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**The Impact of Mediatic Culture on Cross-border
Cooperation Between Russia and EU. Leningrad Region**

SUMMARY

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KEY WORDS: Border, Russia, European Union, Estonia, Finland, Written Press.

Approach and novelty

The ex-Soviet space is characterized mainly by an important dynamism of borders structures, emphasizing one more time the permanent reconstruction of borders and their significance. The new state structures focus more on sensitive geopolitics which incorporate, among others, concepts of hard security and the use of fear in order to gain internal cohesion. In this way, the new border zones often become the place of discursive confrontations between actors with different visions and ideologies, coagulated in a conflictive understanding of the border. The borderless world rhetoric and the diminishing role of border as a barrier for goods, people and ideas are contradicted by the changing meaning of borders and their instrumentalization in order to build social difference and social control. At the interference between Russia and its western neighbors, Estonia and Finland, the end of communism period and the fall of Iron Curtain did not mean the end of borders, but rather it signaled the beginning of some new processes of division and reconceptualization of borders, made concrete both at discursive level, and material level. Especially the border between Russia and Estonia is perceived as being a place of confrontation between different ideologies, perceptions on space and conflictive memories, being thus the topic of different analysis focused on understanding the process of borders re/construction.

The use of Eastern border in order to detach itself from Russia and the Soviet past was a priority in Estonian discourse after the fall of USSR. In a lesser degree, Russia has mobilized and re-conceptualized the border with Estonia in order to build a door to Europe, without giving up the positive images of Soviet period or its grandiose past.

Amid a less sinuous evolution and a relative stability, the border between Russia and Finland does not seem to be a very urgent research object. Nevertheless, the implications and ideological charge of the borderland contributed to a continuous interest for this area at the academic level. This interest originates mostly from the Finnish side, where the border with Russia is perceived as an argument for numerous internal and external political evolutions. For Finland, its eastern border is a constant that will continue to shape the contour of country's policy, being thus essential to understand the realities' depth determined by its presence. For Russia, the border represents a model of good cooperation with a western democracy, and its

construction at discursive level offers a larger understanding on Russia's position on the international scene. Placing these borders in European context and undertaking a comparative analysis of discursive constructions associated with the border areas form important elements in enlarging the analytical angles and understanding the complex constructions of Russia's western borders.

In the same way, a multidisciplinary approach can extend the analytical frame and can bring new elements in the discussion regarding border's reconceptualization. The beginning of border studies has been characterized by a disciplinary concentration dominated by fields such as geography, history, international relations, political science, borders being understood mainly as fix elements determined by the sovereignty, territoriality and space. Later on, the border studies extended and became more inclusive, with contributions from different social or economic sciences. The border studies incorporated interdisciplinary approaches which brought new perspectives and meanings of borders, allowing analyzing them as systems where the political, social and economic factors interact at multiple levels. On this background, communication sciences (Chavez, 2012) (Horga, 2007), next to cultural studies (Ravisco, 2010) or philosophy (Balibar, 2009) have started recently to contribute to a diversification of border studies and to an integration of new elements in their understanding. They can also contribute to a theorization of border studies, process that proved to be a difficult one. Borders' contextuality had determined many researchers to focus on case studies and to follow borders' evolution at local level. Despite these difficulties in offering a unique conceptual frame, there have been attempts to theorize and unify this field based on different elements: Brunet-Jailly (2005) offers a variables' typology centered around market forces and trade flows, the policy activities of multiple levels of government, local cross border political clout, local cross border culture. In this way, Brunet-Jailly has tried to offered a theoretical frame large enough so that it can be applied to multiple border areas. Van Houtum și van Naerssen (2002) used sociological concepts such as "othering and ordering" for offering a general understanding of borders, and Rumford (2006) underlined the importance of borders theorizing in a world where globalization is a reality, but where a strong resistance to it is still present. Payan (2014), for his part, suggested a theorizing in border studies starting from the analytical methods, and not from the nature of the phenomena associated to borderlines. In order to build a border theory, it is needed, he suggests, to focus on methodological strategies and instruments that we can use and to choose the ones that increase our predictive power (Payan, 2014, p. 3), opting in this case for a more consistent attention to comparative multidisciplinary studies. A. Kireev (2013) also talks

in favor of multidisciplinary studies, suggesting a typology of borders based on historical comparative study of Russian borders.

Developing a general border theory has proven to be difficult due to many different pluri-disciplinary perspectives integrated in this subfield, such a step being stalled by the contextual nature of borders and their dependency to local and regional factors. Among others, Kireev justifies this situation through the influence of “post-structuralist and post-modernist style and rhetoric” (Kireev, 2013, p. 46), which brings skepticism regarding “any universal story” so that many researchers prefer empirical approaches to the theoretical ones, and futurist analysis on borders dynamism to their historical study. Most researchers had considered as being useful a focus on the main used concepts and a stimulation of constructive discussions around this topic (Kolossoff, 2012) (Corey Johnson, Reece Jones, Anssi Paasi, Louise Amoore, Alison Mountz, Mark Salter, Chris Rumford, 2011). Newman, which initially supported the need for a theoretical frame that could be used in order to bring the different perspectives on borders in a common analytical frame (Newman D. , 2003), raised a series of questions regarding the multitude of case studies related to borders which prevent a focus on common concepts, theories and terminology. Later on, Newman gave up the idea of generating a border theory, saying that a “common theory is neither possible, nor needed” (Newman D. , 2006, p. 156), being more important to develop a common understanding on the existing terminology. Agreeing with this perspective, Paasi (2005) signals even a surplus of theoretical perspectives in border studies, suggesting the need for an increase in interdisciplinary researches in order to enlarge the methodological perspectives in border studies. This approach builds on the remarkable complexity of borders and their contextuality, but it does not suggest a limitation to case studies, but rather to enlarge the approach through a series of conceptualizations and development of a common vocabulary. It takes thus into consideration that all the borders are stricken by the same global processes, the differences being visible at the level of local implications. In this way, an important attribute of border studies consists exactly in their multidisciplinary and the different perspectives they allow and integrate, so that my research will include multiple perspectives in order to nuance the understanding on borders.

Despite the fast evolutions of borders in the context of globalization, the research builds on the idea that, regardless of the changes in the meanings of borders, geography continues to play an important role when we talk about international relations, and the interference space between Russia and the EU is a perfect exemplification of this reality. The rhetoric of a

“borderless world” is sometimes violently contradicted by the mental, symbolic and material persistence of borders. The need of belonging to a community and to differentiate from “the other” according to a collective identity with an historical consolidation (Horga, 2007, p. 35) are constant elements that transforms the borders in reality of our contemporary world. Thus, despite the globalizing forces, the borders keep playing an essential role in the way we perceive the reality and the way we position ourselves in relation to those living on the other side of the border. The resistance of those perceptions in time and their capacity to perpetuate induce the need to integrate an historical perspective in the analytical frame opened by geography, all the more so as the mental border is more striking between communities with different perceptions on the historical past. These perceptions on historical past are often used as border’s determinants, so that including an historical perspective can only enlarge the understanding frame on borders. For O’Dowd (2010) this “bringing back of history” in the border studies offers a better understanding of present representations by raising awareness on historical positions and avoiding an exaggeration in relation to the novelty of contemporary globalization shapes and borders’ modifications.

Borders can only be reshaped to a limited extent by the changing of regimes and the transformations on the international scene, being mostly dependent on people’ perception. As some researchers suggest, some borders and border practices can be so deeply ingrained in people’ mind and perceptions that some of their functions can be perpetuated long after the border itself stopped existing from an institutional point of view. Mental perceptions of borders must be accepted as a concrete reality of our world. Loosing sometimes their geographical relevance, borders persists and can be understood as social constructions, the role of discourse in building their meaning being an essential one (Paasi A. , *Europe as a Social Process and Discourse. Considerations of Place, Boundaries and Identity*, 2001) (Strüver, 2004). Mass media is an essential element in the contemporary world in this process of reconfiguration and reconceptualization of borders at perceptual level, so that a larger understanding of the meanings attributed to a state’ borders can be achieved through analyzing the mediatic representations of borders’ meanings. The role of discourse in building the meaning of borders has been widely accepted in the context of placing the borders also in the imaginative, discursive frame, emphasizing constantly the perceptual image of the observer (Strüver, 2004). Mass media can contribute to the transformation and perpetuation of the perception on border as a barrier or as a contact area, as mass media is in central position nowadays in the process of information proliferation (Giddens, 1991) and the dominant representation of the borders (Anderson, 1991). The analyze of the mediatic representations starts from the assumption that

a country's policies are highly influenced by the public discourse on certain topics, and in deciding upon an agenda for discussions (MC Combs Maxwell E., Shaw Donald L., 1972).

More than this, the field of mediatic representations is structured as a space where different actors draw social problems (J. Young, 1981) and bring certain solutions by shaping political options. Thus, this research builds on Kitch's perspective which sees journalism as a process, rather than a product (Kitch, 2008, p. 318), and the press discourse will be understood as a way to shape the collective meaning of borders.

Aim and objectives of the research

The aim of this research is to analyze the image that Russian press creates about the western neighbors and its reflection in existing perception on borders, and correlating this information in an analysis of the processes that lead to a more efficient cross-border cooperation, mainly by focusing on the process of building mental barriers through discursive practice and mediatic images. The temporal delimitation of the study integrates the period from 2000 to 2015, with an extension to 1993-1996 for analyzing Finland's integration to the EU. The modifications on the international scene and in Russia's relations with the two countries forces an extension of the analysis from the border towards the entities that it delimitates and an integration of the bilateral context for the understanding of the representations and perceptions on borders. Different elements will be integrated in the study. First of all, the role of the past and collective memory will be interrogated in relation with the shaping of the state border and the impact that the representations on the past in the written press can have on the determination of collective identity. How is the neighbors' image modified during time and how much is the past used in these representations? Is the press emphasizing the stereotypes and prejudices in the representations of the past or is it making space for a cooperant dialogue? The focus will be also placed on the role "Europeanization" occupies in the mediatic discourses and images. Which elements of the European identity are present and how does their choice influence the nature of cooperation? In this way, we can follow how does the more accentuated presence of European actors in Russia's close neighborhood area influence the representations of the two countries in the written press and the forms of practical cooperation.

We will also integrate in this analysis the center-periphery relation, trying to understand to what extent the discourses are different at these two levels and can influence each other, as well as the rapport between the hegemonic and polemic discourse in the written texts. In order to understand collective memory and identity construction in a society, we need both an analysis of the common historical representation, accepted and shared to a certain extent by all members of the society, as well as of the polemic representations, as "the dynamic between the hegemonic

and polemic representations is the one that creates, organizes/ reorganizes the collective frame through which an image on the past is transmitted (Tieaga, 2009, p. 339). Following this strategy, we introduce a more nuanced perspective on the mediatic representations, underlining the different approaches related to the border with Estonia and Finland, making space in the same time for the local perspectives on these issues.

The study starts from two fundamental questions:

1. How did the perceptions on Estonia and Finland develop in time in the Russian public discourse and how does these elements influence the cross-border cooperation?
2. How does the perceptions fluctuate at different levels (central, regional, local) and what differences between the discursive strategies used for the two countries?

In order to answer these questions, the study will be built on several important levels:

1. Historical level will observe the impact historical fragments transmitted in the press can have on the image of the two neighbors and the perception on borders. Also, under this aspect we can follow the extent to which these historical representations give shape to a space of cooperation or perpetuate stereotypical images and a conflictive positioning. To what extent borders' representations are influenced by a past marked by cooperation or conflict? Which is the historical representation of "the other" in the border regions with Finland and Estonia and how have they changed in time?
2. The European level will investigate the relation between mediatic representations and identity, especially the way mediatic representations on borders are used in order to denote identity marks in relation to Europe. How influent is European Union on modifying the representations on borders? To what extent is the idea of border used in order to create a relation of familiarity with Europe? How is the proximity to Europe reflected in the understanding of borders?
3. Center- periphery relation will analyze the differences between the discourses and representations in central and regional/ local press. To what extent is the press reflecting the local or national/international evolutions? To what extent can local representations influence the central discourse on foreign policy and relation with the EU?
4. The elements that can improve the perspectives on cooperation through mediatic representations and discursive constructions. What kind of cross-border cooperation might promote a more intense sentiment of belonging and neighboriness.

Comparative analysis will play an important role in this part, by trying to illustrate the factors that could improve the cooperation between Russia and Estonia using the lessons of the Finland-Russia cross-border practices.

Methodology and study material

The study builds on a newspapers' screening and a semiotic analysis of the selected articles, as well as on comparative case study on the information related to Russia's border with Estonia and Finland, combining a series of materials and qualitative and quantitative approaches. The comparative case study is focused on the types of mediatic representations utilized for the two studied countries and the way that these representations can shape certain forms of cross-border cooperation. The comparative case study is extended on the discursive strategies used at the central, regional and local level. This instrument is used in analyzing and synthesizing certain similitudes, differences and patterns that exist and that can facilitate the interpretation of the information obtained.

The empirical work included collecting some support materials in elaborating the analysis: other press materials, official declarations, official reports, debates from Finland and Estonia on congruent topics with our research's subject. Even though the study is focused on the Russian perspective on the topic, understanding both countries' perspective on cross-border cooperation is important in order to enlarge the approach. Thus, several materials that reflect Finland's and Estonia's understanding have been collected so that the information obtained from the Russian press could be integrated in a larger context.

From a methodological point of view, the first two chapters are focused on the literature review, combining an historical perspective with a disciplinary one in order to obtain an overview on the evolutions and transformations of the study object.

The third chapter consists of a comparative analysis on the press materials related to the two countries studied, using the screening of press articles and their semiotic analysis. This effort consists both of a quantitative analysis (the quantification of thematic corpus regarding the topics approached, the general tone of the articles, and the frequency of the references to the two neighbor countries), as well as a qualitative analysis structured around the social semiotics and having as objective to place the mediatic representation in the context they have appeared. We have, thus, intended an investigation of the possible discursive changes and connecting them with the larger evolutions from the border areas and in the relation between the different international actors present in the area.

A number of 990 articles have been collected for the 2000-2015 period from Kommersant, Leningradskaia Pravda, Vesti, Ivangorod and Vyborg newspapers. Applying the analysis to a reduced number of press materials, and not extending it to the discourse from different communication channels (television, radio, internet), the intention is not to extrapolate the discursive practices analyzed to the level of entire society, but rather to indicate certain

directions observed. More than this, analyzing these directions during a long period of time offers an historical perspective and allows a personification and underlining of some evolutions which are more often presented in a formal and retrospective way.

In order to analyze these materials a data base built on several elements was needed. The tone of articles has been coded according to the general image of Estonia, respective Finland (positive, negative or neutral). The thematic categorization concentrated on the main subjects discussed in the bilateral relations between Russia and the two neighbor countries. The following categories have been used: foreign policy/security, economy, culture, social, border management, environment, but this classification presents a limitation generated by the fact that one article can be placed in more than one category, so that the classification losses to a certain extent its accuracy. A consistent codification was based on a series of significant (activities, events, objects and stories) which helped in understanding their connotations and placing the represented images in the temporal frame.

A trend analysis has been realized for showing which subjects and thematic have been covered, the frequency of articles, the difference between central and regional level regarding the covered subjects etc. Discourse analysis, combined with comparative case study offers a detailed description of the elements that influence the approach to cross-border cooperation and the contemporary practices from border areas. The aim of the analysis is, thus, both descriptive and analytic, trying to underline the images created in the press related to the two neighbors. In the descriptive phase, the analysis observed the references to the two actors and the frequency over time, and in the analytic phase the accent has been on placing the obtained information in the general context of Russia relations with the UE and the strategies used by the actors involved. Comparing the two border areas offers the possibility to observe different approaches and discursive strategies on cross-border cooperation.

1.4. The structure

The paper is divided in 3 chapters. The first chapter aims at tracing the general context of Russian border, analyzing from this perspective the main factors and evolutions relevant for Leningrad region. The comparative analysis on the two border segments offers an overview on the factors that can determine certain forms and intensity of cross-border cooperation. The historical perspective deepens the understanding on borders and their contextuality.

The second chapter tracks the discussions on borders in order to understand their origin and evolution in time. Conceptualizing the border through the field literature promotes the aim of establishing some interpretative benchmarks useful in developing the case study.

Understanding the political, social and symbolic meaning of border is essential in shaping a larger frame of evolution and socio-political transformations that occurred in Europe.

The third chapter tracks the way discursive practices develop in the Russian press in relation to the image of the neighbors, and respectively, to the border that they share. Illustrating the influence that press can exercise on the social life is one of the objectives of the chapter, as well as emphasizing the opinions that were discussed at the public level deciding the context in which the cross-border cooperation developed. The conclusions part will summarize the analysis and will offer some answers for the questions mentioned in the first part of the study.

Conclusions

Despite the accelerated borders' evolutions in the globalizing context, this study builds on the idea that geography is still extremely relevant when it comes to the construction of international relations, and the space between Russia and the UE is a perfect illustration of this reality. The rhetoric of a "borderless world" is sometimes violently rejected by the mental, symbolic, but also material persistence of borders. The rhetoric regarding borders' redundancy are contradicted by ever changing meaning of borders and their instrumentalization in order to build differences and social control. The discourse regarding trans-border cooperation was affected by the process of Europeanization even in the Russian realities (local and regional press adopted more easily a European terminology), even though is a much lesser degree than in the neighbor countries. This Europeanization at the discursive level is not translated nevertheless at the level of institutional practices and trans-border contacts. The borders with the western neighbors continue to be traditional borders, which separate states with different interests and different cultures, and the inter-state relations continue to be treated from a bilateral perspective. Thus, even though it's necessary to interpret the border from the Europeanization perspective and to take into consideration the influence exercised by different EU instruments, this approach needs to be completed with a national perspective which understands the border as a demarcation line between two nations with different histories and evolutions.

When we talk about cross-border cooperation, perceptions are extremely relevant as they can help overcoming or accentuating the barrier effect of borders. This reality is integrated in the evolution that can be observed in borders study, as they are not seen as fix lines, but rather as processes and constructions which can be perceived differently by the actors who are affected by the border. In the case of Estonia, the further an actor is situated in relation to the border the

more this country is criticized. On the contrary, close to the border the discourse is more moderated and focused on emphasizing the opportunities for cooperation.

In a country like Russia, where the nationalism has grown lately and which is focused on defining its own development model, the national borders continue to be an imperative that is only little affected by the European model. National borders' persistence is not a strange process in the European Union countries either, especially when these borders are also the external limit of the Union. EU's failure to place itself as an identity benchmark above the nation states is visible through the persistence of nationalistic rhetoric. Even if both in Finland, and especially in Estonia, the border with Russia is seen as a demarcation line between the European specific and the system specific for the eastern part of the border, the national stereotypes persist in bilateral relations with Russia. Thus, the study of national borders is still extremely relevant, despite seeing them from a larger perspective and multiple angles. This does not mean that we can deny the impact the globalizing forces have on borders' permeability, especially the big impact that supranational institutions have. We can affirm, though, that perceptions and different mental representations on borders have proved to be much more persistent than the afferent institutional practices. These perceptions come from stereotypes and myths rooted in the past, thus overcoming the past is an imperative if we want to diminish the demarcation role of the borders. This aspect is important especially in the case of Russia-Estonia border, where past representations and contradictory interpretations of past events are the main elements in building the state border and maintaining a reserve in getting to know the other. On the Russian part of the border with Finland, the common past is relatively neutralized, which allowed a rhetoric of good cooperation to appear. Nevertheless, the stereotypes from the other side of the border and a caution related to the eastern neighbor (Laine, 2013) make the discourse on cooperation and good neighborliness to seem rather fake and forced. As Laine concludes, to talk about border is to talk about difference. These aspects are perpetuated despite their disadvantages at the local level and the attempts to modify the border rhetoric towards acceptance and opening. The differences at the institutional, legislative, cultural level, or the ones related to practices and cooperation culture, accentuate the barrier effect Russian border with the two states, even though some economical aspects encourage cooperation (e.g. the price policy from Russia and Estonia). Thus, we cannot strictly say that a border is "open" or "close", as there are different openness degrees in a border's evolution. In the same time, the border can be perceived as being close by some actors and open by others, as well as it can be close for some functions and open for others. The evolutions on international scene, the understanding of state suzerainty and territorial integrity, the effect of securitizing policy and economic

factors, allow borders to be both in a process of closing as well as opening, according to the prevalent interests and perceptions. We can say that the affirmations regarding borders deconstruction under the globalizing effect are exaggerated, as we can map multiple evolutions which allow both a consolidation of borders, as well as their diminishing for some functions. These ambivalent processes prevent us from placing the border between Russia and Estonia in the category of closed borders despite the major problems that exist there, as well as they prevent us from placing the border with Finland in the category of open borders, despite the official rhetoric of minimalizing the problems existing at bilateral level. In the same time, this ambivalence is relevant also for the conflict that exists between the economic discourse and the securitizing one related to borders. If the economic interests dictated an opening of the borders in last decades (with the edificatory examples of the EU), the securitizing discourse has brought in discussion external threats, real or constructed at the discursive level. Understanding borders less as fix lines and more as evolutive elements leads to Paasi perspective of seeing borders as institutions and symbols that are produced and reproduced through social-political and discursive practices. In this way, the borders are evolutive elements, and not given realities, which can be de-constructed through processes that are the different than the ones which allowed their construction.

When we talk about asymmetric cooperation relations, the powerful states have the capacity to model the borders, using a series of alternatives exposed by Kozák (2010), which starts from ignoring until dominating the weak one. The decisions regarding the nature of borders are framed by the big national paradigms in which are included the relations with the neighbors. Thus, Estonia choses rather to close up in front of Russia, detaching itself from what happens on the other side of the border (an attitude that can be observed at the local level as well, if we analyses the discourses from Narva which emphasize the European character of the city and its alienation from the Eastern realities). Finland, on the other hand, has a pragmatic approach on trans-border relations, an approach that is in line with the national policy of accepting the presence of “the big bear” at East and the need to accommodate this reality with country’s interests. The borders have, nevertheless, different meanings for different actors, and this aspect is even more important if we analyze the positions on the topic at the local level compared to the official discourse from central level. The different borders’ permeability is mentioned by Balibar as being one of borders’ main trait, and uses the comparison with a rich man from a rich country, for whom the border has become a formality and a recognition of his status, and the meaning of border for a poor man from a poor country. For this one, more than being an obstacle, the border represents also a place where he passes many times when he is

rejected or when he reunites with his family (Balibar, 2002, p. 83). These differences show multiple meanings of borders and their evolution in time and they underline the need to study the borders from multiple perspectives for being able to apprehend the different symbolic attached to them.

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