dimensions. *Russian Journal of Economics* 9(1): 1-32. <https://doi.org/10.32609/r.j.9.104761>
- Katsuba, S. (2023). Russia's "Gay Propaganda Law" and Anti-LGBTQ Violence. *Russian Analytical Digest*, 300, 5-8. <https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000631043>
- Strand, S. (2023). The Reactivation and Reimagination of Military Conscription in Sweden. *Armed Forces & Society*, 50(4), 1175-1195. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X231164740> (Original work published 2024)
- Carroué, L. (undated), Danemark/Suède - les détroits danois : verrou stratégique de la mer Baltique et laboratoire de coopération transfrontalière. *Géoimage*, CNES.

Bibliography – Institutes’ notes

Cordesman, A. (2014). Russia and the “Color Revolution”. Center for Strategic & International Studies. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russia-and-color-revolution>

Eaton, N. and Malinkin M.E. (2016). Building a Soviet City: the Transformation of Königsberg. *Wilson Center*. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/building-soviet-city-the-transformation-konigsberg>

Bibliography – Newspapers

Berger, Stefan (31 July 2010). Rusbridger, Alan (ed.). "Should Kant's home once again be German?". *The Guardian*. London, England, United Kingdom.

V. Gerasimov, (9 March 2016) “Po opytu Sirii” [Following the Syrian experience], *Voenna Promyshlennyj Kur'er*. www.vpk-news.ru.

Sitography

International Monetary Fund. External Relations Dept. (1984). The realities of economic interdependence: Its benefits and frustrations. *Finance & Development*, 0021(001), A009. <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/022/0021/001/article-A009-en.xml>

Rumler, Frank (2012). "Rebuilding Post War Germany: A Century-Long Project". *Berlin Germany Life: City Info Guide*.

Brooks, G. (2013). Partners in production in Russia. Automotive Manufacturing Solutions. <https://web.archive.org/web/20160407155340/http://www.automotivemanufacturingsolutions.com/focus/partners-in-production-in-russia>

“Development strategy focusing on promoting domestic production of previously imported goods to foster industrialization” according to: Bussell, J. (2023). *import substitution industrialization*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

Kulik, R.M. (2024). Eastern bloc. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Eastern-bloc>

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica (2025). *Eastern Front*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Eastern-Front-World-War-I-history>

Spires, S. (2025). Northern Crusades. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Northern-Crusades>

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica (2025). *Battle of Tannenberg*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Tannenberg-World-War-I-1914>

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica (2025). Crimea. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Crimea>

Kryzhanivsky, S.A., Zasenkov, O.E., Stebelsky, I., Makuch, A., Hajda, L.A., Yerofeyev, I.A. (2025). Ukraine. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine>

Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2025). *special economic zone*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/money/special-economic-zone>