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'Königsberg/Karaliaučius/Kaliningrad region: settlement of sovereignty will end Second World War'¹

Abstract

The present status of the Königsberg/Karaliaučius/Kaliningrad region is not defined at an international level. The Potsdam Conference in 1945 assigned this region to the Soviet Union for a temporary period. But, the USSR no longer exists. The question of sovereignty for the Königsberg region is therefore one that must now be answered.

The neighbouring states of Lithuania, Poland and Germany, as well as the Scandinavian states, are deeply interested in the demilitarisation of the region. The Balts welcomed the US Congress resolution demanding the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Königsberg region, which was unanimously passed in 1996. However, almost nothing appears to have happened since, as the Russian army is still there and the pollution of the Baltic Sea still continues on a critical scale.

The international community, particularly the European Union, whose economic aid to Russia totaled more than □ 1,1b [\$1b], must attach conditions to this aid to require that Russia withdraws its army and allows the people of the region to decide their own future in a referendum. Indeed, the Second World War will at last be over when the Königsberg region is liberated from Russian occupation.

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The Baltic States were invited to join NATO during the Prague Summit on the 21st of November 2002. They also expect to complete their negotiations for European Union membership soon, planning to join it in 2004. With this anticipated expansion of the EU, the question of the Königsberg/Karaliaučius/Kaliningrad region has inevitably become a part of the international agenda.

The region of Königsberg is a separate territory which is currently administered by the Russian Federation, it lies on the Baltic shore between Poland and Lithuania, and is separated from Sweden by the Baltic Sea. Until the Second World War this region was a part Germany, known as East Prussia. When the German frontiers were redrawn after 1945, that territory was divided between Poland and Russia. After the Soviet army entered the region in October 1944, the inhabitants experienced mass murder at the hands of the communists. Almost all the Germans and Lithuanians living there were killed or deported to concentration camps in Siberia. However in the late 1980s ethnic Germans from other parts of the Soviet Union were again allowed to settle there, and it now seems likely that some 10,000 Germans live there today, half of them in Königsberg, the capital.

Before becoming German, this region was originally inhabited by the Prussians, a Baltic people, as well as by Lithuanians. The old Prussian language was closely related to Lithuanian, but has long been extinct. Today approximately 40,000 Lithuanians continue to live in the region. They represent about 4 percent of the population which totals nearly a million, the majority of whom are Russians who settled there only during the last half century. This picture contrasts sharply with the situation a century ago when, despite prolonged and intensive germanisation, there were still 170,000 Lithuanians in the region, representing 9 percent of the total population of two million.

In fact this region was always closely related to Lithuania culturally. The Königsberg Region is the main part of what Lithuanians call 'Lithuania Minor', which significantly, is considered to have been the birthplace of the nation's literature, literary language, and national press.

It is clear that the present status of the Königsberg Region is not defined at the international level, although it should be remembered that the Potsdam Conference in 1945 assigned this region to the Soviet Union only for a temporary period until the final Peace settlement. In addition, the USSR, which was given this temporary mandate, no longer exists. The issue of sovereignty for the Königsberg Region is obviously one which must now be addressed.

During a recent dinner-debate of the European-Atlantic Group held in London in October 2002, the Rt. Hon. Michael Ancram, Shadow Foreign Secretary of the Conservative Party was asked 'Why couldn't NATO and the EU leaders press Russia to withdraw its military forces from Königsberg region as soon as possible, and allow the people there to decide their future themselves in a referendum?'. He answered by saying that it is obvious that 'the region is an anomaly, which the EU has to resolve'. He also said that he: 'would like to see more debate about the future of this region in Europe'².

Inevitably the future of this region lies with Europe. This is why the former President of Lithuania Vytautas Landsbergis made a statement on the Karaliaučius-Kaliningrad region on May 23, 2002 which suggested that Europe should initiate a 'real

² See www.eag.org.uk.

international debate on this issue'. According to him the question of 'who will take care for this region', must be answered 'in a way satisfactory to Russia'. He asked in addition: 'Will the European Union be responsible for this region in future, or will its neighbours, Poland, Lithuania or Sweden ?'³

His concern is well-founded. Currently Königsberg is an impoverished region which is the primary source of drug trafficking in the Baltic States and Europe, and has the most severe AIDS problem in the continental region. There are more Russian troops concentrated there than American army personnel in the remainder of Europe. This is a force of 100,000 troops, supported by a rusting fleet of 850-1,000 tanks and 1,000-1,600 transporter vehicles. In addition the Baltic fleet is also stationed there, together with half of the entire North Western Russian Air Force, which has 460 rockets capable of carrying nuclear weapons. An accurate estimate of the total military accumulation in the region is probably considerably higher than the estimate made in the 2001 European Commission Report 'The EU and Kaliningrad', which said that the numbers had 'fallen from 200,000 to only 18,000', because even the Kremlin has acknowledged having 48,000 soldiers there⁴. I was extremely surprised by the letter of the EU official, Gerhard Lohan, who wrote to me on November 4, 2002 that 'the European Commission is not aware of any demands for the withdrawal of the Russian military present in Kaliningrad' and who quoted Jane's Sentinel security assessment from August 2002, that the Russian military presence in Kaliningrad amounts to a total of 16,500 men, with some 8,600 men

³ Tėvynės Sąjungos Pirmininko, Seimo nario Vytauto Landsbergio pareiškimas 'Dėl dirbtinai kaitinamo Karaliaučiaus-Kaliningrado klausimo', May 23 2002.

⁴ 'The EU and Kaliningrad', Commission of the European Communities, January 172001, p.12. Maybe there is a spelling mistake in the report, i.e. 18,000 instead of 48,000, but it is clearly a rather serious error.

due to leave by the end of 2003⁵. It would be wise for the EU to make absolutely sure that this is the case, because Russia remains 'a wild-card in European and regional security scenarios'⁶.

That Report, which attempted an in-depth picture of the difficult situation in the region, was right in stating that the strategic importance of Königsberg had decreased during the 1990s, but it highlighted major problems. It stated: 'Kaliningrad is the second worst source of pollution in the Baltic Sea region after St. Petersburg, generating more than 400,000 tons annually of domestic and industrial waste'⁷. It also said: 'Diseases such as tuberculosis, diphtheria, measles and epidemic paratyphoid are widespread. ... Drug use and prostitution have led to the alarming spread of other communicable diseases. For instance, Kaliningrad is among the worst regions in Russia for registered cases of HIV, and is by far the most affected area in the Baltic Sea region'⁸

The European Commission launched a debate on 17 January 2001 on the impact of its enlargement policies on Königsberg. However this has not developed into a real international debate on the future of this region as it has been thus far been confined to the discussion of economic help for this region. The nature of the continued Russian

⁵ Letter of Gerhard Lohan, Head of Unit (Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus), Directorate Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Central Asian Republics, External Relations Directorate General.

⁶ Dana Michele Linnet, 'Denmark's Foreign and Security Policy Toward the Baltic States 1991-1995. A case study of Post Cold War Policy Change', University of Copenhagen, April 2000.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 14.

⁸ *ibid.*

presence there has yet to be discussed. This may be because of Chris Patten's assertion at the inception of the discussion that: 'Kaliningrad should not become a bone of contention between Russia and the enlarged EU'. His statement was however remarkable for failing to mention the historic name Königsberg of the region and that it had been assigned to the Soviet Union only for a temporary period until the Peace Settlement Conference, which has in fact, never taken place. Thus, the Soviet lease has now expired, as surely as the British leasehold of the former colony of Hong Kong had expired a few years earlier.⁹

Chris Patten has also stated, during a Plenary session of the European Parliament held in Strasbourg on May 14 2002 that 'We share the Parliament's view that, as part of Russia, Kaliningrad is essentially a Russian responsibility. We also believe that EU enlargement is an opportunity from which Kaliningrad can greatly benefit, rather than a threat'¹⁰. Indeed the EU is no threat to anyone in the region, but the present position of Königsberg is likely to remain a significant threat to the EU and neighbours of the region for as long as the question of future sovereignty after the end of the lease remains unresolved. It is therefore surprising that the EU has yet to take a decisive position on the necessity of Russian withdrawal from this region.

I now would like to quote from the statement 'Karaliaučius region should be with Lithuania' made by the present Council of Affairs of Lithuania Minor, a non-

⁹ 'Commission launches debate on impact of enlargement on Kaliningrad', IP/01/66, Brussels, January 17 2001.

¹⁰ 'EU-Russia Summit and Hoff Report on Kaliningrad', Speech by The Rt. Hon Chris Patten, European Parliament – Plenary session, Strasbourg, May 14 2002 – SPEECH/02/201.

governmental organization: 'In 1989 the Resistance Movement of Lithuania Minor sent a letter to Michail Gorbachev, the Secretary General of CPSU, asking him to pay heed to the fact that "Lithuania Minor, constituted mainly of the present Karaliaučius Region, is a Lithuanian land since time immemorial and as such belongs to the Lithuanians", end of quote¹¹.

The official policy of Lithuania is that the country does not have any territorial disputes, however it is deeply interested in the demilitarization of the region. It should be recalled that in 1996 the US Congress passed a resolution demanding the withdrawal of the Soviet troops. This was initiated by Christopher Cox, Chairman of the Congress Policy Committee. Despite this strong statement, almost nothing appears to have happened since, as the Russian army is still there, and the pollution of the Baltic Sea still continues on a critically high scale. However, there are important undercurrents relevant to an understanding of how the situation may be rectified. Among these is the fact that it is known that Russia's leader Vladimir Putin took a poll in Königsberg in the beginning of 2002, from which it was evident that the majority of population, and particularly the younger generation, saw the future of the region as lying with Europe.

Other moves are also being made in other places. During the first meeting on April 24 2002, between the Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Kasayanov and the European Union Commissioners, the Königsberg issue dominated the discussion. A major point in discussion was Russia's request for 'visa-free corridors' through the territories of the future EU members Poland and Lithuania, 'to allow the free movement

¹¹ 'Future of the Karaliaučius region should be with Lithuania', Council for the Affairs of Lithuania Minor, <http://www.mlrt.lt/ateng.html>.

of people and goods'. While it is known that the EU declined this request, it is significant that Russia also sought free access for military personnel and material 'along these corridors'¹². It is also relevant to note that the The Baltic Assembly, which embraces representatives of all three Baltic parliaments, has recently suggested an appeal to the European governments, and those of Russia and the regional government in Kaliningrad, that the future of this region is with Europe and that a referendum must be allowed, to permit the citizens of that region to decide on their future for themselves¹³.

Unfortunately, when Russia's President later declined an invitation to participate in the EU-Russia Summit in Copenhagen, demanding a meeting in Brussels, the Commission made what I would interpret as totally unacceptable and indeed immoral concessions to Russia, proposing feasibility studies of non-stop visa-free trains to run across Lithuania's territory, when Lithuania joins the EU. The proposal of such sealed trains has historical echoes of the famous sealed train in which Lenin was taken to Russia for the organization of the Communist revolution in St. Petersburg. The very proposal clearly violates the sovereignty of Lithuania, and it is very strange indeed that Putin's European friends, particularly Italy's Silvio Berlusconi, Spain's Jose Maria Aznar, France's Jacques Chirac and Greece's Constantin Simitis were in favour of a deal, which was called by Vytautas Landsbergis, former President of Lithuania and former Chairman of Lithuania's Delegation for the Negotiations with the USSR, as 'a new Ribbentrop-Molotov pact on the future of Lithuania'¹⁴. Fortunately, it did not become a reality thanks

¹² Ahto Lobjakas, 'Russia: Kaliningrad's Future A Topic Of Kasayanov's Talks With EU', RFE, May 24 2002.

¹³ Interview with President Landsbergis, May 18 2002.

¹⁴ See Judy Dempsey 'Diplomatic notebook: Putin's Schengen shenanigans', *Financial Times*, October 9 2002 and the statement of Prof. Vytautas Landsbergis, MP, former Chairman of the

to the firm position of Denmark, and the German efforts, not least by attracting European attention to Russia's criminal war in Chechnya.

An agreement was reached between the EU and Russia in Brussels on November 11 2002 on the issuing of Facilitated Transit Documents to residents of the Königsberg region, and of Simplified Transit Documents to inhabitants from Russia. While the fact that both types of documents were now to be controlled by Lithuania effectively changed the status of the region, it also left the major three issues, related to its environmental and administrative problems, unanswered:

- First, the extraction of oil in the Baltic Sea by Lukoil near Lithuania's border is capable of transforming the *Kursių Nerija*, Curonian Spit into a disaster area. The international community, above all the EU, must demand the discontinuance of the building of extraction facilities immediately.
- Second, the project to build a new nuclear power station in Kaliningrad must be abandoned as well. It is ridiculous that the EU demands Lithuania to close down its nuclear power station at Ignalina, while Russia simultaneously develops a new nuclear power station project in Königsberg.
- Third, the EU's aid to Russia has totaled more than one billion euros since 1990. Why not ask something in return as soon as possible, e. g. rapid, orderly,

and complete demilitarization of the Königsberg/Karaliaučius/Kaliningrad region?

One can argue that the Königsberg region is a Litmus test of the European Union itself. Obviously the EU is able to help the region (during the present year alone this assistance totals some € 40 million), but the real question is whether the Union can develop firm and clear policies regarding the future of this region. Until it does this, its effective stance will remain essentially pro-Russian and anti-American. The European Union has to create a Common Strategy towards the Kaliningrad region, replacing ineffective strategy towards Russia¹⁵. Thus, it would be much more wiser to transfer the relationship of the EU with this region from the Directorate of the External Relations to the Directorate of the Enlargement.

Prof. Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission, stated in his address 'A Wider Europe – A Proximity Policy as the key to stability' to the Sixth ECSA-World Conference 'Peace, Security and Stability. International Dialogue and the Role of the EU' that 'we need to set benchmarks to measure what we expect our neighbors to do ... We might even consider some kind of 'Copenhagen proximity criteria'. He also mentioned that 58 percent of the Russians wish to join the EU, according to opinion polls performed by the EU in the end of the last year. The percentage in the Kaliningrad region, undoubtedly, is much higher. Indeed, Russia has to be persuaded to respect human rights and to acknowledge the wish of its people to join the EU, to let the Kaliningrad / Königsberg / Karaliaučius region become free and to allow its integration

¹⁵ HUISMAN, S. *Future of Kaliningrad*. ISS-EU Newsletter No 1, February 2002, <http://www.iss-eu.org>.

into the EU. This is the best way to resolve the enormous problems of the region, rather than importing them into the EU.

The former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in her recent book 'Statescraft' argued that the EU is irreformable. This paper suggests that the resolution of the Königsberg issue will clearly show whether this is true or not. The question is whether the EU can find strength to transform its present policies by issuing a clear demand for Russian withdrawal from the Königsberg region. This can be done by attaching conditions to the economic aid to Russia and allowing the people of the region to decide their own future, in a referendum. If this were to happen, the Baltic nations would recognize that this organization has a genuine intention to play a positive role in the Baltic Sea region. Indeed, the Second World War will at last be over, when Lithuania Minor is finally liberated from the Russian occupation.