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Non-Freight Cross-Border Traffic between Poland and the Kaliningrad Oblast

The article provides the analysis of the current condition and the perspectives for the development of the border-crossing infrastructure on the border between The Polish Republic and Kaliningrad region of Russian Federation. The economic and political factors influencing the amount of the non-freight cross-border traffic on this section of the border are considered as well.

В статье дается анализ современного состояния и перспектив развития приграничной инфраструктуры на границе между Республикой Польша и Калининградской областью Российской Федерации, изучаются экономические и политические факторы, влияющие на изменение объема пассажиропотоков, пересекающих данный участок границы.

Before the break up of the Soviet Union the Kaliningrad Oblast was a militarised part of the Russian Federation of Socialistic Republics, which was inaccessible to foreigners. This was due to the strategic meaning of the region as a place where the USSR Baltic navy, army and air force, which belonged to so-called «second defence line», were stationed (T. Palmowski, 1999). At that time there were the following border crossings with Poland: the road ones that were designated for ordinary traffic in Gronowo and Bezledy, the rail ones for freight traffic in Braniewo, Bartoszyce and Skandawa and by sea in Frombork. Until 1991 the border traffic here was practically non-existent. It was limited

to the boarding of local government delegations and to those who were going to the USSR for business purposes.

In the new geo-political situation, after the break-up of the USSR in 1991, the Kaliningrad Oblast became an enclave separated from the rest of the country by independent Lithuania, Latvia and Belarus, and was open to the world. Then the trans-border co-operation between the enclave and other countries significantly grew in importance, especially with Poland and Lithuania. The problems concerning the possibilities of crossing borders, their capacities and border traffic became significant.

An important stimulus for the development of border contacts at local and regional level was the Agreement between the governments of the Republic of Poland and the Russian Federation signed in 1992. Since then the intensity of border traffic has been noticed on the described border (E. Kulesza, 2003).

Among the nine border crossings in existence in 2004 on the Polish - Russian border, 7 are used by cars and people (3 road crossings, 1 railway crossing, 2 sea crossing and 1 air one) (Table 1).

Table 1

**Road and railway border crossings on the Polish and Russian border
(recorded on 1.09.2002)**

Border crossing on the Polish side	Border crossing on the Russian side	Type of crossing	Type of traffic	Opening hours
Gronowo	Mamonowo I	Road	People, freight (RP and RF) up to 6 tonnes of the whole mass	24 hours
Bezledy	Bagratyonovsk	Road	People, freight (RP and RF - without limits, international - up to 8 tonnes per axel)	24 hours
Goldap	Gusev	Road	People, freight (to 7,5 tonnes of the whole mass)	24 hours
Braniewo	Mamonowo	Rail	People, freight	24 hours
Bartoszyce	Bagratyonovsk	Rail	Freight	24 hours
Skandawa	Zheleznodorozhnyi	Rail	Freight	24 hours

Source: E. Kulesza, A. Maciejewski, 2003.

The road crossings are of central importance in the border traffic. Among these, the Bezledy-Bagratyovsk crossing has the biggest capacity, which has been serving the international non-freight border traffic since 1993. In 2002 almost a half of all the people crossing the Polish - Russian border used this crossing (Turystyka w 2002, 2003). Apart from non-freight traffic, Polish and Russian citizens are allowed to use, without any limits, freight traffic here. In the case of the citizens of different countries, lorries with the load of 8 tonnes per axel can use this border crossing.

The border crossing in Bezledy has the best- developed infrastructure on the Polish side of the border. It is equipped with eight lanes, parking space for cars being checked, radiometric gates, scales for weighing loads and accommodation for border guards and shipping service. At the beginning of 2004, it was expanded to include a new building for veterinary and botanical inspection services. New lanes were opened as well on the Russian side in Bagratyovsk, in 2003.

The Gronowo-Mamonowo I crossing, which was developed in the mid-1990s, acquired international status in April 1997. It has 7 lanes (4 entering and 3 exiting) and roofs with a checkpoint channel. Currently, it deals with around 1/3 of the total number of crossings between Poland and Russia. Apart from non-freight traffic, freight traffic weighing up to 6 tonnes is possible for Polish and Russian citizens.

The most modern crossing, which is not in full use yet, on the Russian side is in Gusev. It was developed by the Russians with support of European Union funds, with the aim of building an access corridor from the Kaliningrad Oblast to Belarus, which Poland did not agree to. However, the Polish side, in Goldap, also started work with the aim of infrastructure development, including enlarging the buildings for customs officers, building lanes for freight checks and the town's ring-road for freight traffic. This is the only crossing at the Polish and Russian border which except for cars, freight vehicles up to 7,5 tonnes of the whole mass, can be crossed by cyclists (pedestrian traffic is not allowed on any crossing).

Currently, the Goldap-Gusev crossing has the smallest capacity among the road crossings at the northern-eastern Polish border. However, its share in serving passenger traffic is increasing. Since having its status increased to include international non-freight traffic in January

2002, 18 % of the number of travellers crossing the Polish - Russian border have checked through there.

Apart from the operating border crossings, there is a car-freight crossing, Grzechotki-Mamonowo II being built at the moment. It is due to be opened in 2005. Work to modernize the road infrastructure is being carried out on both sides of the border. However, due to the lack of co-ordination, there is a possibility that the opening date will be delayed. The Russians were building a motorway that would connect Elblag with Kaliningrad (called a «Berlin road») at the beginning of the 1990s. However, on the Polish side, in 2003 bridge reconstruction was finalised, and the repairing of the road surface is planned in 2004 (E. Kulesza, A. Maciejewski, 2003). Currently, in Poland there is building work going on on infrastructure sites near this crossing, yet there are certain delays on the Russian side.

There is only one border crossing between Poland and Kaliningrad Oblast used as a passenger rail crossing - this is Braniewo-Mamonowo. There is only one pair of trains on the Kaliningrad - Gdynia line with wagons to Berlin. Rail traffic was launched there in May 1993. Currently, only 1 % of the number of travellers crossing the Polish - Russian border use this means of transport (E. Kulesza, A. Maciejewski, 2003).

Apart from the crossings mentioned above, one can cross the northern-eastern Polish border by sea. There are two crossings of this kind, to Elblag and Frombork. There are passenger and sports-sailing checkpoints, and in Elblag there are also freight checkpoints (E. Kulesza, 2003). The crossing in Elblag now has little importance, but the crossing in Frombork is used to serve the tourist hovercraft trips to Baltiysk and Svetly. The total amount of passenger traffic isn't constant, but is approximately 60,000 people a year, of which only 4,000 are Russian.

The airport in Szymany near Szczytno, which has been in operation since 1996, is almost unused by traffic between Kaliningrad Oblast and Poland. Air connections take place from Warsaw to Kaliningrad by Polish Airlines LOT.

Since the opening of traffic border crossings, the amount of traffic between Poland and Kaliningrad Oblast has been fluctuating (Table 2). There was a gradual increase of people crossing the border until 1997, when there was a peak of over 5 mln people. The trend stopped in 1998 when a new act about foreigners was introduced in Poland, which obliged the Kaliningrad Oblast citizens to possess tourist passes. It was

accompanied by the economic crisis in Russia, which was followed by an increase in the value of the American dollar in currency exchange rates. The increase in the value of the dollar was bad both for Russians purchasing goods in Poland and Polish exporters to the region (E. Kulesza, A. Maciejewski, 2003). The border traffic then decreased by over 40 % compared to the previous year, the number of departures from Poland fell by a half, and arrivals to Poland - by 36 %.

Table 2

Border traffic at the Polish-Russian border between 1994 - 2003

Years	Total (in thousands of people)	Total		Poles		Foreigners	
		Crossing the border in the following directions (in thousands of people)					
		from Poland	to Poland	from Poland	to Poland	from Poland	to Poland
1994	1822	915	907	468	477	447	430
1995	2836	1438	1398	759	725	679	673
1996	4199	2135	2064	1189	1128	946	936
1997	5088	2591	2497	1605	1513	986	984
1998	2950	1654	1296	893	660	731	636
1999	4238	2093	2145	1087	1095	1006	1050
2000	4427	2172	2255	1029	1045	1143	1210
2001	3957	1929	2028	959	986	970	1042
2002	3946	1948	1998	1132	1145	816	853
2003	3171	.	«	949	.	.	620

Source: author's analyses based on the Central Statistical Office materials.

During the next two years, the number of border crossing travellers rose again, then since 2001, when the excise duty on spirit products decreased in Poland, the fall in number has been recorded again. The decrease in spirit excise duty limited the benefit of trade travel.

In 2003, there was a significant fall in the number (by over 774,000 in comparison with 2002). This was as a result of the introduction by the Russian government of a big rise in car insurance charges for cars arriving into the enclave in September 2003. The number of Poles crossing the border decreased then by around 1/4 in comparison with

September 2002 (Table 3). The second factor that affected the fall in the number of border crossings was the introduction of obligatory visas to cross Poland's eastern borders on September 1, 2003, which was connected with the preparations Poland was making for its accession to the European Union. As a result, the Russian side introduced the same law.

In the case of Polish citizens going to the Kaliningrad Oblast, as well as the enclave's inhabitants going to Poland, visas are free, yet their acquisition requires handing in a passport at the consulate, and in the case of multi-entrance visas - additionally, certificates of HIV examinations are required (E. Kulesza, A. Maciejewski, 2003). Travellers who use travel agencies are charged with an additional administration fee of 50 Polish zloties. The extra fee is also collected if one wants to obtain a visa quicker than through the usual procedures (the equivalent of 100 USD to wait one day and 10 USD to wait four days).

Table 3

**Poles going to and foreigners arriving
at the Polish - Russian border from 2002 - 2003**

Months	Departures of Poles from Poland				Foreigners arriving in Poland			
	2002	2003	2002	2003	2002	2003	2002	2003
	In thousands of people		Previous year = 100 %		In thousands of people		Previous year = 100 %	
Total	1132,1	48,6	118,1	83,8	853,3	620,0	81,9	72,7
January	79,4	96,6	107,6	121,6	68,1	50,3	80,0	73,8
February	94,6	88,2	138,5	93,3	67,0	42,9	87,9	64,1
March	91,7	92,3	115,9	100,6	73,6	50,7	81,7	68,9
April	85,6	65,6	120,6	76,6	72,4	45,0	87,8	62,2
May	99,1	80,5	121,1	81,3	79,4	55,3	88,4	69,6
June	90,3	74,6	117,8	82,6	76,8	58,9	80,9	76,7
July	104,0	82,9	122,1	79,7	84,0	66,1	82,4	78,7
August	103,2	89,3	116,9	86,6	89,3	73,9	86,0	82,8
September	96,8	73,4	115,6	75,8	69,2	58,5	82,3	84,6
October	99,0	61,1	117,3	61,7	60,0	33,5	72,9	55,9
November	101,5	71,3	116,6	70,3	59,9	41,1	77,7	68,7
December	87,1	73,0	109,4	83,8	53,9	43,7	72,3	81,5

Source: author's analyses based on the Tourism Institute data.

The introduction of compulsory visas reflected in the reduction of border traffic in October 2003, either compared to September 2003 or the relevant period in 2002 (Table 3). The number of Poles going to the Kaliningrad Oblast fell by approximately 38 % in comparison with October 2002, and foreigners arriving in Poland by over 44 %, which was less than a year before. Nevertheless, in the following months, an increase in departures from Poland to the Kaliningrad Oblast and in the opposite direction was recorded. It can be assumed that the effect of the introduction of compulsory visas would actually be less than it had been predicted at the beginning.

Among the travellers crossing the Polish - Russian border in the last decade of the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century, Polish citizens have outnumbered other nationalities. They accounted for between 51 and 62 % of the total people. Only in the years 2000 and 2001, the numbers of foreigners crossing the border were a little higher than the number of Poles. In 2002, 90 % of foreigners coming from the Kaliningrad Oblast to Poland through the biggest, this amounted to more than 80 % of the total border traffic, border crossings (Bezledy-Bagratyonovsk i Gronowo-Mamonowo), comprised of Russians (Turystyka w 2002, 2003), Germans made up (5 %) and Lithuanians (2,8 %), and the percentage of other nationalities' citizens was very small (2,2 %).

The border crossings at the Polish-Russian border have a local character. Around 95 % of border crossings comprises of people living within 100 km from the border (E. Kulesza, 2003), with 38 % of Poles and 52 % of Russians living within 20 km from the border.

At the Polish-Russian border crossings, the main purpose of travelling to the neighbouring country is in purchasing goods, part of which (excise duty goods - cigarettes, alcohol, petrol) is smuggled. The fact that over 90 % of travellers spend less than a day abroad indicates that (E. Kulesza, 2003). A tremendous factor behind this state is caused by the bad economic situation experienced by the cross-border inhabitants, for whom the trade of the above-mentioned goods is often the only source of income, due to the price differences between the countries.

According to Polish Border Guard data (Ruch graniczny ..2003), over 70 % of Poles setting off to the Kaliningrad Oblast in 2002 de-

clared «purchase of goods» as the main purpose of their trip (Figure 1). Four out of five people from the total number purchased their goods within 20 km of the border. In the last few years, a trend in the fall of trade trips for the sake of pure tourist trips has been observed. A small part still comprises of business trips, visits and other purposes.

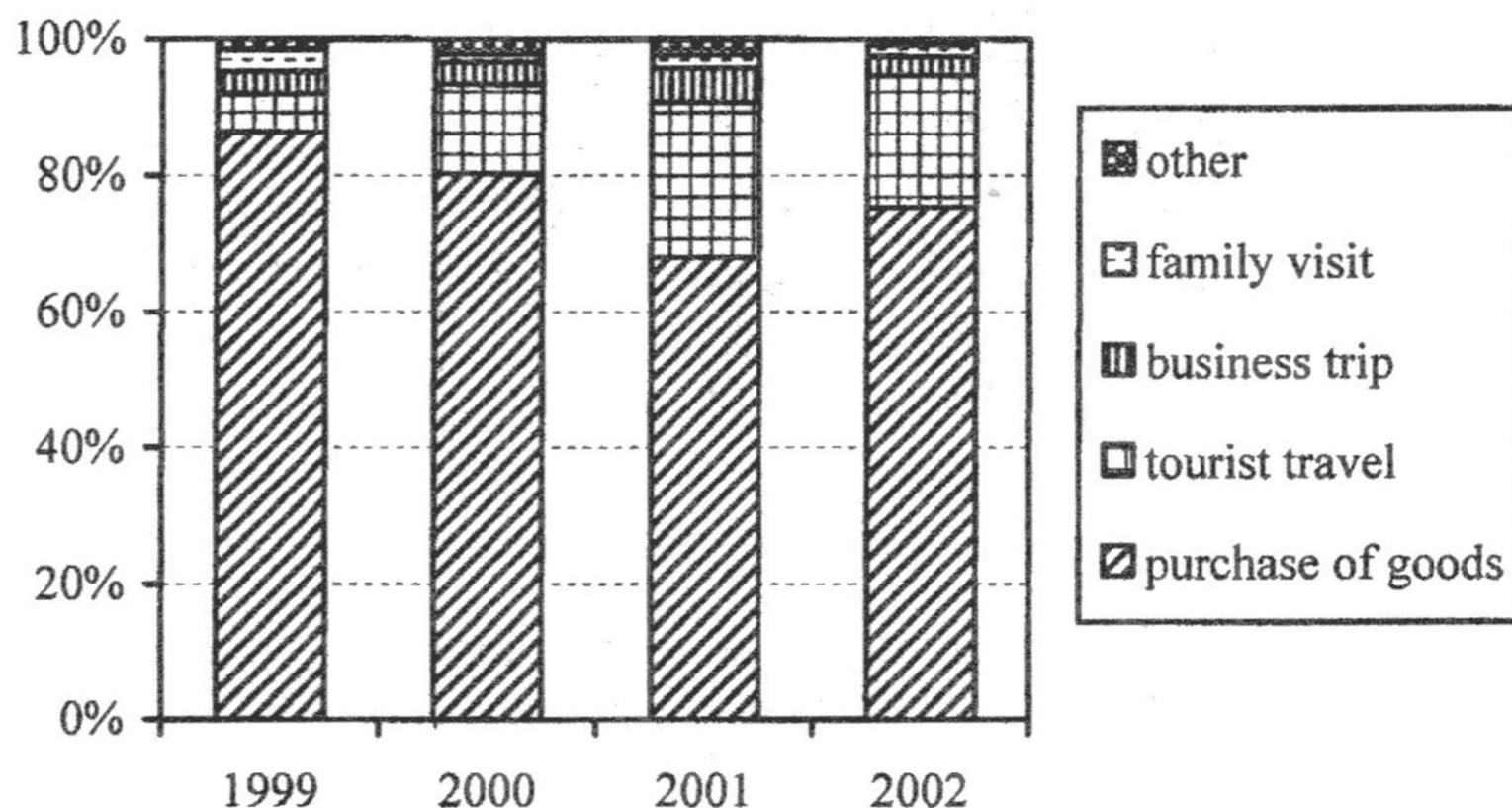


Figure 1. The purpose of car trips by Poles going from Poland through the Polish-Russian border

Source: prepared by the author on the basis of the Central Statistical Office materials.

Purchases are also the main purpose of foreigners' trips from the Kaliningrad Oblast to Poland (Figure 2). The share of foreigners' coming on trade trips in comparison to other purposes for trips was smaller than in the previous years than the percentage of Poles going to the Russian enclave. According to the Polish Central Statistical Office data, foreigners more frequently than Poles declared tourist purposes, connected with business and other. In the last years, the number of the Russians coming to Poland to purchase goods has been increasing (e.g. 44 % in 2000 and 72 % in 2002), at the same time the share of people travelling for tourist purposes and on business trips has been going down.

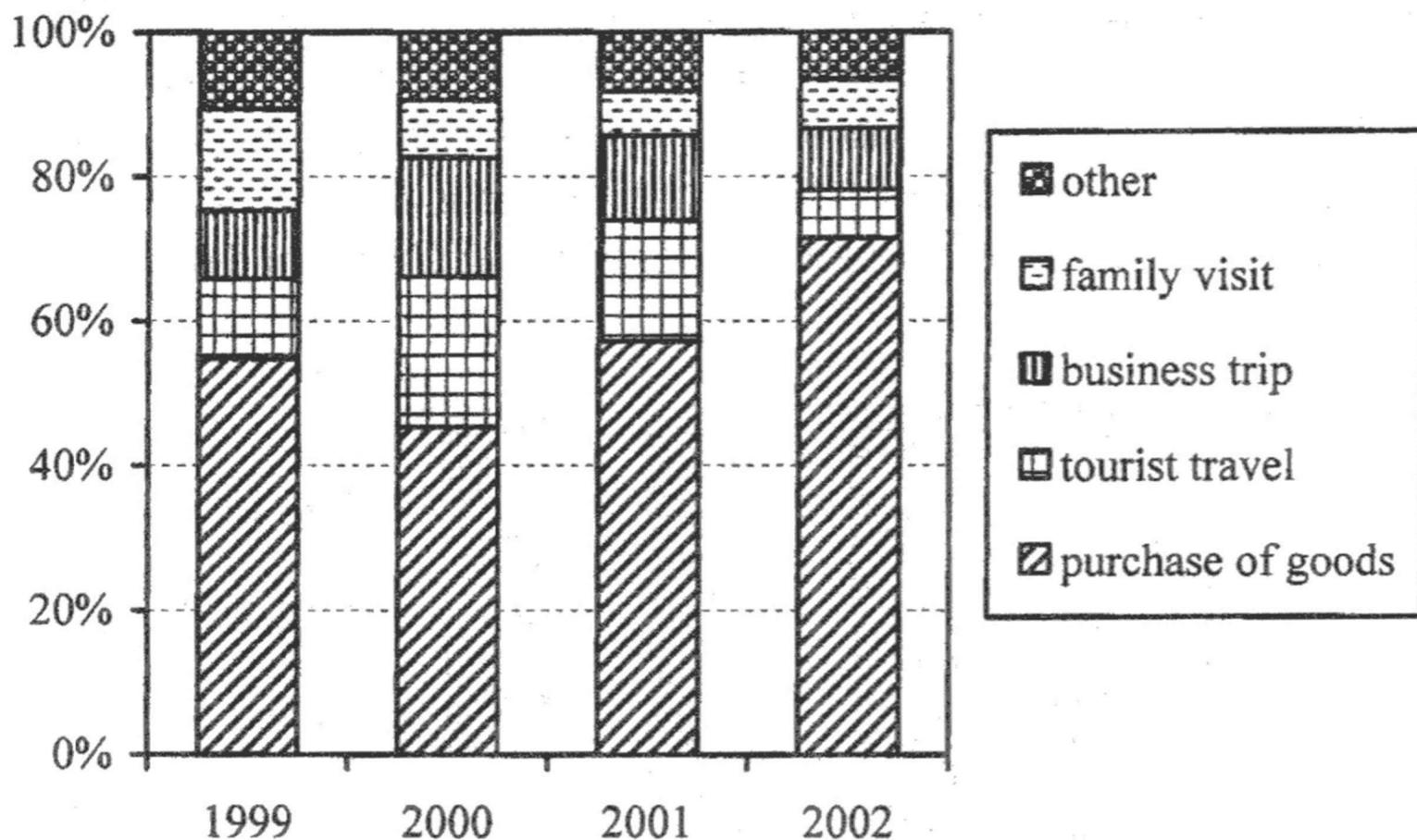


Figure 2. The purposes of car trips by foreigners coming to Poland through the Polish-Russian border

Source: prepared by the author on the basis of the Central Statistical Office materials.

In contrast to Poles going to the Kaliningrad Oblast, only about 40 % of foreigners travel to Polish towns to purchase goods within 20 km from the border. The majority (47 %) travel to towns and cities which are further in Poland (from 20 to 100 km).

The highest percentage of reasons declared by travellers for crossing the border (non- freight border traffic between Poland and the Kaliningrad Oblast) is unofficial trade, which has been caused by the poor economic situation. Although this generates criminal activity, such as smuggling, it is, for many cross-border inhabitants suffering from a high rate of unemployment, the main source of income. In the case of the region, the exchange affects significantly the living standards of the enclave's inhabitants, which is better than in other parts of Russia (E. Kulesza, 2003 quoting A. Chlopecki, G. Fedorov).

The trade character of the majority of trips in the analysed area causes the changes in the amount of traffic to be closely connected with any changes in the conditions of crossing the border (e.g. raising car

insurance fees, citizens' insurance) and in any changes in the country's legal regulations (e.g. the price of licence rates).

The barriers which hinder the development of different forms of trans-border co-operation e.g. tourism, depend not only on the small number of the border crossings, but also on difficulties in crossing them, connected with the efficiency and willingness of border services that are responsible for this.

The rise of new and the development of existing crossings at this border are connected with the problem of a lack of co-ordination between the Russian and Polish governments which is best illustrated by the case of the enlargement of the crossing in Gusiew by the Russians and the enlargement of the premises in Bezledy by the Poles, or the building of the Grzechotki-Mamonowo II crossing. Border crossings have been affected negatively by the Russian government's unwillingness to create border crossings for pedestrians and cyclists, which could be used by tourists.

The border crossings' capacities are influenced not only by their number and infrastructure, but also by the above-mentioned problems with serving the border traffic. The uncoordinated activities of customs officers, border guards, especially on the Russian side, the different treatment of Poles and Russians at the border, unofficial fees for shortening the length of waiting periods or forcing illegal fees by organized criminal groups are an important hindrance in the growth of trans-border co-operation.

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