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▶ **To cite this version:**

Arnaud Serry, Pierre Thorez. The Russian-Baltic states boundary: a limit between peripheries or a link between European Union and the post-soviet states. TWENTY YEARS LATER (1991-2011): THE RESHAPING OF SPACE AND IDENTITY, Sep 2011, Russia. halshs-00827160

HAL Id: halshs-00827160

https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00827160

Submitted on 28 May 2013

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The Russian-Baltic states boundary: a limit between peripheries or a link between European Union and the post-soviet states

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After the collapse of the USSR and the enlargement of the European Union to the Baltic the border between them became the border between Russia and EU. This paper focuses on flows of goods and persons through boundaries between Russia, and Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania). The purpose is to analyze the role of this boundary after the enlargement of the EU. Often regarded as peripheries within their respective federations, eastern Baltic and western Russia are, by definition, a transitional and circulation area. Immediately after the collapse of USSR, the new boundaries remained almost easy to cross. In the beginning of the 21th century, they became no more fuzzy but rather fixed. Since 2004, and the enlargement, the crossing has been regulated. People need visas that means papers and cost. The evolution of cargo flows has been more contrasted. Economic policies, political stakes and traditional links, are elements to understand East Baltic area. Kaliningrad Oblast, the Russian exclave lying by the Baltic Sea, strengthens the interest of the purpose.

The approach is mainly through port and railway traffics for goods, and through air networks for passenger flows. Eastern Baltics ports are mainly transit ports for goods coming from or going to post-soviet states, while some Baltic airports concentrate flows between the last ones and the UE.

Moreover, the mapping of traffic of people and commodities establish a new perception of the impact of the new EU border in the region.

1. The context

1.1. Geographical

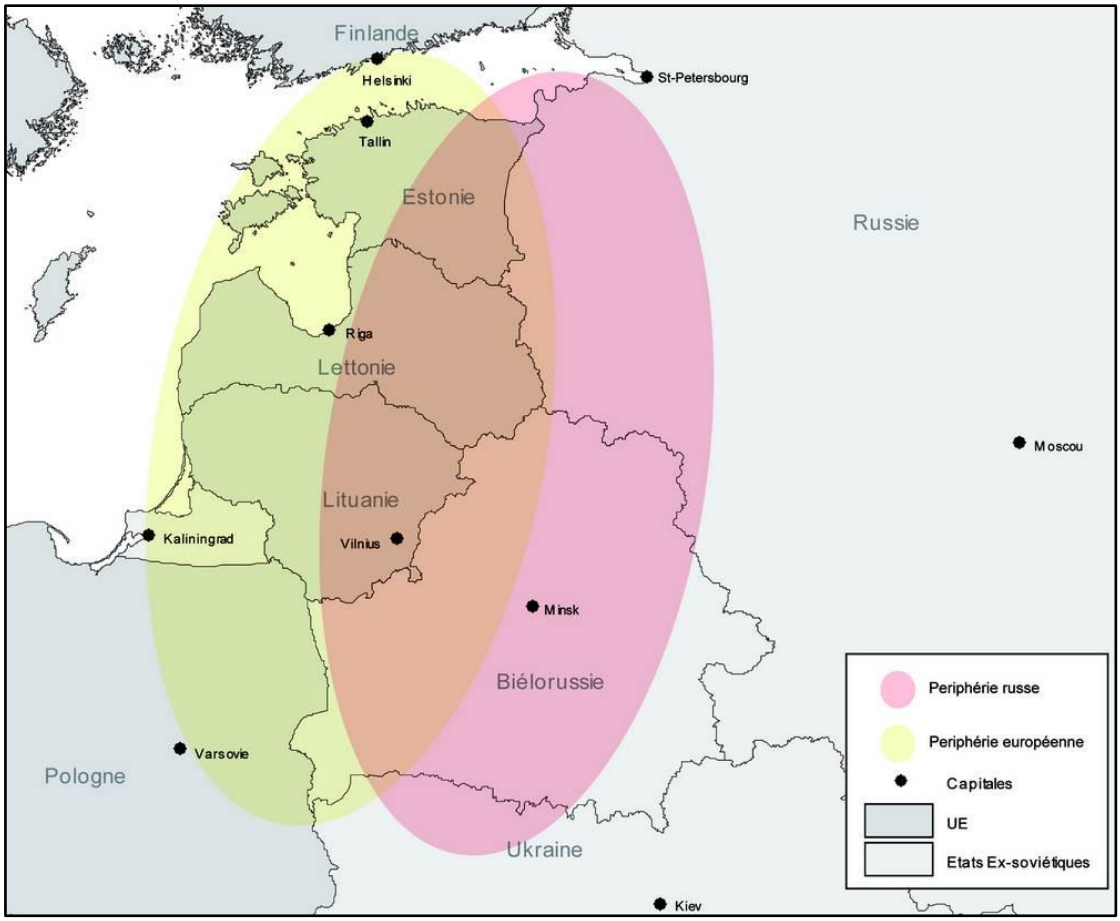
The Russian-Baltic boundary appears as a specific space. Is it the margins of E.U., only a periphery, or a new center? If the Baltic region is a periphery, the associated center has to be in the European Union (Fig 1.).

However, we are seeing a decline in profit center: on the contrary, dynamic economic and commercial cooperation and advance characterize the region. The peripherality of the region is still tempered by the strong mesh that connects the main poles of the network.

The Russian-Baltic boundaryis adynamic space, and also a margin, forseveral reasonsthat this areaisconducive to innovation:

- Asin the periphery, it is less controlledthan thecentral place;
- New European frontier, it isalocuswhere thegradientsare the strongestontheshorterdistance;
- Finally, many networks, physical and institutional, are crossing this space.

Fig. 1: Geographical context



1.2. Historical

The end of the Soviet times. Baltic States are mainly linked to USSR and Comecon. Main international gate-ways are the ports. There are no international airlinks, a just a few trains towards Eastern and Central Europe.

In the early 90'sdrop of the links with FSU due to several factors: economic collapse, social crisis, nationalism.

2004 enlargement of EU changes the nature of the border with FSU. Is it a new wall or an advantage for international flows?

2.Cargo flows

2.1. A Soviet inheritage: the large share of railway transportation

The tablesclearly showthe regional specificityin terms offreight transportin the region:itis dominated byrail, especially internationally. Even if rail share in freight transport is decreasing, it is still higher than in the other E.U. countries. Road transport is yet minor and volatile. As statistics about road transport are not available, only rail transport is here analyzed.

Part of road in fret transportation (%)

	1998	2000	2005	2009

EU		73,7	76,4	77,5
Estonia	32,7	37,3	35,4	47,3
Latvia	24	26,5	29,8	30,2
Lithuania	40,4	46,6	56,1	59

Part of rail in fret transportation (%)

	1998	2000	2005	2009
EU		19,7	17,7	16,5
Estonia	67,3	62,7	64,6	52,7
Latvia	76	73,5	70,2	69,8
Lithuania	59,5	53,4	43,9	40,1

Source : Eurostat

2.2. The ports

After the collapse of the USSR, half of the former Soviet port capacity of the Baltic sea was located outside Russia.

The Baltic range still keep particularities of the Soviet system:

- The purpose of the port system remains mostly similar. Exports of raw materials from Russia and the CIS countries and import of manufactured goods.
- Transit flows remain the major components of port traffics.

Four features define the evolution of maritime traffic in the BalticRange: increasing traffic of crude oil, based on Russian exports, growth of container movements, increase of intrabalticro-ro flows and geographical concentration of traffic in some ports. Today the main ports of the range are Sankt Peterburg and Primorsk oil terminal.

Unfortunately there is little information on Russian operators and investors in the Baltic statesports. Russian actors are present, but they are discreet to avoid offending national sensitivities.

2.3. Railway traffics

Goods carried by rail

Main international rail freight in the 3 Baltic States concernRussia, as a result of port transit activities. For instance crude oil exported by Tallinn-Muuga is carried by rail from Russia.

There is also a phenomenon of neighborhood, for example between Lithuania and Belarus (Klaipeda exports Belarus fertilizers to E.U. and USA).

Intensity and distribution of international rail freight

We can notice a spatial differentiation of hinterlands:

- In Lithuania, flows exist with most post-Soviet states;
- In Latvia, the distribution of flows is much more concentrated, with the absence of the Caucasus countries;
- Estonia seems to be in an intermediate position.

Train blocks: Apart traditional goods (metals, minerals, oil ...),a new kind of traffic dramatically increases: container flows. Ports, railway companies and new operators (shipping and stevedoring international companies) are setting up train-blocks between the Baltic States and FSU and China.

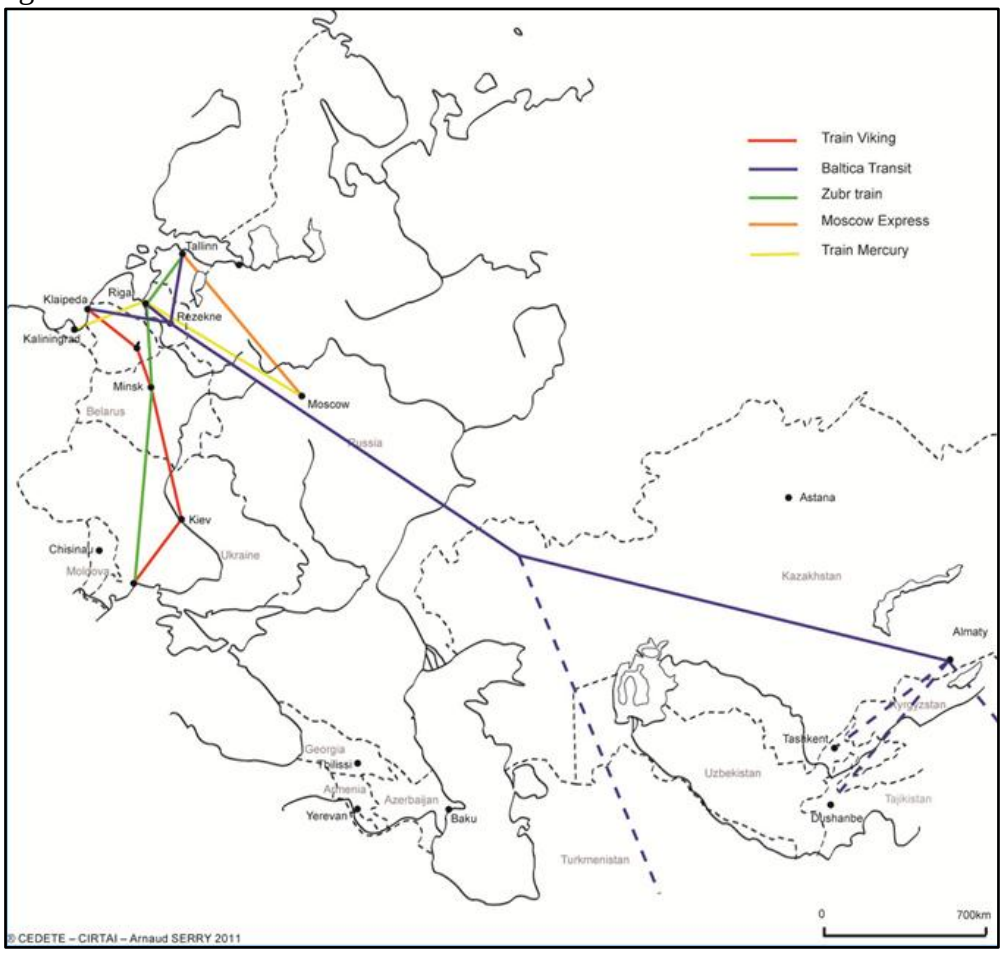
Train-blocks enable "door-to-door" delivery, safety and easy border crossing and customs procedures (CIS/EU border in 30 min). One good example is the Train « Viking » rolling from Klaipeda (Lithuania) to Odessa and Illichivsk (Ukraine), carrying about 40 000 TEUs per year (Fig. 2).

Lithuanian and Russian railways are planning a container train Mercury in 2012 between the ports of Kaliningrad and Klaipeda and logistics centers in Moscow.

The "Baltica transit" is a twice weekly train-block service between Riga and Almaty (Kazakhstan). Transit time is 8-10 days. It is operated by FESCO (Far Eastern Shipping Co.).

There are some other projects for instance the AS Baltic Rail, railway polish forwarding company based in Estonia and Poland, which intend to develop regular container train services from Šeštokai (LT),the terminus for European gauge railways, to Sankt Peterburg, Moscow and Central Asia. It seems to be an emergent railway transit policy between EU and CIS.

Fig.2: Block-trains between Baltic States and CIS countries

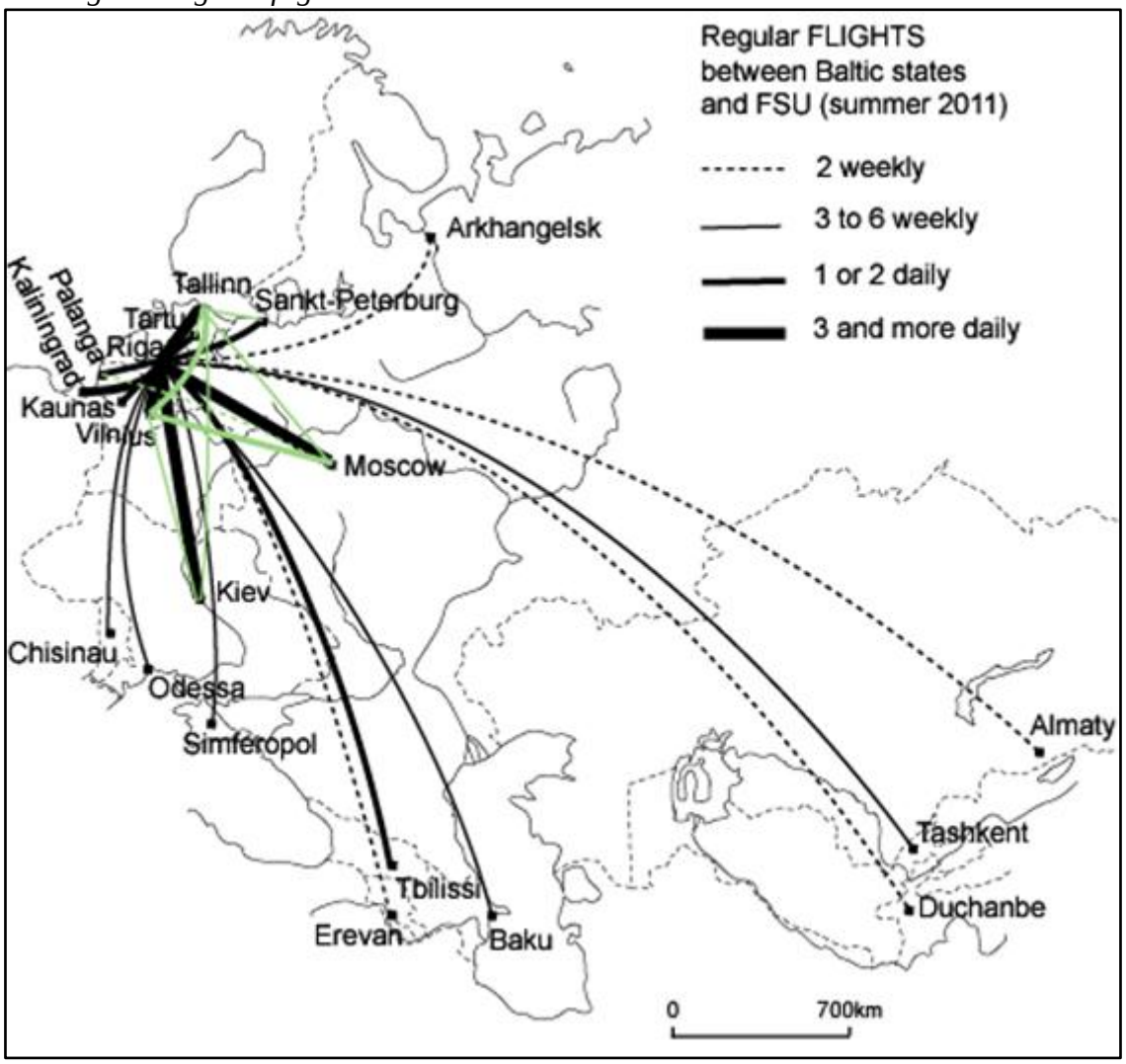


3.Passenger flows

Means distribution of international transport ofpassengersis similar tothe traditional division: domination of theairbut rail and road have still a significant share.

In the Soviet past all the regular commercial flights in the Baltic republics airports were flown as domestic, inside USSR. After the independences the network changed dramatically. Today less than 20% of the destinations are located in FSU. A long time second after Vilnius, Riga airport is now the first one in the Baltic states for passengers carried and movements (4,6 million and 68 145 in 2010 respectively). It is also the first by the number of FSU destinations. This is a consequence of the firm strategy of Air Baltic, the main air company in the region. It created a hub in Riga in 2004, working as a gate-way between EU and FSU 5fig. 3).

Fig. 3 : Regular flights between Baltic States and FSU



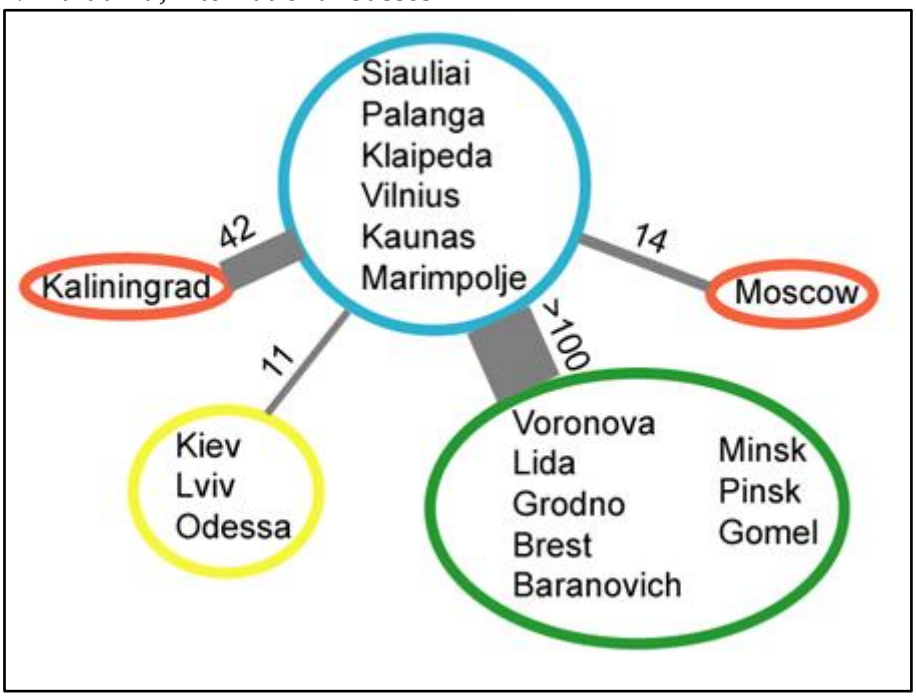
During the 90's flows and flights decreased even to 100%. Many destinations in FSU were closed. In the beginning of the 21st century, more flights are operated, mainly with the capitals (Moscow and Kiev). But flights to other towns are not yet re-operated. Prioriry for Baltic States air network is development of links with the EU.

After exclusive links, to USSR, then to EU, Riga airport and Air Baltic intend to win a central position in the middle of the to regions.

The Baltic Soviet republics were in direct railway connexions with many towns of the USSR, even in its asian territory. Those links disappeared in the beginning of the 90's. To day, apart Kaliningrad, the only remaining trains travel to the capitals of the neighbor countries.

Road transport is difficult to analyze due to lack of reliable information. We tried to use busses schedules, network maps and global statistics. Road transport seems to have an important place in cross-border flows, probably in relation with little cross-border business (Fig. 4). After the entrance of the Baltic States in the Schengen area, visas were introduced. Therefore regional international passenger flows decreased.

Fig.4: Lithuania, international busses



But it is impossible, without personal enquiry at the border cross-points to evaluated individual car international flows. Obviously, there is a lot of *chelnolkies* from both side of the border.

4. The case of Kaliningrad

The traditional means of transport between Kaliningrad oblast and the Russian Federation is train (about 70% of total passengers in enquiry in 2005)[1].

The need of transit visas impacted passenger practice towards air companies. In 2011, there are still 2 daily trains between Kaliningrad and Moscow, but not less than 10 daily flights.

Railway remains dominant for freight with a share of about 80%. But fares for transit are higher for Russians imports and exports, than using Baltic States or "continental" Russia ports.

[1] *International Organization for Migration, Vilnius office, Migration and transit as seen by Kaliningrad population, Representative public opinion survey of the Kaliningrad population, 2005*

The border became a factor of territorial discontinuity for Russian Federation. It is a draw back to intrarussian flows. Russian sea companies operate ro-ro ships between Ust-Luga and Kaliningrad.

For Kaliningrad oblast, crossing the borders does not necessary means going abroad, but going to the heartland.

Conclusion

As wrote Claude Raffestin[2], the border between Russia and the Baltic States, has contradictory impacts: it is a cut and a seam. In a general evolution characterized by traffic drop in the early 90's followed by recovery after 1999 and growth in the 2000's, borders are easily crossed by international and transit flows organized by international operators. Business against political borders. Ports are positioned as gateways between Russia and Europe and participate in the building of a single integrated reticular regional space.

At local scale the border became a frontier. Local mobility especially cross-border practice, is now more difficult.

We could conclude that the border is a seam in global transport system, but a cut in local mobility.

[2]Raffestin C.(1986) : *Éléments pour une théorie de la frontière*. Diogène n°134