

Specific Kaliningrad character of the Russian identity

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Abstract. There are different levels of territorial identity perceived as a sense of belonging to a particular social and territorial community. People residing in any region identify themselves with these levels to a different degree. Since 2001, the authors have been doing sociological research into the territorial identity of the population of the Kaliningrad region, which became a Russia's exclave after the demise the USSR. The research shows that residents of the Kaliningrad region associate themselves with different territorial communities to a varying degree starting with an ever strengthening sense of national identity, followed by the regional and local identity. The sense of macro-regional (European) and global identity is significantly lower.

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1. Introduction

For most of the post-Soviet history and due to its exclave location, the Kaliningrad region has been

attracting the attention of many political scientists and sociologists who study the issues of regional implications of the national identity. Unfortunately, judgments on the situation in the region do not

always reflect the real situation, and the results of some biased surveys often become a subject of political speculations. Geographers, sociologists and political scientists of I. Kant BFU have been monitoring socio-economic and political processes in the region since the early 1990s, and studying the issues of the Kaliningrad regional society in the making for as long as 15 years. This article will show that while assessing their belonging to different territorial communities the residents of the Kaliningrad region unfailingly highly prioritize the Russian communities of different territorial levels, placing the all-Russian community at the top of the list.

2. Self-identification of the population with social communities of various territorial levels

The problem this paper addresses is the specific geographic identity of the people in the Kaliningrad region. There were many authors, Russian and foreign, who tried to grasp these peculiarities of the exclave region both theoretically and empirically (with some extent of success), but the issue remains. The ‘borderline’ status of the exclave territory gives the theoretical possibility to think about the possible identities of its inhabitants as less integrated into the ‘main’ national culture and identity. Among the most notable examples of such papers, the following studies may be mentioned.

For instance, Ingmar Oldberg in his study on the Kaliningrad identity in 2,000 supposed that there might be a potential basis for the forming of a Western-oriented and even a separatist attitude “by analysing the composition and the views of the population, official symbols, place names, architecture, history-writing as well as economic and political strivings” (Oldberg, 2000). Despite the fact that none of the tendencies mentioned were realized, four years later R. Misiunas expressed his expectations towards the “genuine local autonomy of the territory” drawing on the assumption of the Kaliningradians “lacking clear historically formed self-perception” and the growing role of the European Union in the region (Misiunas, 2004). Years later, in 2011, two American authors A. Diener and J. Hagen complained on the disappointment and

loss of enthusiasm in the EU towards the perspective of adopting the European approaches in the foreign policy and federalism by the Kaliningrad region, seeing its further perspectives in a rather sceptical way as the region remains under the strong command of the security interests. Nevertheless, the problem of the allegedly ‘waning’ Russian identity among Kaliningradians is also mentioned in this paper, although the evidence forming the foundation of this statement seem mostly speculative (Diener, Hagen, 2011).

On the other hand, there are also those who assert that Kaliningradians do not have any European identity, and on the contrary, have a strong regional identity. Such opinions are mentioned in an interesting article by A. Kazharski (Kazharski, 2015), but still these statements lack empirical evidence, just as the opposite ones. Interestingly, A. Kazharski admits that “while it is tempting to exaggerate the distinctness of its [Kaliningrad region] identity – and from there only one step remains to political expectations – as well as exploitations. But – as a local expert put it for me in a conversation – «we are just another Russian region populated by ordinary Russians, though we do have extraordinary circumstances of living»”. Of course, one of these circumstances was the necessity for Kaliningrad to integrate into the Baltic exchange networks, which was somehow difficult, partly because of the “persistence of adverse geopolitical orientations in the local populations and persistent stereotypes in the public opinion” by both Russian and European neighbouring sides, as was shown in the paper by Y. Richard, A. Sebentsov and M. Zotova (Richard et al., 2015).

The problem is partly the fact that not just ordinary people, but also social researchers and politicians draw on the subjectivist, speculative and stereotypical ideas of the Kaliningradians’ identity, and the main scope of this paper is to put some empirical findings into the concept of the Kaliningrad identity.

While examining the identity of a certain social and territorial community (society), it is necessary to determine the hierarchical correspondence between this community and some other relevant ones. When it comes to the inhabitants of the Kaliningrad region, the Kaliningradians, we should compare them horizontally with the citizens of Novgorod, Tver, Klaipeda, Olsztyn, Brandenburg.

It is the regional level. Going vertically, the immediate higher hierarchical level is the level of the macro-region. When we define the macro-regional level for the Kaliningrad region, it is either the international Baltic Sea region or the Russian North-West (the Kaliningradians are included in both these communities). The national level is a certain country (Russia, Poland, Lithuania...), though it is clear that hardly any Kaliningradians may associate themselves with the people of neighbouring Poland or Lithuania. Then comes the part-of-the-world level – Europe, Asia, America... It seems obvious that if we live in Europe, we are Europeans.

But sometimes sociologists ask tricky questions: who are we, Russians or Europeans? Kaliningradians or Russians? From a scientific point of view the question itself is not quite correct, as it suggests choosing from different scales, and therefore disparate objects. And besides, the comparison does not draw objective evidence, but rather an account of subjective opinions of the respondents: how many of them think that they are Europeans or Russians. Therefore, such findings are to be dealt with very carefully and supported with some objective data (e.g., the presence, size and achievements of political parties and movements, advocating the separation of a region).

The functions of the state, region, town towards a citizen are quite different. People's attitudes to each of the levels are defined by the official functions of the latter, and they are ascribed by the majority of researchers to the correlation between local, regional and "national" (or, rather, the country) identities. Most often, a person lives and acts in his/her village, or town, then in the region and only then – in some other regions (which they view as a country as a whole). Therefore, the results of a sociological survey alone cannot give grounds to assess the relationship between various (and disparate) territorial identities. For the practical purposes of determining the regional policy measures, it is much more effective to study the dynamics and/or comparison of the regional identity with other territories rather than to examine the regional and territorial identity itself.

Conclusion: It is impossible to view in direct opposition the different levels of territorial identity: Russian (national), macro-regional (Siberia, the Urals, and others), regional (subject of the Russian

Federation), local (specific area within the subject of the Russian Federation). Everyone is more or less aware of their belonging to each level of identity.

3. Specific character of the Kaliningrad regional society

The main features that distinguish the Kaliningrad region from all other Russian regions are, firstly, its formation on the part of the territory of Eastern Prussia, which used to belong to Germany, what predetermined the migrant origin of the initial population of the region; and secondly, the exclave nature, territorial remoteness from all other Russian regions and proximity to the European countries. These two factors have a strong impact on the formation of the Kaliningrad society, determining its main difference from other Russian regional societies.

Eastern Prussia left the elements of the material and, to a much lesser extent, spiritual culture, which can have diverse though rather insignificant impact on the specific character of the regional society. Another factor is that it began rather recently, after 1945, and the majority of residents of the area do not have that sense of rootedness, bond to the territory, which is typical for the population of old developed regions of the country. The region was populated by immigrants from various parts of the Soviet Union and certain patterns of the process determined the fact that by the 1980s the region had become the most 'Soviet' of all regions of the country and its residents to the greatest extent could be identified as 'Soviet people'. The local specificity of the regional society was formed to a much lesser extent than in other administrative and territorial units of the Soviet Union.

Currently, local natives, according to our estimates, account for only 40% of the population. Of these, 20% represent the first generation and 20% the second. That is, even today the population of the region has a predominantly migrant character. And the influx of migrants from other regions of Russia and the CIS countries strengthens this feature of the area and does not contribute to the strengthening of the native population. The consequence is the increased mobility of the regional

population, both migratory and social, as working age migrants with an active commitment to improving their living standards and social status are more numerous.

Nationality-wise, the composition of the population is also heterogeneous. According to the 2010 census, Russians make up more than 82% of the population, 3.5% – Belarusians and Ukrainians, 1.0% – Lithuanians and Armenians, 0.8% – Germans, 0.5% – Tatars. Other nationalities are the Poles, Azerbaijani, Chuvash, Mordvinians, Jews, etc. Although their native language is Russian (or they are fluent in it), some particular features of culture and mentality of different nationalities are more visible in the region than in the Russian regions with an evident predominance of the Russian population. Besides, Russian people come from different regions of Russia and the CIS countries and bring certain ethnographic and mental differences, diverse in different parts of the country.

The problem of the badly-formed society in the Kaliningrad region is one of the specific issues affecting the social and economic life in the region. The fact of recently populating the area and the high migratory mobility of the population make it difficult to form a stable social and territorial community. This does not strengthen social stability in the region, makes it difficult to formulate common interests of the region's population and regional development objectives; on the other hand, it may cause a tendency for the population to equate themselves with the all-Russian society, its values, attitudes and objectives, as it sees them.

The second major problem is the exclave location, the elements of which arose immediately after the formation of the administrative region included in the RSFSR in 1946 because it got separated from the other Russian regions by the territory of the other union republics. But they used to be parts of one country, the Soviet Union, where the borders between the republics were almost transparent, performing a contact function with a minimum barrier role. Exclavity was insignificant for the early regional society. A much harder and faster-growing exclavity impact was felt after the collapse of the Soviet Union. On the one hand, the region had to build trade, economic and political relations with the new Baltic states on a new ground, which gave rise to many new costs for businesses and residents. On the oth-

er hand, in the conditions of open borders and the transition to a market economy, the economic, tourism, socio-cultural contacts in the region and European countries have intensified.

Despite the fact that separatism as a real political prospect in the Kaliningrad region has never existed since the region is linked to the main part of the country with political, economic, ethnic, demographic, religious ties, the possibility of such a threat has been debated in the media. Diverse group of Western and some Russian experts have proposed different options of the regional isolation from Russia: autonomous republic, condominium (territory under the joint control of Russia and other countries), accession to some other country, independent state (Fedorov, Zverev, 1995; Klemeshev, 2005; Klemeshev, Mau, 2007). Therefore, the scientists of the Kaliningrad State University (currently I. Kant BFU) have conducted case studies to examine how the exclave position of the region, along with the efforts of the economic and socio-cultural European expansion, affect the formation of the society. The research results are well covered in a number of publications (Klemeshev, Fedorov, 2001; Klemeshev, Fedorov, 2004; Klemeshev, 2005; Klemeshev et al., 2005; Berendeev, 2007; Alimpieva, 2009).

It turned out that a key feature of the Kaliningrad society is the exclave syndrome, awareness of remoteness from the mainland (Klemeshev, 2005: 143–157). Regional support measures that are accepted by the federal authorities can weaken, but do not overcome the impact of the exclavity factor for the regional socio-political processes.

In order to monitor the public opinion on the primacy of self-identification of the population with geographical communities at various levels, for more than 15 years I. Kant BFU researchers have been conducting polls among the residents of the region where they asked about the level of geographical identity that was primary for the respondents. Here, in Fig. 1, we present the results of Kaliningrad public surveys held in 2001–2015.

It may be noted that the majority of the population identify themselves with the Russian identities on a variety of levels (city, rural area, the Kaliningrad region – Russia). At the same time, over the past fifteen years the identification of people in the region primarily with common 'Russians' has strengthened. In 2001, the national identity was

number 1 priority for 25% of the population, now this figure has grown to 41%. The current results cannot be attributed to random fluctuations, since the proportion of the population with a national

priority vector of the territorial identity has grown throughout the 15 years, and even in 2011, the least favourable in terms of the socio-political situation in the region, this group accounted for 36%.

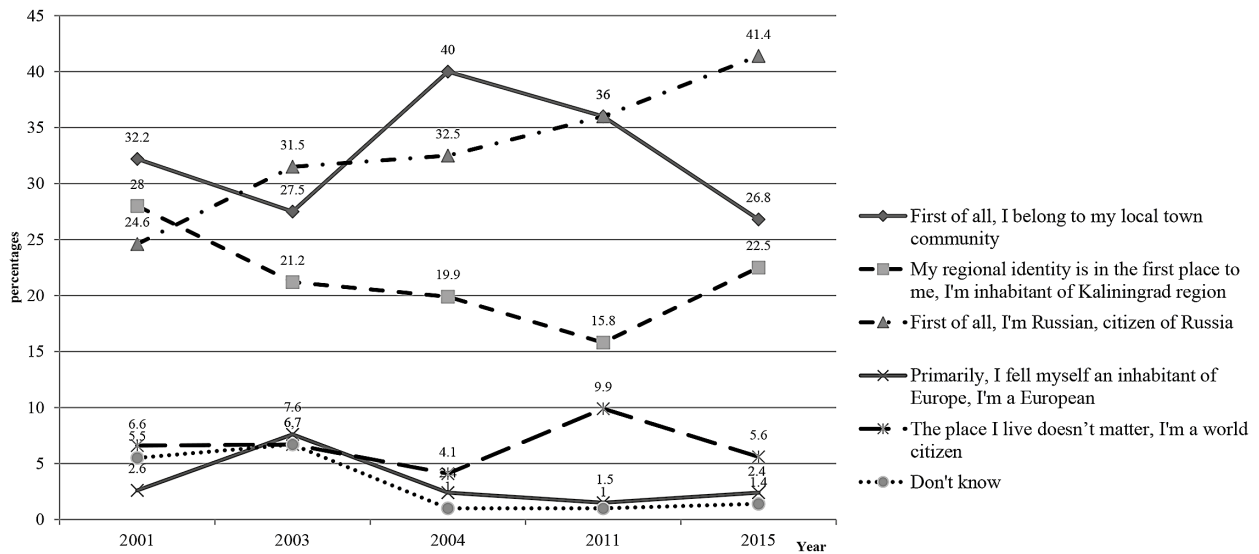


Fig. 1. Opinion polls dynamics in the Kaliningrad region on the priority of their belonging to different territorial communities in 2001–2015

Source: Responses collected during the series of social surveys in 2001–2015

At the same time, the proportion of those who identify themselves with their locality significantly decreased, and the share of ‘Europeans’ and ‘cosmopolitans’ fell drastically from 12% to 8%. Thus, we can talk about a steady strengthening of national identity in the Kaliningrad region since 2001.

At the beginning of March 2016, we conducted a survey with more detailed issues relating to the regional identity of the inhabitants of the Kaliningrad region. The representative sample included 983 people (confidence level of 95%, confidence interval of $\pm 3.12\%$). In particular, the respondents were directly asked to rate how strongly they felt that they belonged to various geographic groups.

As it is shown in Fig. 2, the majority of the region’s inhabitants perceive themselves as Russians to a very high (65%) or high (26%) degree (in total, their share was 91%). Only 2.4% said that hardly identified with Russian residents. In the case of regional and local identity, the results were virtually identical: about 94% of residents of the area said that they felt like a resident of the region to a large or very large extent; similarly, to a large extent about 90% felt like an inhabitant of their home

place. At the same time, identification with ‘Europeans’ or ‘inhabitants of the Earth’ geographical communities was much weaker.

Almost three-quarters of the population considered themselves native to the area: 60% gave an unambiguously affirmative answer, another 16.5% – ‘rather yes’. ‘Rather not’ option was chosen by 8.6%, and clearly a negative answer was given by 13.2%. Only 1.6% did not answer this question. Interestingly, the natives are not only those who were born in the region: among the people who had lived in the region for over 20 years, 52.1% were clearly positive, from 10 to 20 years – 35.9%, from 3 to 10 years – 29.6%, up to 3 years – 41.9%. Among those born in the territory of the Kaliningrad region, only 74.1% consider themselves uniquely native of the area, which again demonstrates the ambiguity of interpretations of demographic facts by the social actors. However, the contingency coefficient between life expectancy in the region and self-awareness as native residents of the Kaliningrad region is 0.358 (at $p = 0.000$), which indicates the presence of a significant direct, though not very strong, relationship between the two variables.

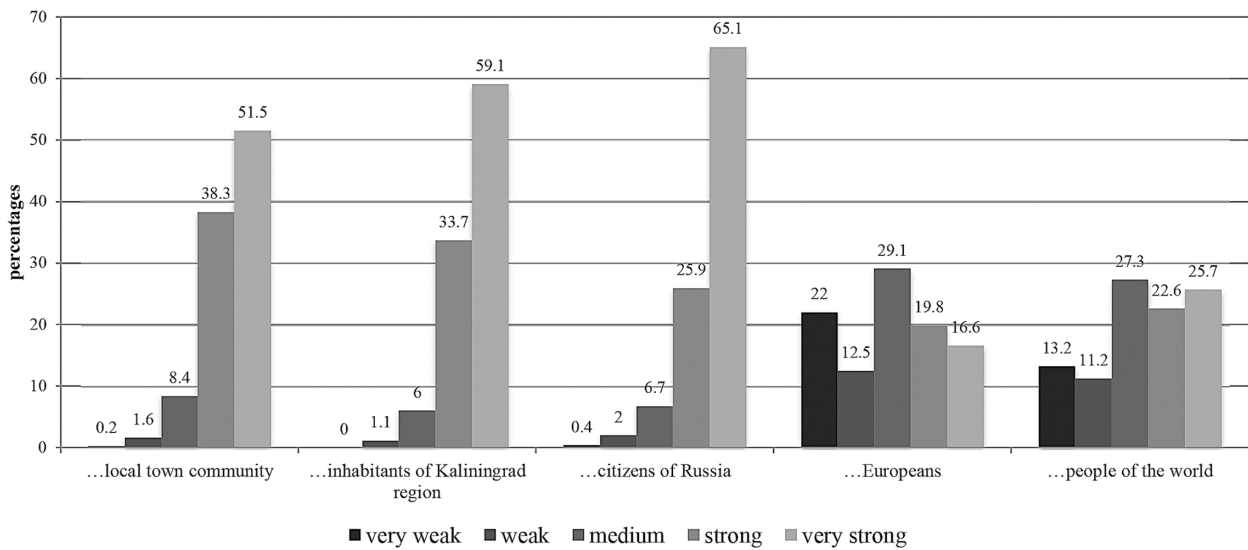


Fig. 2. Self-assessment of the identification degree of the regional population with different geographical groups

Source: Responses collected during the social survey in 2016

In this situation, it would be logical to assume there was a link between the duration of residence in the region and the degree of self-identification with the various geographic communities. According to the analysis of contingency between the variables listed in Table. 1, such a relationship exists only with the local and regional identities. The strength of this connection is not high, but the level of significance *p* indicates sufficient statistical reliability. Thus, the increase in the length of stay in the region significantly related to the degree of self-identification with the local residents and the regional geographic community.

Table 1. Contingency coefficients between the duration of residence in the Kaliningrad region and the degree of self-identification with geographical communities at various levels

The level of geographic community	period of residence TO contingency	<i>P</i>
Local (residents of the city, village)	0.247	0.000
Regional (residents of the Kaliningrad region)	0.257	0.000
Nationwide (Russian citizens)	0.127	0.577
European (European)	0.139	0.405

Source: Calculated by authors using SPSS statistical package

As we can see, however, the degree of identification with geographical communities of a higher level is not connected with the duration of residence: the coefficients for the contingency are lower, but even this statistical relationship is not sufficiently reliable – high *p* values indicate a very high probability of accidental distribution. Thus, we can say that the period of residence in the region has a positive effect on strengthening of identification of the residents with the local and regional community, but did not significantly affect the identification of the inhabitants with the communities of Russians, Europeans and the inhabitants of the Earth as a whole – neither positively, nor negatively.

We can assume that in fact, the connection between life expectancy in the region and the degree of identification of the inhabitants of the geographical communities does not really exist, and the existing relationship reflects the relationship between the age of the respondents and identification with geographic communities (contingency ratio between the age of the respondents and the length of stay in the region is 0.453 at *p* = 0.000). However, a statistically significant correlation between the age of the respondents and the degree of identification with any level of geographic communities was found: the value of contingency factors for different levels reached 0.146–0.157 at *p* = 0.357 commonality 0.520. Thus, the link between the duration of stay

in the region and the degree of identification with the local and regional level cannot be attributed to the influence of the age of the respondents.

In addition to geographical identity, we also looked at the various profiles of the 'horizontal' social identity: ethnic, national, religious and professional. As shown in Fig. 2 and 3, about two-thirds of the inhabitants of the region feel unity with people of the same profession or occupation to a strong (34.3%) or very strong (32.8%) degree. Unity with people of the same religion is felt by a somewhat higher percentage of the respondents: a very large extent – 39.7%, to a large degree – 38.3%.

General ethnicity (not necessarily Russian) is the basis for a very strong sense of unity of 48.2%

of the inhabitants of the region, another 42.3% feel strongly towards the people of their own nationality. It is noteworthy that unity with the Russians (regardless of nationality) is the basis for the formation of a sense of identity for the most significant share of respondents: 60.2% of the region feel contingent with the Russians to a very high degree, another 31.8% – to a great extent (total is 92%). Less than one percent of the respondents feel commonality with the Russians to a lesser degree or do not feel it at all. Finally, contingency with Slavic nations as a whole is also characteristic for the overwhelming majority of respondents – 41.8% said 'very strong' unity, 32.8% – 'strong'.

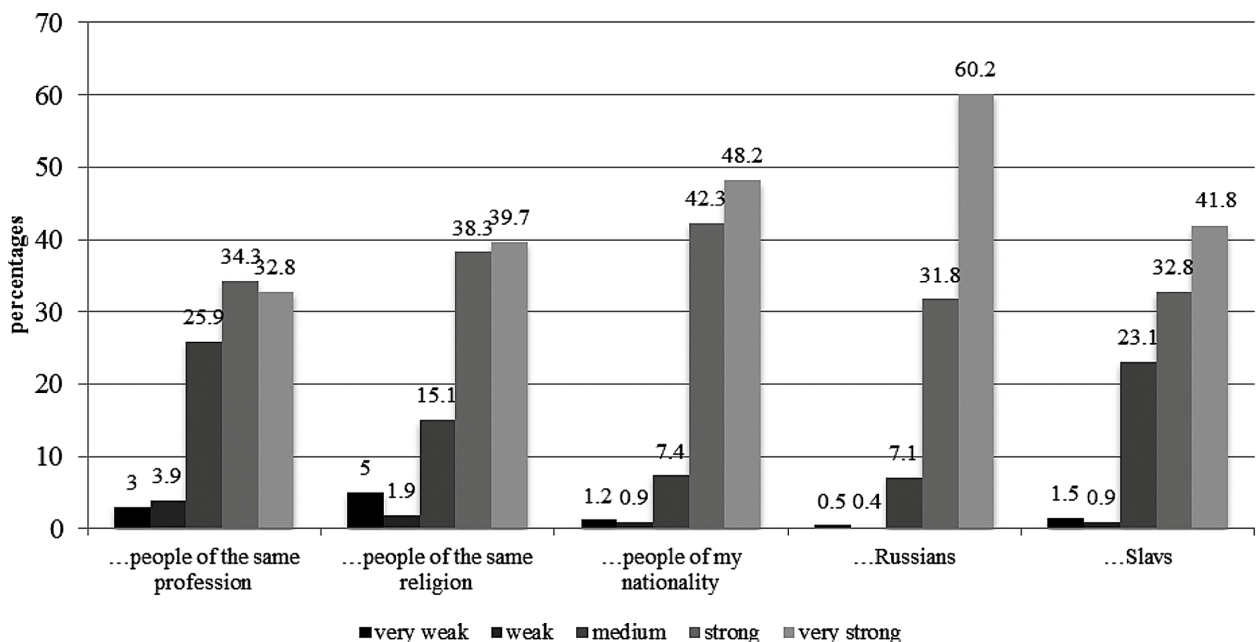


Fig. 3. Self-assessment of the identification degree of the regional population with different geographical groups.

Source: Responses collected during the social survey in 2016

In line with strengthening the national, or rather the state identity, comes the distribution of answers to the question on the administrative and political status of the region as seen by the area residents (Fig. 4).

A significant proportion (36.5%) of the responses in 2015 (compared to only 16.5% in 2001) chose the option 'an average region of the Russian Federation'. A region with SEZ rights is the most preferred answer (51% in 2015) and it shows a growing tendency. It means that this status in the eyes of Ka-

liningradiansis fully justified. Indeed, in the 2000s, the regional economy developed quite successfully, especially due to the fact that enterprises could use the SEZ mechanism and federal support for infrastructural development. As a result, answers stating that the preferred status of the region was a republic within the Russian Federation, a territory under the joint authority of the Russian Federation and the EU, an independent state were given by 2–3% of the respondents in 2015, while in 2001 such answers were given by 10–16 % of the respondents.

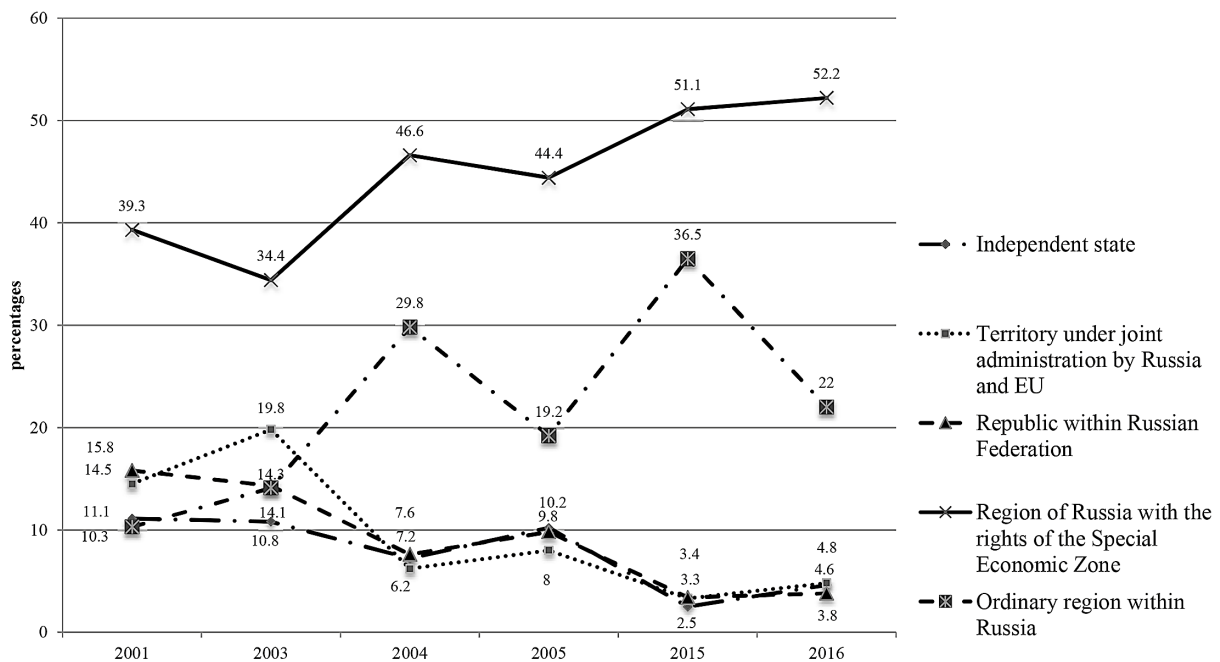


Fig. 4. Dynamics of views of the Kaliningrad regional population on the preferred administrative status of the region

Source: Responses during the series of social surveys in 2001–2016

One would assume that the preferences of the inhabitants of the region with respect to the administrative and political status of the region may be associated with the duration of residence. We can assume that there are some certain permanent factors which influence socio-political attitudes in the region (like exclave or proximity to European countries) and they grow stronger with the length of residence in the region.

However, the research did not find any reliable statistical link between the duration of stay in the region and preferences with regard to the administrative and political status: the distribution of observed frequencies did not differ sufficiently from what was expected – the value of contingency coefficient is 0.136 at $p = 0.792$.

In this case, we can assume quite the opposite, that the preferences for political and administrative status of the region changed under the influence of situational factors, such as the assessment of the current situation in the Kaliningrad region.

Indeed, the analysis of cross-distribution shows that a variety of ‘autonomous’ options for the existence of the region are obviously more preferred by the part of the population that considers the regional situation as ‘catastrophic’. The region is seen

as one of the subjects of the Russian Federation by those who assess the local situation as ‘good’ or ‘satisfactory’, while the other groups, except those who see the overall situation as ‘catastrophic’, wish to accept it as a Russian region with the status of SEZ (contingency coefficient value for these two variables is 0.297 at $p = 0.000$).

4. Conclusions

1. The most significant geographic communities which residents of the Kaliningrad region identify themselves with are various territorial levels of the Russian identity, i.e. the national, regional and local levels; the importance of macro-regional European and global levels is much lower. Despite the fact that the residents of the region actually identify themselves to some extent with all vertical levels of geographic communities, the primary role of the national Russian community has been increasing for over 15 years of the monitoring.
2. After the inhabitants have lived in the region for some time, their degree of identity with the local

and regional level increased significantly, but this process does not affect other levels: self-identification with national, European or global community neither strengthens nor weakens.

3. Over the past 15 years, the people of the region have lost a great deal of interest in certain preferred administrative and political forms of status associated with strengthening the regional autonomy from the federal centre. However, this trend, according to the results of the analysis, must be explained by the public perception of the aggregate socio-economic conditions and policies that determine the overall assessment of the regional situation rather than the duration of residence or some features of the Kaliningrad society.

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