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Russian dreams and Prussian ghosts: Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University and debates over historical memory and identity in Kaliningrad

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Abstract

This article will examine how the Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University and the Kaliningrad State Technical University have come to exert considerable influence over debates surrounding historical memory and identity in the Kaliningrad region. Under the direct control of the Russian Federation, the Baltic exclave of Kaliningrad is surrounded by member states of the European Union. While the region's universities have helped to strengthen links between Kaliningrad and institutions across the European Union, the way the students and staff interact with the Russian state reflects cultural tensions in Kaliningrad society. A detailed examination of the history and identity of Kaliningrad's universities can therefore provide deeper insights into the region's balancing act between Europe and Russia as well as the way universities can influence local debates over history and identity.

Keywords: Kaliningrad; university; Russia; Germany; historical memory

Though the end of the Cold War saw the withdrawal of the Soviet forces from Central Europe, one sliver of territory resolutely remained under Moscow's control. Part of the Russian Federation after the collapse of the USSR, the Baltic exclave of Kaliningrad was surrounded by states that would eventually join the European Union. Isolated from what its residents have come to call the Russian "mainland", Kaliningrad's cultural identity remains

ambiguous.¹ With local elites hoping to pursue economic opportunities that deeper integration with the European Union could provide, debates within Kaliningrad about the region's relationship its European neighbours have often been a source of tension with the central government in Moscow.²

As an intellectual space building links between Kaliningrad and educational institutions across the European Union, the Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University and the Kaliningrad State Technical University have become key actors in debates over historical memory and identity in the region. For the past thirty years debate within these higher education institutions and the interaction of their students and staff with the Russian state have reflected wider cultural tensions in this region. As a consequence, evolving interest in the region's Soviet and pre-Soviet history within these universities can both provide insights into Kaliningrad's balancing act between Europe and Russia as set out interesting perspectives on the broader role universities can play in reflecting as well as shaping debates over history and identity in regions that have experienced the collapse of an established political order.

For as Martin Klimke pointed out in his study of student protest in post-1945 Germany and the United States in the 1960s, universities have often become focal points for social change in societies experiencing a high degree of social pressure.³ With their development highly vulnerable to shifts in the political economy that may affect their financial position and institutional prestige, as Rosemary Deem has pointed out universities often struggle to resist pressures to reshape their curriculum to reflect the ideological agendas of social milieus that

¹Joel C. Moses, 'The Politics of Kaliningrad Oblast: A Borderland of the Russian Federation', *The Russian Review*, no. 63 (2004), 10.

²Christopher S. Browning/Pertti Joenniemi, 'Contending Discourses of Marginality: The Case of Kaliningrad', *Geopolitics* 9, no.3 (2004), 717.

³Martin Klimke, *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in the Global Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 23–24.

have achieved a dominant position within the power structure of their societies.⁴ Moreover, as Pierre Bourdieu has outlined the role universities play in shaping the ideological outlook and career paths of future members of elite government cadres has made oversight of higher education a key priority for state institutions working to ensure that students and alumnus remain committed to the established political order.⁵ As a consequence, universities themselves have become spaces in which conflicts within elites over historical narratives are regularly played out, as Joseph Moreau demonstrated in his study of political conflict over history textbooks in the United States.⁶ In their attempt to engage with and partially revive the pre-Soviet history of their region, high education institutions in Kaliningrad reflected these different dynamics shaping the interaction between universities and political institutions in times of rapid political and economic change.

On the political map of Europe, Kaliningrad appears as a curious anomaly. Bordered on the east by Lithuania, the South and West by Poland and facing Sweden across the Baltic Sea, as an oblast of the Russian Federation, Kaliningrad is entirely surrounded by member states of the European Union. Until 1945, this territory belonged to the German region of East Prussia, whose capital Königsberg was a major political and economic hub linked to cities across East and Central Europe. Though the region around the city was largely rural and dominated by the great estates of the Prussian aristocracy, Königsberg itself had some industry and a heavily used port that became the basis for a significant level of prosperity. By the First World War the city had expanded to become a cultural centre for the region with a concert hall, opera house and established educational institutions.⁷

⁴Rosemary Deem, 'Globalisation, New Managerialism, Academic Capitalism and Entrepreneurialism in Universities: is the local dimension still important?', *Comparative Education* 37, no. 1 (2001): 11.

⁵Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1998), 181.

⁶Joseph Moreau, *Schoolbook Nation: Conflicts over American History Textbooks from the Civil War to the Present* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 176.

⁷Stefanie Schuler-Springorum, 'Assimilation and Community Reconsidered: The Jewish Community in Königsberg, 1871-1914', *Jewish Social Studies* 5, no. 3 (1999): 105–106.

One of the institutions that provided Königsberg with a reputation that reached beyond East Prussia was the Albertus-University. Founded in 1544 by Duke Albrecht of Prussia, it rose to European prominence in the course of the eighteenth century. While Immanuel Kant acted as its rector in the 1780s, other key figures in the German intellectual history, including Herder, Fichte and Schiller, either studied or taught there. A key benefactor of the reform of the Prussian state in the early nineteenth century, the Albertus University was one of the first German universities to systematise the study of Botany, Mathematics and other sciences.⁸ As a prominent institution in a city that remained loyal to the Hohenzollern dynasty at times when Berlin seemed out of control, the Albertus University was also major recipient or patronage from the Prussian royal family. By the 1860s, an ambitious building programme around a central campus expanded its infrastructure, making the Albertus-University a prominent part of the urban landscape of Königsberg.⁹

By the early twentieth century the Albertus University had become an established part of the European academic scene as well as a space in which the senior nobility of Prussia could educate its sons those of wealthy mercantile families from East Prussia, Scandinavia and Russian-ruled cities on the Baltic coast. The university's student fencing fraternities, the Burschenschaften, connected alumnus across the Baltic region with one another and their alma mater. Even with the enormous damage suffered by East Prussia during the First World War, the Albertus University maintained these international links, working with universities in newly independent Baltic states and Polish universities despite territorial tensions between Germany and Poland.¹⁰

⁸Riccardo Pozzo, 'Aristotelismus und Eklektik in Königsberg', in *Die Universität Königsberg in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Hanspeter Marti/Manfred Komorowski (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2008), 176–177.

⁹Christian Tilitzki, *Die Albertus-Universität Königsberg: Ihre Geschichte von der Reichsgründung bis zum Untergang der Provinz Ostpreußen 1871 – 1945* (Bd 1), (Berlin: Akademie Verlag 2012), 34.

¹⁰Tilitzki, *Die Albertus-Universität Königsberg*, 391–392.

Yet the decline of the university long preceded its final destruction in the last months of the Second World War. With the rise of the National Socialist movement, liberal or Jewish members of faculty forced to flee to universities in Sweden or Finland. Over time, even conservative professors who remained loyal to the Prussian ideal began to chafe at the ideological restrictions of the National Socialist regime and often sought early retirement or careers elsewhere in Europe. By the late 1930s the university of Immanuel Kant had become an intellectual backwater. Despite attempts by the Hitler regime to turn it into a centre where academics could develop research designed to create new systems of rule for territories conquered during Wehrmacht offensives in Poland and the USSR, by the time Soviet soldiers crossed over into East Prussian territory in the winter of 1944 the university had largely stopped functioning.¹¹

Like all other institutions in East Prussia, the Albertus University ceased to exist as the entire German population either fled or was expelled by Soviet authorities in 1945. The region itself was divided between Poland and the USSR, with Soviet portion fatefully apportioned the Russian union republic rather than the Soviet successor Republics of the once independent Baltic states. Even before the first settlers were relocated from across the Soviet Union into the newly renamed city of Kaliningrad, Soviet troops systematically demolished most of its buildings including the campus of the Albertus University. This was in line with a reconstruction plan sanctioned by Stalin based on the architecture and planning requirements of Soviet model cities in Russia and Ukraine.¹²

¹¹Friedrich Richter, *450 Jahre Albertus-Universität zu Königsberg Preussen 1544-1944 - Berichte und Dokumentationen zu ihrer jüngsten Geschichte - Die 400-Jahrfeier vom Juli 1944* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1994), 8.

¹²Bert Hoppe, *Auf den Trümmern von Königsberg: Kaliningrad 1946 – 1970*, (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2000), 20–21.

In the short term, attempts by the Soviet government to ensure the near complete suppression of any German legacy from pre-1945 East Prussia in the newly reconstituted oblast of Kaliningrad seemed to be destined for success. With large parts of Kaliningrad deemed a military zone closed to foreigners under Stalin and Khrushchev, the new Soviet settlers in the city were discouraged from discussing the region's pre-1945 history. As a consequence, schools established during the period of reconstruction were based on a Soviet cultural framework, deliberately detached by central authorities from any possible continuity with the traditions of the region's pre-war institutions such as the Albertus University.¹³

The settler population itself largely was made up of former Red Army soldiers as well as rural and urban professionals that had been effectively press-ganged from across the Soviet Union into settling in still ruined towns and villages. While farmers or industrial workers from far-flung cities in the Soviet north or Siberia such as Murmansk and Norilsk volunteered with great enthusiasm, city dwellers from Ukraine sent to rebuild the city of Kaliningrad and staff its various institutions had to be coerced into remaining by the NKVD and police.¹⁴ Despite these initial pressures, by the late 1950s the population of the region had stabilised to the extent that reconstruction efforts made considerable progress. The increasing stability and self-confidence of the Soviet order in Kaliningrad also led to the foundation of educational institutions, with the development of a regional university and a separate technical university put in place by the late 1960s. One popular slogan set out by the regional Communist Party immediately after the war underscored efforts by Moscow to stabilise the region's identity around a Soviet cultural model:

¹³Stefan Berger, 'How to be Russian with a Difference? Kaliningrad and its German Past', *Geopolitics* 15, no. 2 (2010): 348.

¹⁴Yurii Kostyashov, *Секретная история Калининградской области. Очерки 1945-1956/The Secret History of Kaliningrad Oblast 1945-1956*, (Kaliningrad: Terra Baltica, 2009), 78.

Go with unquenchable hatred towards your enemy! It is your holy duty to... enter the cave of the beast and punish the fascist criminals! ¹⁵

As with the population of the region as a whole, the first generation of academics teaching in Kaliningrad's new higher education institutions were drawn from the rest of the USSR. This reflected an underlying structural problems with universities that were designed to train local loyal cadres for Soviet order who were intended to staff Kaliningrad's regional Communist Party and state institutions. With the region dotted with military installations and the state barring most foreigners were from entry during the late Cold War, many scholars only spent a few years at the universities there before moving back to more prestigious institutions in more influential cities. Similarly, though the number of native born Kaliningraders continued to grow the lack of substantial employment prospects beyond local farms, some industrial facilities and an overwhelming military presence meant that a large proportion of graduates tended to seek work elsewhere in the RSFSR or other major Soviet republics.¹⁶

As a consequence, though there was growing interest in the pre-Soviet history of the region among a small band of locally born intellectuals the academic culture of the region remained oriented towards the ideology and historical narratives of the Soviet state. Like other settler societies dominated by a strong military presence, Kaliningraders recreated much of the state culture of their society of origin in an environment unmediated by the presence of a strong indigenous presence. For such a regionally and culturally diverse group of settlers the key unifying factor remained the institutions and rituals of a shared Soviet experience.¹⁷ Though the emergence of a first native born generation of Kaliningraders fostered a greater sense of

¹⁵‘Идите с неутолимой ненавистью к своему врагу! Это ваша святая обязанность ... войти в пещеру зверя и наказать фашистских преступников!’ in Норре, *Auf den Trümmern von Königsberg*, 19.

¹⁶Ingmar Oldberg, ‘The emergence of a regional identity in the Kaliningrad oblast’, *Cooperation and Conflict* 35, no. 3 (2000): 272.

¹⁷Ibid, 273.

rootedness, the region's territorial and institutional integration in the USSR meant that links with Moscow and other key centres remained strong. As Kaliningrad chronicler Ilia Maximov pointed out this limited the extent to which the local population developed a sense of distinctiveness from the rest of the Russian Socialist Federal Republic or the USSR as a whole during the Brezhnev era:

This issue was not of interest during the Soviet time, mostly because of the ban [on open discussion of East Prussian history] but also because the population had with the settlement of the region little time to explore an alien culture that was associated with Fascism. The disinterest towards German culture can also be partly explained with the partial analphabetism of the first settlers.¹⁸

This regional dynamic only began to change once the reforms introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev began to radically alter the social structures of the USSR as a whole. As separatist sentiment swept the Baltic Republics that separated it from the RSFSR, Kaliningrad became increasingly cut off from the rest of the Soviet Union. At the same time, the collapse of Soviet state meant that the military institutions that had shaped Kaliningrad life since 1945 were suddenly less socially dominant. Moreover, the contraction of employment opportunities in what territorially isolated Kaliningraders were coming to call the Russian 'mainland' created a situation where by the mid-1990s there were far fewer incentives for graduates to leave the region for Moscow St Petersburg.¹⁹

¹⁸In der sowjetischen Zeit war dieses Thema nicht interessant; hauptsächlich wegen des Verbotes und auch weil die Bevölkerung in den ersten Jahren der Erschließung des Gebietes keine Zeit für die fremde Kultur hatte, die zudem mit dem Faschismus assoziiert wurde. Die Gleichgültigkeit gegen die deutsche Kultur kann man auch zum Teil über das Halbanalphabetentum der ersten Umsiedler erklären.“ Ilia Maximov, 'Der Kaliningrader: Wer ist er?', in *Auf den Spuren von Königsberg* (Frankfurt an der Oder: Viadrina Online, 2008), <https://homepage.univie.ac.at/philipp.ther/kaliningrad/kaliningrader.html>

¹⁹Pertti Joenniemi and Andrey Makarychev, 'Process of Border-Making and Border-Breaking – The Politics of Kaliningrad', *Working Papers Series in EU Border Conflicts Studies*, no. 7 (2004): 5.

Facing their own severe economic downturn exacerbated by the region's territorial position, local political and cultural elites were faced with a difficult set of choices. With the Yeltsin presidency mired in infighting and wars in the Caucasus, Kaliningrad remained a peripheral priority for the Russian state. Massive cuts in education spending affected higher education, with the universities losing some of the best staff and lack of building maintenance often undermining the ability of whole faculties to function. As both the military and industrial pillars of the region's economy fell apart, political leaders and academics who had once served the Communist Party of the Soviet Union more or less loyally searched for funding and trade opportunities that closer links with the European Union might generate.²⁰

At the same time, with the Soviet order that had once shaped the region's cultural frames of reference defunct, both elites and the wider population began to look for alternative historical and cultural frames through which to express a regional sense of identity increasingly distinct from a distant Russia Federation. This search for stability in a chaotic period of institutional collapse and social changes was summed up well in 1993 by Evgeny Popov, who had been appointed as the head of the city's architectural office at a time at which the Soviet regime was still dominant a decade before:

To resurrect the architectural face of the city we have to examine various ideas. But before I go into detail I would like to deal with a question that has long concerned our architects, namely the spatial redevelopment of the city centre. In particular this is about the empty spaces in the centre of the city. Its construction depends on those commissioning [projects]. For example this could become a business centre. Such a structure would, however, require a developed communications and road network. It could also be a cultural centre. Not only architects, it could also let artists fulfil their potential. Personally I would prefer the latter

²⁰Stefan Gänzle and Guido Müntel, 'Europeanization 'Beyond' Europe? EU Impact on Domestic Policies in the Russian Enclave of Kaliningrad', *Journal of Baltic Studies* 42, no. 1 (2011): 60.

variant. It would reflect the character of the urban layout of our city more. High rise buildings fit in badly with the medieval milieu of our city.²¹

Though interest in Kaliningrad's pre-Soviet history had already been building within the universities in the late 1960s, particularly in the university history department this activity had remained largely focused on the preservation of the remnants of Prussian architecture and other buildings and relics built under German rule.²² Such small scale activism that couched critiques of the Soviet present through an interest in a German past began to gain a degree of momentum over the course of the 1980s as a growing number of Kaliningrad born residents took interest in city beautification initiatives at a moment of state decay. Though not yet a direct challenge to Soviet ideology, initiatives such as the establishment of the *Deutsch-Russisches Haus* in 1993 or the restoration of the Lutheran Salzburg church in the town of Gusev (or Gumbinnen before 1945) represented a major shift in historical discourse in a region where discussion of the pre-1945 past had been a taboo only a decade before.²³ As the need for external investment became increasingly clear, even state officials provided some support to historical reconstruction efforts in an effort to explore possible routes to reviving the local economy.²⁴

²¹“Um das architektonische Antlitz der Stadt wiedererstehen zu lassen, muß man verschiedene Ideen prüfen. Doch bevor ich darauf eingehe, möchte ich eine Frage anschneiden, die seit langem unsere Architekten bewegt, und zwar die bauliche Gestaltung des Stadtzentrums. Es geht vor allem um den leeren Raum im Zentrum der Stadt. Seine Bebauung hängt von Auftraggebern ab. Das kann z.B. ein Geschäftszentrum sein. Solch eine Struktur setzt allerdings ein entwickeltes Fernmelde- und Straßennetz voraus. Es kann auch ein Kulturzentrum sein. Da könnten nicht nur Architekten, sondern auch Künstler ihr Potential zur Geltung kommen lassen. Ich für meinen Teil würde die zweite Variante vorziehen. sie entspricht dem Charakter der baulichen Gestaltung unserer Stadt mehr. Die Hochbauweise paßt zum mittelalterlichen Milieu der Stadt schlecht.” Ilia Popov, ‘Königsberg - Kaliningrad: Gestern, Heute, Morgen’, *Königsberger Express*, no. 5 (1993): 4.

²²Stefan Berger, ‘How to be Russian with a Difference? Kaliningrad and its German Past’, *Geopolitics* 15, no. 2 (2010): 349.

²³‘Assoziation „Deutsch-Russisches Haus“’, *Über Uns - Deutsch-Russisches Haus*, http://www.drh-k.ru/deu/page/uber_uns, date retrieved: 20 August 2016 and ‘Salzburger Anstalt Gumbinnen’, *Stiftung Salzburger Anstalt Gumbinnen*, <http://www.salzburger.homepage.t-online.de/Anstalt.htm>, date retrieved: 17 April 2016.

²⁴Olga Sezneva, ‘Architecture of Descent: Historical Reconstructions and the Politics of Belonging in Kaliningrad - the Former Königsberg’, *Journal of Urban History* 39, no. 4 (2012): 772.

With this growing willingness to open up debate about Kaliningrad's pre-Soviet history, the conditions for a full blown process of reconciliation with potentially generous German partners were in place by the time the USSR ceased to exist in December 1991. With the removal of state travel restriction, better off Kaliningraders able to get visas at newly opened consulates were able to cross into Poland and even Germany with increasing frequency. Such regular access along with the chaotic and crime ridden politics of the exclave fuelled cross-border smuggling, causing concern among Polish law enforcement agencies worried that such instability that would hold up Poland's accession to the EU. Yet it also increased daily interactions between Kaliningraders, Germans and Poles at a time at which the region's population had significantly less contact with everyday life in the rest of Russia.²⁵

As important to the region's economy was the surge of interest among Germans of East Prussian origin as well as the German state in the region. That often very right wing writers for the *Ostpreußenblatt*, the newspaper of the East Prussian community, would make comments such as "Russian hospitality is unmatched" in 1993 shows how many former expellees wanted to find a way of renewing some contact with their former homeland.²⁶ By the mid-1990s, German tourism as well as more limited inward investment from German individuals and businesses helped stabilise the region's economy. The opening of German, Polish and Lithuanian consulates as well as cultural institutes and Catholic and Lutheran churches marked the beginning of a period in which the EU and states neighbouring Kaliningrad developed ambitious plans to foster economic initiatives through which the exclave could act as a bridge to help Russia's wider integration into Western institutions. The exclave's unique geostrategic position and the great interest of Germans and Poles of East

²⁵Agnieszka Hreczuk, 'Polish-Russian Relations and Kaliningrad', in *Russian Participation in Baltic Sea Region-Building: A Case Study of Kaliningrad*, ed. Paul Holtom/Fabrizio Tassinari (Gdansk: BaltSeaNet, 2002), 70.

²⁶Helmut Spies, 'Ein Erinnerungsfoto aus Ribbenischken Wiedersehen mit der Heimat nac dreiundvierzi g Jahren', *Das Ostpreußenblatt*, no. 10 (1993): 13.

Prussian origin helped turn the region's pre-Soviet history from an ideologically embarrassing relic to be avoided into a major economic asset for the political and cultural elites of the region.²⁷

This wider political and economic context was crucial to driving a cultural re-engagement with the legacies of German East Prussia in Kaliningrad that went far beyond the small circle of intellectual and eccentrics that had explored the region's history as an act of revolt in the 1970s and 1980s. In an environment where all the certainties of Soviet society had collapsed, the economic opportunities as well as the yearning for a new sense of civic identity among large segments of the population created the basis for a re-engagement with the German past. Helped with German state and charitable funding, state and private initiatives such as *Stiftung Königsberg* and the *Marga und Kurt Möllgaard Stiftung* worked to restore lost relics of East Prussian architecture.²⁸ Though rebuilding of the old Lutheran cathedral and parts of the pre-1945 inner city along the harbor attracted the most attention, these efforts were emulated in smaller towns across the region trying to use identification with a romanticized version of Prussian history to attract investors from both the EU and Russia.

In such a conducive environment, in Kaliningrad's two universities members of faculty with a particular interest in East Prussian legacies had the space to build a lasting institutional framework for engagement with Kaliningrad's pre-Soviet past. These efforts did encounter considerable suspicion from politicians and education officials in Moscow. The statement by Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev in 1994 that "Russia needs to maintain an imposing presence in order to avoid being squeezed out of the region" reflected widespread worries within the central Russian state that greater contact between the local population and

²⁷Raymond A. Smith, 'The Kaliningrad Region: Applications of the Civic and Ethnic Models of Nationhood', *Journal of Baltic Studies* 24, no. 3 (2007): 236.

²⁸Kirsten Salein, *Das Leben ist Keine Himbeere: Perspektiven Jugendlicher in Kaliningrad* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2005), 103.

neighbouring European states may be the first step towards the emergence of Kaliningrad separatism.²⁹ Yet as the ability of education officials in Moscow to control the actions of academic administrators in far-flung outposts diminished, the two main universities in the exclave were able to provide the space for students and academics to explore regional history without interference. With the politics of the region rife with corruption and organised crime, local authorities were also too pre-occupied with personal survival to block such engagement with German and Polish partners.³⁰

By the mid-1990s an embrace of the pre-Soviet past came to reshape almost every academic department in the university. From architecture and urban planning to law and politics, a whole range of faculties focused on local history as well as wider Polish, German and European legal frameworks that were reshaping the region around the exclave. Courses with titles such as *Immanuel Kant's Philosophy and Modernity* or *European Union Law* played as prominent a role as Russia-oriented subject matter.³¹ Though ill-prepared for a post-Soviet order, university administrators quickly understood that this embrace of the region's German past could also attract significant research grants and support funding from German and Polish state institutions and academic foundations. In a context where educational institutions were being starved for funding by a financially strapped state, focusing on links with German and Polish universities and funding bodies that could provide crucial training and grants was of existential importance for local higher education institutions that were coming under heavy pressure.³²

²⁹Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott, *Russia and the New States of Eurasia: The Politics of Upheaval* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 237.

³⁰Mark Galeotti, 'Kaliningrad: A Fortress without a State', *IBRU Boundary and Security Bulletin* (1993): p. 57.

³¹'Course Guide', *Department for Study Programmes and Education Policy* (Kaliningrad State University, 2002).

³²Stefan Gänzle, Stefan Meister and Conrad King, 'The Bologna Process and Its Impact on Higher Education at Russia's Margins: The Case of Kaliningrad', *Higher Education* 57, no. 4 (2009): 537.

By 1999 the outlines of a new Kaliningrad political and cultural order was clearly emerging. While late Soviet elites had managed to survive in the new order, the promotion of a distinctive Kaliningrad identity based on its territorial isolation from Russia and an East Prussian historical legacy provided them with a new means through which to legitimise their position by balancing political loyalty to Moscow with economic and cultural cooperation with Germany and Poland.³³ For the region's intellectual elite, deeper engagement with the region's history and the partial reconstruction of physical landmarks of its German past provided the basis of access to German and EU cultural institutions to a more extensive scale than was possible on the Russian "mainland". Disoriented by rapid change, a rediscovery of the region's post-1945 settler experience and pre-1945 German legacy among the wider public provided a regional identity narrative that blended Soviet and Prussian elements to build a sense of cosmopolitan distinctiveness from Moscow without necessarily representing a full break from the Russia cultural world. This sense that in Kaliningrad there was no contradiction between asserting an identity that was both European as well as Russian is in itself reflected in the Immanuel Kant University's mission statement that was first released in 2005:

The main symbols of the University, shown in its logo, are a sea wave and a bridge. The Kaliningrad region is developing as one of Russia's zones of integration into the European sociocultural space. The region bridges economy, politics, culture, education and science of Russia and the European Union. The rising sea wave symbolises the coastal location of the University, its progress and sustainable development.

The wave creates the image of university life as a vast space of knowledge and constant striving for sociocultural understanding in the Baltic Sea region - one of the most successful

³³Yann Richard, 'The Russian Exclave of Kaliningrad: Challenges and Limits of its Integration in the Baltic Region', *Cybergeo: European Journal of Geography*, no. 719 (2015): 7.

macroregions in the world, which brings together countries with the highest global competitiveness ranking. A symbol of connection and integration, the bridge represents increasing academic mobility and promotion of Russian higher education and innovative technologies abroad, offering the benefits of both European and Russian academic traditions.

The bridge also shows a historical tie between the once-famous Albertina University and the University of today.³⁴

Kaliningrad universities therefore focused on the region's history with the active cooperation of the regional government and built links with colleagues in Germany, Poland and Lithuania as an instrumental part of this process of regional identity construction. The intensification of such teaching and research activities built on discursive engagement with three key themes that were intended to provide the basis for a European future that blended German historical legacies with contemporary Russian cultural discourses.

The first was the physical reconstruction of architectural remnants of the German past. As a consequence Kaliningrad's educational institutions fostered particular specialisms in architecture, archaeology, urban planning and urban history as private and state demand rose for graduates with experience in these disciplines. Urban reconstruction projects, which began with the city of Kaliningrad and then spread to smaller towns such as Baltiysk, restored many surviving buildings in consultation with academics at both universities without fundamentally altering the pre-existing Soviet urban layout. The economic strategy underpinning these reconstruction programmes was bluntly explained by the region's governor Georgi Boos in 2004:

³⁴'Symbols', *Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University*, <https://eng.kantiana.ru/about/symbols/>, date retrieved: 9 April 2016.

The better quality of life that people have, the less they want cataclysms or a political crisis.

It's an axiom of Marx: poverty is the cause of instability. The cause of stability is wealth.³⁵

With some support from German funding grants as well as Russian state banks, these projects were intended to attract tourists to the region by celebrating its past. In the process they bound academic staff interested in reconstruction deeply into established state structures. Yet they also fostered an interest in German artefacts and architectural styles among the elite and an emerging middle class, creating newly built environments that resembled those in much of Central Europe rather than the rest of Russia.³⁶

The second area of focus for Kaliningrad's universities was teaching and research relating to the culture and history of East Prussia. While the school curriculum remained heavily regulated by the central Russian state, courses in universities could examine German history and cultural traditions connected to the region more freely.³⁷ Expanded access to German language teaching and the establishment of local Lutheran parishes fostered by the German consulate and the Goethe Institut opened up access to European and German economic and educational opportunities. Yet within the university and schools curricula the particular interactions of Russian thinkers, politicians and soldiers with East Prussia were also emphasized on the initiative of teaching staff but with the active support of the regional administration in order to retain a sense of connection with the Russian cultural world. Professors Eduard Demidenko and Vladimir Krivosheev reflect this belief among many local academics in finding a balance between German and Russian elements in assessing a student survey on teaching:

³⁵Andrew Rettman, 'Kaliningrad enclave to pilot EU-Russia integration, Moscow says', *EuObserver*, 3 July 2006.

³⁶Sezneva, 'Architecture of Descent', 779.

³⁷Ingmar Oldberg, 'Contributing to Identity-Building in the Kaliningrad Oblast', in *The Kaliningrad Challenge: Options and Recommendations*, ed. Hanne-Margret Birckenbach and Christian Wellmann (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2003), 238.

Although the interest to the region's history seems to be considerable and there is a course of "History of Russian West" taught in secondary school, the survey revealed insufficient knowledge of facts and events of the past. It is well known that from 1758 until 1762 during the Seven Years' war Eastern Prussia was actually a part of the Russian Empire. In German historiography, this period is referred to as "the first Russian period."³⁸

In this context, a particular focus within local schools and university humanities departments on Immanuel Kant, who was presented as founding figure of European as well as Russian philosophy helped provide a framework through which Kaliningrad's German and Soviet histories could be balanced. Whereas Lenin remained the focus of the region's Soviet identity discourse before 1989, Immanuel Kant took this place after 1991 to become a symbol of a Kaliningrad identity that blended European and Russian identities.³⁹

The final component embedded within universities was an engagement with the politics and law of Germany, Poland and the European Union that placed the development of a Russian Kaliningrad as part of a wider project of contemporary European integration. With the integration of Poland into the European Union and Germany's dominant economic role in the Baltic region the legal framework of the states surrounding Kaliningrad oblast began to shape its socio-political development. Through the creation of a Special Economic Zone for the region the Putin administration went on to ensure that a highly corrupt Kaliningrad elite only pursued European economic opportunities in a manner that was coordinated by Moscow.⁴⁰ For local politicians and businessmen access to specialist knowledge in European affairs

³⁸Eduard S. Demidenko and Vladimir V. Krivosheev, 'The Region and Regional Problems through the Eyes of Young Students: Social Historical Memory', *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 6, no. 6 (2015): 162.

³⁹Valery Galtsov, 'The Problems of People's Identification in the Kaliningrad Region', *Anthropological Journal on European Cultures* 5, no. 2, (1996): 92.

⁴⁰Timur Gareeva, 'The special economic zone in the Kaliningrad region: development tool or institutional trap?', *Baltic Journal of Economics* 13, no. 2, (2014): 127.

became economically crucial to a far greater extent than any other Russian region. The foundation of an Institute in European Studies in Kaliningrad State Technical University as well as significant levels of regular cooperation between academics in Kaliningrad and universities such as Viadrina in Frankfurt an der Oder and Wuppertal in Germany, Gdansk University of Technology in Poland or Vilnius University in Lithuania played a crucial role in drawing the exclave into a whole range of EU led institutional and economic projects.⁴¹ Bolstered through student exchanges, such educational and institutional interaction between Kaliningrad and its neighbours helped embed it in the European integration process to an extent far beyond any other Russian region in the first decade of Vladimir Putin's rule.

In each of these three areas both universities attained a role in regional development that went beyond that of regular higher education institutions in other parts of the Russian Federation. As a key point of contact with political elites in neighbouring states, academics helped provide the basis for wider projects of economic and political development such as the reconstruction of parts of historical Königsberg. As part of a wider project of ambiguous regional identity building the universities also became a focal point for those elements within the elite and parts of the population that came to see themselves as part of a culturally distinct part of both the Russian as well as the European cultural worlds. Finally, as an increasingly prominent interest group in itself, the university community could promote its instrumental role in the region's relationship with the European integration project to lobby for greater access to funds, higher student numbers and institutional autonomy. With the Polish, German and Lithuanian governments particularly interested in promoting prosperity and stability in such a strategically important region, by the late 1990s and early 2000s higher education institutions along with a range of businesses and civil society institutions were increasingly

⁴¹'Europastudien – 2010/2011', *Europainstitut Klaus Mehnert Kaliningrad – Kaliningrader Staatliche Technische Universität Kaliningrad*, 2009, 1.

well integrated in wider European research and economic structures overseen by the European Union.⁴²

Though fringe elements within the Russian Far Right and the security services concerned about potential separatist tendencies in Kaliningrad viewed these endeavours with some considerable suspicion, the economic reformers that helped shape policy during Vladimir Putin's first term in office emphasized strong business and educational ties with European states. In this context, for the first decade of Vladimir Putin's presidency local Kaliningrad intellectual and business leaders had the full support of the Russian federal authorities in efforts to build institutional relationships with European partners. During his visit in 2005 for the city's 750th anniversary celebrations, Vladimir Putin personally backed these efforts in stating that:

Kaliningrad represents Russia's westernmost border and its proximity to European countries and extensive infrastructure will unquestionably help the region's development... Russia will always give Kaliningrad's development the attention it requires and will make use of its financial, legal and administrative possibilities for this purpose.⁴³

With such state support universities had the space to emphasise Kaliningrad's East Prussian past and adopt the legacy of the pre-war Königsberg universities as their own. This matched the completion of a cityscape whose architecture came to resemble that of East German and Polish cities rather than the urban landscapes common in Russia. This effort at reconstructing physical and institutional continuities with aspects of East Prussia's historical legacy culminated with the lavish celebration of the city's 750 year anniversary in 2005 attended by

⁴²Stefan Gänzle, Stefan Meister and Conrad King, 'The Bologna Process and Its Impact on Higher Education at Russia's Margins: The Case of Kaliningrad', *Higher Education* 57, no. 4 (2009): 541.

⁴³'President Vladimir Putin congratulated the residents of Kaliningrad on the 750th anniversary of the city's founding', *President of Russia*, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/33675>, 2 July 2005, date retrieved: 17 August 2016.

Gerhard Schröder and Vladimir Putin.⁴⁴ In the same year Kaliningrad University was renamed Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University, one of only twelve fully Federal universities in Russia. This both increased the university's prestige and funding within the Russian higher education system and emphasized the region's particular Baltic European identity: reflecting the extent to which central authorities in Moscow felt willing to accept Kaliningrad's social and cultural distinctiveness within the Russian Federation.⁴⁵

Though not directly related to the development of the university itself, the final step towards reshaping the Kaliningrad's relationship with the EU would also help to strengthen its own internal emphasis on a connection with a German past and a European present. After replacing Vladimir Putin in the presidency in 2008, Dmitry Medvedev made several statements emphasizing Kaliningrad potential as a showcase to Europe for the emergence of a truly modern Russia. As part of this initiative, Medvedev gave his full support to negotiations with the EU to ease visa restrictions for the region's residents.⁴⁶ By 2010 Kaliningraders gained access to a special visa regime, allowing them free day access to neighbouring Polish oblasts and easing the process it took for Kaliningraders to gain work and tourist visas across the Schengen Area.⁴⁷ These further steps to integration with European Union legal frameworks also benefited the university, with easier travel back and forth into neighbouring states making it relatively straightforward for academics and researchers to regularly collaborate with colleagues in Poland, Lithuania and Germany.

⁴⁴Stefan Berger/Paul Holtom, 'Locating Kaliningrad and Königsberg in Russian and German Collective Identity: Discourses and Political Symbolism in the 750th Anniversary Celebrations of 2005', *Journal of Baltic Studies* 39, no. 1 (2008): 22.

⁴⁵Gänzle/Meister/King, 'The Bologna Process', p. 540.

⁴⁶Andrew Rettman, 'Visas and trade to dominate 'yet another' EU-Russia summit', *EUObserver*, 13 December 2011.

⁴⁷Stanislaw Domaniewski and Dominika Studzińska. 'The Small Border Traffic Zone between Poland and Kaliningrad Region (Russia): The Impact of a Local Visa-Free Border Regime', *Geopolitics* 21, no. 3 (2016): 4.

The centerpiece of this intensifying engagement between the Kaliningrad region and neighbouring member states of the European Union was the foundation of the Kaliningrad Technical University's Klaus Mehnert Centre for European Studies. Established in 2005 as a small department focusing on European politics and law with financial assistance from the Robert Bosch Foundation, it attracted students interested in opportunities provided through Erasmus exchange agreements with universities across the European Union.⁴⁸ In 2009 it even gave the SPD Speaker of the European Parliament Martin Schulz an honorary doctorate, at a ceremony at which former Chancellor Gerhard Schröder was also a speaker. The extent to which senior German politicians and foundations were willing to get involved even with relatively such minor academic initiatives underscored how far German institutions were willing to go to assist Kaliningrad Oblast's further integration into a European institutional framework.⁴⁹ As institutions that symbolized a growing engagement particularly of young Kaliningraders with the European states surrounding their region, the universities continued to play a central role in projects promoting cooperation and exchange.

The historical legacy of East Prussia was instrumentalised in several distinct ways in this period of intensifying cooperation between the EU and Russia. On a local level, Kaliningrad elites trying to reconcile clashing identity narratives and economic interests by focusing on particular aspects of the East Prussian legacy that did not involve conflict with Russia. In this context, the celebration of the memory of Immanuel Kant proved an ideal framework for a revival of aspects of the East Prussian past without incurring fears of Kaliningrad separatism in Moscow. Rather than engaging with aspects of a German past associated with military hostility to Russia such as the role of the Teutonic Knights or the military exploits of the Prussian monarchy, the intellectual cosmopolitanism Immanuel Kant represented as well as his influence on Russian philosophers could enable academic elites to construct a sense of

⁴⁸Benjamin Haerdle, 'Europäisch Denken Lernen', *Wirtschaft und Wissenschaft – Magazin*, no. 2 (2007): 22.

⁴⁹'Martin Schulz ist Ehrendoktor in Kaliningrad', *Aachener Zeitung*, 18 May 2009.

historical continuity between a pre-1945 East Prussia and a post-1945 Kaliningrad that could act as bridges between Moscow and wider Europe. A 2013 speech by the university rector to the DAAD is a typical example of this form of ideological syncretism:

Our University began its life as Kaliningrad State Pedagogical Institute in 1947. In 1966, it was granted the university status; in 2005 the University was renamed Immanuel Kant Federal University of Russia by a decree of the Government of the Russian Federation. Being an innovative institution, Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University strives to maintain and spread academic and research traditions of its predecessor – the Albertina University of Königsberg. The Albertina, one of the oldest universities in Europe, had a 460-year history. I. Kant, J. Hamann, J. Herder, F.W. Bessel, K. Jacobi, F. Linderman, A. Gurvits, D. Hilbert and H. Helmholtz taught at the Albertina University. K. Donelaitis, the founder of Lithuanian literature, delivered lectures on theology there. E.T.A. Hoffman, the famous writer and composer, attended lectures in philosophy at Albertina. The University's greatest alumnus is Immanuel Kant, the world famous philosopher, who was a Russian citizen for some time. The name of I. Kant forever tied the city of Königsberg and the Albertina University with the spiritual heritage of humankind and the history of the region.⁵⁰

Moreover, Kant's global prominence as a philosopher could also allow Kaliningrad intellectual and economic elites to present their region as a place of world importance to bolster external tourism and investment. In a similar fashion, the reconstruction of the historical port of Königsberg in which the university's architecture and history departments played a crucial role fostered a historical narrative in which the region was part of a Baltic world in which Russia and Europe played an equal part.⁵¹ For Kaliningrad elites and the wider population, the celebration of Immanuel Kant therefore became a key symbol of a regional

⁵⁰'Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University', *VII International Youth Summer School «Russia & EU: Legal and Political Issues of International Cooperation» Kaliningrad, Russia 22 July – 9 August 2013*, Kaliningrad, 2013, 2.

⁵¹Sezneva, 'Architecture of Descent', 774.

identity in which Russian and German cultural elements could interact in a positive manner rather than becoming a source of political conflict.

References to Kant went beyond references to his philosophical work in promotional literature for the region. Near the front entrance in buildings that had once housed the pre-1945 Albertinum a statue of Kant was put up as a central symbol of the region's pre-1945 as well as its post-1945 identity. Despite an emphasis on restoration of Russian national sovereignty that became increasingly pervasive in national state institutions during the Putin presidency, mayors, oblast governors or other city officials were willing to support and be seen to be engaged with efforts that emphasised and celebrated aspects of the East Prussian historical legacy that demonstrated how their region in the past and present were part of a wider European cultural community.⁵² Through this particular emphasis on the role of the university and other cultural institutions in framing the Kaliningrad region's identity a local political elite vulnerable to Moscow's interventionism was willing to portray the region as both European as well as Russian in a way that did not indicate any contradictions between both social environments.

In contrast to the efforts of the university and the local government, during the 750 year anniversary celebrations the military, Federal culture ministry and national volunteer organizations sponsored public spectacles that placed the region within the confines of a Russian national narrative. Veterans associations and the army financed re-enactments of the Second World War conquest of Königsberg or Eylau during the Napoleonic Wars that were pivotal to Russian history, while the city government took pains to emphasise the pivotal role

⁵²Mariusz Czepczyński/Michał Czepczyński, 'Heritage resurrection: German Heritage in the Southern Baltic Cities', in Elizabeth Auclair/Graham Fairclough, *Theory and Practice in Heritage and Sustainability: Between Past and Future*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 143.

the region played during these key moments in Russian history.⁵³ While the region's political and cultural elite emphasized Immanuel Kant's cosmopolitanism and old Baltic trading links, a central ceremony during the anniversary celebrations focused on a re-enactment of the eighteenth century arrival of Peter the Great in the city, implying that it had always been connected to Russian imperial expansion. During these same ceremonies a new Russian Orthodox cathedral was opened, set in deliberate contrast to the attempts by the city government and German foundations to fund the restoration of the old pre-war Lutheran Cathedral.⁵⁴

As the Putin government worked to concentrate power in the hands of the presidency and limit the autonomy of regional governments the space for local elites in Kaliningrad to strengthen links with their European neighbours became more constricted. Despite claims of political liberalization under Putin's temporary successor Dmitry Medvedev, Russian security services fostered networks of nationalist and neo-Soviet organizations in the region to counter what they considered to be potential separatist tendencies. By 2008, once obscure Cossack groups enjoyed funding from the Kaliningrad state culture department in a region whose pre-1945 history and post-1945 population had little direct contact with Cossack traditions.⁵⁵ Concerned that the bulk of the region's population had repeatedly visited Europe while only a minority had visited "mainland" Russia more than once, federal authorities also initiated a programme of state grants for school visits to Moscow and St Petersburg.⁵⁶ In the run up to local elections the security services moved to eliminate the Baltic Republican Party and other movements that supported a limited degree of autonomy and replace them with candidates

⁵³ 'Историческая справка', *Город для Каждого*, 2005, <http://www.klgd.ru/city/history/ist750.php>, Date retrieved, 14 August 2016.

⁵⁴ Berger/Holtom, 'Locating Kaliningrad and Königsberg in Russian and German Collective Identity', 23.

⁵⁵ 'Правительство одобрило проект закона «О казачестве в Калининградской области»', *Правительство Калининградской области*, 20 January 2015, <http://gov39.ru/news/101/78506/>, Date retrieved: 11 December 2015.

⁵⁶ Olesya Gerasimenko, "'Будет бедно, но чисто и красиво, как в Белоруссии'", *Kommersant-Vlast*, 25 September 2012.

less willing to make decisions on their own initiative. Under such pressure from Moscow, by 2013 local politicians began to distance themselves from the previous decade's effort to engage with the region's history, instead focusing on a revival of nostalgia for the supposed military greatness of Soviet society.⁵⁷

These step by step moves to reimpose central control over the region were not entirely successful. Having eliminated gubernatorial elections in 2005, the Putin administration imposed an outsider to the region in the person of Georgy Boos as governor. This proved an unfortunate choice, as Boos's attempts to take control of various local forms of corrupt state revenue sharing pushed local elites too far and offended a wider population unwilling to pay additional fees to finance increases in institutional graft. These tensions culminated in a wave of protests that forced the removal of the governor and his replacement in 2010 by Nikolai Tsukanov, a locally born politician who balanced support from Kaliningrad powerbrokers with demonstrations of loyalty to President Putin.⁵⁸ As part of a process to mollify local discontent, further state financial grants were disbursed to the local university and historical reconstruction efforts. At the same time, the Russian Ministry of Interior secured partial access to the Schengen area for Kaliningrad residents with the EU Commission and confirmed the continuation of the Special Economic Zone framework for a further five years.⁵⁹

As a consequence, while failed protests in Moscow against the return of Vladimir Putin to the presidency in 2011 led to increased repression, the initial impact of this conservative turn in Kaliningrad was more limited. Though Governor Tsukanov was heavily involved in highly

⁵⁷Jadwiga Rogoża, Agata Wierzbowska-Miazga and Iwona Wiśniewska, *A Captive Island Kaliningrad Between Moscow and the EU*, *OSW Studies*, no. 41 (2012): 30.

⁵⁸Matthew Luxmoore, 'Russian Exclave Sandwiched Between Moscow and the West', *Al Jazeera America*, 12 July 2015.

⁵⁹Stanislaw Domaniewski/Dominika Studzińska, 'The Small Border Traffic Zone between Poland and Kaliningrad Region (Russia): The Impact of a Local Visa-Free Border Regime', *Geopolitics* 21, no. 3 (2016): 539.

dubious business dealings he remained unwavering in his loyalty to the Putin government. Yet as a locally rooted political figure, he also demonstrated commitment to the expansion of the university as well as the continued restoration and beautification of the historic quarters of Kaliningrad and other towns in the region. For all the pressure from Moscow on other aspects of Kaliningrad's relationship with the European Union, the university's role as a symbol of the region's prosperity and connectedness with the wider world largely remained unscathed.⁶⁰

Yet even this rearguard action to preserve the political, economic and cultural particularities Kaliningrad had come to enjoy within the Russian political system could not withstand the pressures unleashed by the Russian army's occupation of Crimea and escalation against the Ukrainian state in the Donbas region. While initial EU sanctions in response to the shooting down of the Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 over East Ukraine and the invasion of Crimea did not directly affect Kaliningrad, the counter-sanctions set by the Kremlin limiting exports of agricultural goods from the EU marked the first step towards the unraveling of the region's special relationship with its German, Lithuanian and Polish neighbours.⁶¹ A succession of military exercises that were seen as provocative by the Polish government along with restrictions on the travel of police and judicial officials set a tone that disrupted cooperation between the region's institutions and their EU counterparts. The cancellation of Kaliningrad's privileges as a Special Economic Zone on 1 April 2016 effectively crippled the basis for business collaboration between the region and European Union countries overnight, while the replacement of Nikolai Tsukanov as governor by an former member of the Russian security services with no previous connections to Kaliningrad in August 2016 indicated a systematic attempt to limit the power of local elites.⁶²

⁶⁰Kathrin Hille, 'Putin appeals to nationalist support as economy wobbles', *Financial Times*, 26 July 2015.

⁶¹Lidia Kelly, 'Isolated Russian outpost withers under confrontation with West', *Reuters*, 7 September 2016.

⁶²Alexander Zapadov 'Пограничные барьеры', *Калининградская правда*, 3 August 2016.

In this increasingly repressive environment, the basis for academic and cultural collaboration between Kaliningrad's universities and European partners was systematically undermined. Prominent Moscow commentators began openly speaking over concerns of German-backed separatism in Kaliningrad. This statement in 2014 by the editorial board of the influential and extreme nationalist *Zavtra* magazine was a characteristic example of such paranoia:

Experts do not exclude the possibility that events similar to those in Kyiv could take place in Kaliningrad. According to them, we must clearly understand that is another question. If the West wants to take revenge for Crimea, it is likely that the object of this will be the Kaliningrad region, cutting it off from the main part of Russia.⁶³

In such a febrile political environment, projects as the Klaus Mehnert European Institute or partnerships with prominent German universities were either shut down or wound back to a minimum. Often these actions were taken without any public announcement, as local German blogger Uwe Erich Niemeier noted to his dismay:

And the Russian side? Why doesn't it publicise the closure? Are the Russians silent because they do not want a worsening of the situation between Germany and Russia? But the closure of a German education institution is a worsening of the situation and when it is done without a justification, perhaps the same will happen as happened with the „Black List“ a few days ago... My god, how much is now being destroyed that was built through decades of meticulous and sometimes also difficult work.⁶⁴

⁶³‘В Калининград Едут Активисты Майдана’, *Завтра*, 4 July 2014: ‘Эксперты не исключают развития событий в Калининграде по аналогии с Киевом. По их мнению, надо четко понимать, что вопрос в другом. Если Запад захочет взять реванш за Крым, то, вероятно, объектом для этого станет Калининградская область, оторванная от основной части России.’

⁶⁴‘Schliesst Russland Deutsche Bildungseinrichtung in Kaliningrad?’, *Kaliningrad-Domizil*, <http://kaliningrad-domizil.ru/portal/information/-mit-deutschem-akzent-/schliet-russland-deutsche-bildungseinrichtung-in-kaliningrad/>, 8 June 2015, Date retrieved: 11 December 2015, ‘Und die russische Seite? Warum macht die die Schließung nicht publik? Schweigen die Russen weil sie keine Zuspitzung der Situation zwischen Russland und Deutschland wollen? Aber die Schließung der deutschen Bildungseinrichtung ist eine Zuspitzung der Situation

Teaching of and public engagement with the region's German history has now once again come under the scrutiny of the security services, leading academics to move to positions in German universities or shift to less fraught research topics. In a region where for twenty-five years much of the population and local elites fostered an environment in which it was considered possible to be consider oneself both a good European as well as a good Russian, sudden shifts in the political outlook of the top echelons of government in Moscow are forcing individuals and institutions to choose between these two forms of identity.⁶⁵

It is therefore an open question as to whether cultural and political elites in Kaliningrad are still in a position to pursue an identity narrative at increasing variance to Eurasianist ideological goals popular with the circle around Vladimir Putin that portray Russia as a civilization separate from Europe.⁶⁶ At a moment when meetings run by academics to discuss European culture such as the literature of Kafka and Orwell come under attack by pseudo-Cossacks who receive state funding, the space to engage with an identity narrative that reconciles a society built by Soviet settlers with the long German history of the region looks increasingly bleak.⁶⁷ Though Moscow may succeed in eroding any sense of cultural distinctiveness in the region, it is equally possible that a particular regional sensibility built around regular contact with the region's neighbours and engagement with the region's diverse past may be difficult to eradicate. If that is that case, attempts by the Putin administration to impose political and cultural uniformity could become counter-productive, entrenching

und wenn sie ohne Begründung erfolgt, passiert vielleicht dasselbe, wie es mit der „Schwarzen Liste“ vor wenigen Tagen passiert ist... Mein Gott, wieviel wird jetzt kaputtgemacht, was in Jahrzehnten in fleißiger, manchmal auch mühseliger Arbeit aufgebaut wurde.'

⁶⁵Linas Jegelevicius, 'Kaliningrad Residents Start to Believe their Fridges Rather than the TV', *BNE Intellinews*, 7 March 2016.

⁶⁶Alexander Lukin, 'What the Kremlin is Thinking: Putin's Vision for Eurasia', *Foreign Affairs*, no. 93 (2014): 92.

⁶⁷'В Калининградской области неизвестные атаковали форум Кафки и Оруэлла', *Yodnews*, 3 October 2015, <http://yodnews.ru/2015/10/03/forum/?nomr=1>, Date retrieved: 11 December 2015.

exactly the sense of distinctiveness within the Kaliningrad region that the Russian central government fears might become a foundation for separatist aspirations.

Whatever the outcome of these political pressures, the way in which universities in Kaliningrad became a focal point for attempts to reconcile a German past with a Russian present in a wider European cultural framework demonstrates how higher education institutions can become areas of focus for clashing identity narratives. As we have seen, Martin Klimke and Rosemary Deem explored how spaces in which students examine and academics reinterpret historical artefacts can play a crucial role in reframing the way regions or even entire nations structure their political institutions.⁶⁸ While in 1960s Germany or the United States the role of universities in shaping identity construction led to considerable conflict between students, academics and the state, in Kaliningrad after 1991 there were strong incentives for local elites to back attempts by academics to develop an identity narrative that revived memory of an East Prussian based on German as well as wider Baltic European traditions.

Once relations between President Putin and the leaders of the European Union broke down, however, the loss in regional autonomy experienced by Kaliningrad Oblast over the previous decade and a half meant that federal authorities could undermine the institutional underpinnings of a shared European and Russian identity that had become central to the ethos of its higher education institutions. The experience of universities in Kaliningrad could therefore provide scholars with more fundamental insights into the interaction between higher education and processes of identity construction that are of relevance to other societies undergoing rapid social change. Yet whether Kaliningrad's universities will survive their

⁶⁸Klimke, *The Other Alliance*, 26 and Deem, 'Globalisation, New Managerialism', 17.

current moment of adversity after a quarter century of recovery and expansion remains an open question.