

METAPHORS AND POWER: REINVENTING THE GRAMMAR OF RUSSIAN TRANS-BORDER REGIONALISM

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Introduction and Theoretical Framing

This paper is grounded in the assumption that metaphors conceal power relations and embed them in various forms and with different degrees of depth. This approach seems to be very close to the school known as Critical Discourse Analysis, which focuses on how discursive practices help produce and reproduce power relations¹.

One of those who convincingly inscribed metaphor, along with metonymy and synecdoche, into the grammar of hegemonic relations, was Ernesto Laclau. For him, metaphor is a type of “rhetorical displacement” when “a literal term is substituted by a figural one”, an operation which establishes “a relation of substitution between terms on the basis of the principle of analogy”². The proliferation of metaphors could be “linked to a constitutive blockage in language which requires naming something which is essentially unnamable as a condition of language functioning”³.

“The power of names” boils down to the fact that “naming ... always means a withdrawal from a troubling anonymity; it means a settled position in the culture’s identity matrix”⁴. “The identity and unity of the object result from the very operation of naming... The name becomes the ground of the thing”⁵ and, subsequently, turns into “a pure signifier” – “not expressing any conceptual unity that precedes it (as would be the case if we had adopted a descriptive perspective)”. In other words, “the unity of the object is a retroactive effect of naming it”⁶. Thus, metaphor turns into what Žižek dubbed “the binary signifier” which points to “the split between the One and its empty place of inscription”⁷. It is in this sense that one may assume that “metaphors create reality. They constitute the object they signify”⁸.

This paper presumes that Russian westernmost regions’ positioning as trans-border actors is the most important element of the political construction of their identities. This process could be conceptualized through a distinction between the two logics of identity-building described by Ernesto Laclau. Firstly, there is a *logic of difference* presumed upon the existence of an ensemble

¹ Tina Sikka. The New Imperialism: Using Critical Discourse Analysis and Articulation Theory to Study George W.Bush’s Freedom Doctrine, *Global Change, Peace & Security*. Vol.18, N 2, June 2006. P.101.

² Ernesto Laclau. On Populist Reason. London & New York: Verso, 2005. P.19.

³ Ibid. P.71.

⁴ Anssi Paasi. Constructing Territories, Boundaries and Regional Identities, in *Contested Territory. Border Disputes at the Edge of the Former Soviet Union*. Edited by Tuomas Forsberg. Edward Elgar Publishers, 1995. P.48.

⁵ Ernesto Laclau. On Populist Reason... P.104.

⁶ Ernesto Laclau. On Populist Reason... P.108.

⁷ Slavoj Žižek. *Iraq. The Borrowed Kettle*. London & New York: Verso, 2004. P.137.

⁸ Rainer Hulsse. Imagine the EU: the metaphorical construction of a supra-nationalist identity, *Journal of International Relations and Development*, vol.9, N 4, December 2006. P.403.

of “differential identities”. Within this framework, sub-national units develop their strategies differentially, i.e. on an individual basis. In fact, this logic describes the specificity of particular regional identities that are not directly linked to each other and do not necessarily reflect / appeal to something that reaches beyond their borders.

The second logic is that of *equivalence*. It suggests that there might be situations when some “differences are equivalential to each other” in their common position vis-à-vis a certain external identity. Then, Laclau argues, “there is a possibility that one difference, without ceasing to be a particular difference, assumes the representation of an incommensurable totality. In that way, its body is split between the particularity which it still is and the more universal signification of which it is the bearer”⁹.

What is discernible in these broadly formulated arguments is a methodological framework to be used for the sake of analyzing the roles of metaphors in the areas of the Russia – EU neighbourhood. In particular, the analytical distinction between the two logics constitutes a good basis for identifying two different patterns of the trans-border activity of Russia’s sub-national units and their metaphorical representations. The author of this paper attempts to complement Laclau’s theory with an understanding of the metaphor as a figure of discourse that performs a sometime overlooked role – that one of translation of a non-political type of discourse into a political one, and vice versa. In other words, each time discursive politicization and depoliticization occur, there is a need in their metaphoric representations.

This function of metaphors will be studied in detail on the basis of a number of cases taken from the practices of Russian sub-national regionalism. In each of the cases under consideration, there is an interesting combination of politicizing and depoliticizing effects to be conceptualized further.

1. Depoliticized Metaphors: Two Discursive Strategies

In this section, I will focus on two logics that underpin the depoliticized type of metaphor-based discourse. The first one approaches the regions through the lens of their geographical location, while the second one makes an accent on regions’ individualism.

1.1. A Logic of Geographic Essentialism

Metaphors can be instrumental in perceiving the process of regions’ international self-assertion as an apolitical one, mainly through referring to what is dubbed “natural rights”, “primordial grounds”, or something which is presented as “organic”, i.e. what is destined to happen “anyway” and can’t be effaced¹⁰. In fact, the discourses of many border-located regions are marked by a conviction that the very geographical location turns them almost automatically and inevitably into full-fledged international actors.

The reference to geography as something which predestines and predetermines the international legitimation and recognition of the regions adjacent to the EU moves regional discourses in the direction of de-politicization. The “organic” metaphors are well represented, for instance, in the VASAB (Visions & Strategies Around the Baltic 2010) papers. VASAB visions are very technical and functional, with minimal political interference and have global (or even pan-European) ambitions. Adhering to the school of spatial planning, VASAB experts perceive the Baltic region-building through the prism of such metaphors as «*pearls*» (major international cities) that have to be connected to each other through «*strings*» (communication corridors). These communications are knowledge-based and designed to enhance the competitiveness of major centers of urban networks in the area (like Gdansk – Kaliningrad – Klaipeda – Karlskrona, or Stockholm – Riga – Tallinn – St. Petersburg – Helsinki, or Petrozavodsk – Joensuu – Oulu)¹¹.

⁹ Ernesto Laclau. *On Populist Reason*. London & New York: Verso, 2005. P.70.

¹⁰ Rainer Hulsse. *Op.cit.* P.411.

¹¹ An Agenda 21 for the Baltic Sea Region. Baltic 21 Series, N 1/98, at <http://www.ee/baltic/publicat/R1.htm>

Another vision of Baltic regionalism can be found in the concept of *Growth Triangles* which is meant to project the experience of Asian economic regionalization onto the Baltic Sea region, especially in the areas of the Gulf of Finland (Southern Finland, Estonia and St. Petersburg). Another option would be ‘geometrically’ connecting Kaliningrad, Lithuania and neighboring areas of Poland. In each of these cases, the Growth Triangle concept is aimed at capitalizing on the parties’ economic complementarities, their geographic proximity, and launching common infrastructure projects¹².

Geographically determined metaphors are readable in a bunch of transportation options, such as «*Northern ray*» (St. Petersburg – Helsinki – Stockholm); «*Southern ray*» (St. Petersburg – Ukraine - Moldova – Romania – Bulgaria – Greece); «*South-Eastern ray*» (St. Petersburg – Novorossiysk – Astrakhan’); «*Asian ray*» (St. Petersburg – Central Asia – China); «*Far Eastern ray*» (Trans-Siberian rail road)¹³; the modern version of the «*Way from Varagians to Greeks and Hazars*», basically with tourist purposes; «*King’s road*» from Norway to St. Petersburg through Sweden¹⁴; «*Murmansk corridor*» (from Kirkenes to the Kola isthmus¹⁵); «*Arkhangelsk corridor*» to connect German industrial centers, ports of the Gulf of Bothnia and Russia’s North East; the «*Blue Road*», a highway and a tourist route crossing Norway, Sweden, Finland and Karelia¹⁶; and *South Baltic Arc* (Lubek – Rostock – Szczecin – Gdansk – Kaliningrad – Klaipeda – Liepaja).

In particular, the Kaliningrad oblast (KO) with its “pilot region” status gives an example of overwhelmingly de-politicized approach to trans-border regionalism, which is manifested by a variety of “technical” metaphors. This region is frequently described as a “*gateway*” (a “*clean gateway*”¹⁷) between Russia and the EU - a technological metaphor which denotes host areas for direct investment and covers “new forms to organize the commodity flows and to penetrate a hinterland”¹⁸. Similar meanings are easily discerned in the “*transportation knot*”¹⁹ and the “*chain*” metaphors as applicable to the KO, as well as a “*free customs stock of global scale*”²⁰, a “*five-star-hotel*” (a city comfortable to business and tourism), an “*international business center*”, “*a meeting place*”²¹ of Russia and Europe, a kind of “*bridge*” between the two, or “*a ski-jump to Europe*”²².

The de-politicized approach to trans-border regionalism is grounded in a search for some kind of neutral field of alleged objectivity that would be able to reconcile ideological differences for the sake of technically tackling the issues that otherwise would be entangled in political discussions. The “technological” language is probably best exemplified by the metaphor of “*laboratory*”, which represents a space “lifted out” from normal life and producing “symbolic prototypes”²³. A number of Euroregion projects with Russian participation could be mentioned as allowing for a de-politicized communication between all actors involved.

¹² Kivikari, Urpo. A Growth Triangle as an Application of the Northern Dimension Policy in the Baltic Sea Region. Russian-European Centre for Economic Policy. Policy Paper, May 2001. Pp. 13,17.

¹³ Tkachov, G.I.; Makarov, V.L.; Churov, V.E.. Mezhdunarodnie i vneshneekonomicheskie svyazi Sankt-Peterburga v 1999 godu, at <http://www.ln.mid.ru>

¹⁴ How to establish a Russian-Finnish Joint venture. Manual for entrepreneurs. St.Petersburg: Phare/Tacis Cross Border Co-operation Small Project Facility, 2000. P. 42.

¹⁵ Smirnov, A. K itogam mezhdunarodnoi investitsionnoi konferentsii «Vozmozhnosti regionov Severa-97», at <http://www.ln.mid.ru>

¹⁶ Shlyamin, Valery. Economic Problems of Regional Politics in the North-West of Russia – Karelian View, in: St.Petersburg, the Baltic Sea and European Security. Helsinki: Nordic Forum for Security Policy and the Finnish Committee for European Security, 1997. P.75.

¹⁷ Kaliningrad 2000-2010. Diagnosis, Concepts and Proposals for Future Development. Grenoble – Kaliningrad – Moscow: TESIS, 2000. P.9.

¹⁸ Peter Nijkamp, Caroline Rodenburg. Mainports and Gateways in Europe. A Comparative Contrast Analysis in the Nordic Area, available at http://www.geo.ut.ee/nbc/paper/nijkamp_rodenburg.htm

¹⁹ Information on Mikhail Kasianov’s visit to the Kaliningrad oblast, March 5, 2002, available at <http://mid.ru>

²⁰ *Izvestia*, August 31, 2000. P.6.

²¹ Pertti Joenniemi. The European Union’s Northern Dimension: on the Introduction of a New Signifier. Paper presented at the International Studies Association Congress, Los Angeles, March 14-18, 2000. P.2.

²² Grirory Revzin. Trampin v Evropu, *Kommersant* N 148, August 18, 2007.

²³ Scott Lash, Technological Forms of Life, *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 18(1), 2001. P.114.

1.2. A Logic of Difference: Regions as “Partial Objects”

The second of two de-politicized logics - that one of difference - presupposes regions' self-positioning as fairly autonomous units enjoying a great deal of freedom of individual action. This is a de-centralized, fragmented and, concomitantly, inherently asymmetric model of regionalism that could be framed as “the *Russian archipelago*” – a persuasive metaphor pointing to a very fragmented space dominated by centrifugal forces with quite heterogeneous regional ‘islands’ that lack strong mutual ties²⁴. Seemingly, in this type of discourse regions may be compared with “*islands*” – a metaphor of ostensible singularity that designates “sealed world”²⁵, a sort of “*gated community*” that semantically is opposed by the “*bridge*” metaphor.

On a hunch, this pattern of spatial organization seems to be rather close to what Slavoj Žižek ventured to figuratively call “*organs without bodies*”. By this unusual and intellectually provoking metaphor he understood a set of presumably autonomous “*partial objects*”, “*shadows deprived of their life-substance*”, that basically are parts of the realm of “the virtual”. Allegorically speaking, “part of reality was (mis)perceived” as an apparition that, nevertheless, could be “more real than reality itself”²⁶. Isn't this conceptualization an interesting frame to be explored for the study of Russian trans-border regionalism, especially in 1990s, a decade known for its spirit of regions' self-assertion as “*partial objects*” eager to produce their own identity discourses, sometimes in clear dissociation with the federal center and in conflict with other regions that supposedly constitute a single body of Russia as a nation? Much of these attempts were indeed “virtual” in a sense that they resembled region's PR campaigns, yet it is exactly these “*partial discourses*” that substantiated regions' performances and identifications.

For the purpose of my analysis it could be assumed – with a certain degree of creative imagination - that in 1990s Russian subnational regions turned into “*subjectless partial objects*”, while Russian federal system became “*vaguely coordinated agglomerate of partial objects*” that “*seem to lead their own particular lives*”. Isn't an agglomeration of “*partial objects*” a nice formula to describe the ruptures and disconnections within the fabric of “*region-centered asymmetric*” federalism in Russia²⁷.

The individualistic (island-type) way of regions' self-promotion in a trans-border ambit may be exemplified by discursive battles between regions on the domestic scene. For instance, Pskov's identity-building efforts consist of the attempted “*cultural rivalry*” with St.Petersburg, which sometimes is presented as an “*infant*” (a “*junior brother*”) in comparison to Pskov²⁸. According to this metaphoric interpretation, Pskov's historical centrality in the context of the Russian – European relations was destroyed by the appearance of St.Petersburg, a city which, arguably, still bears some symbolic guilt for the marginalization of Pskov and the exhaustion of its resources pumped instead into the new Russian capital²⁹. One may also discern a kind of tacit competition between Pskov and Novgorod, a city that historically used to earn the somewhat negative “*elder brother*” reputation³⁰. Even a small town of Ivangorod has willingly entered the identity-constructing battlefield by arguing that it managed to turn into “*Russia's window to Europe*” much earlier than St.Petersburg³¹.

²⁴ Johnny Rodin. The Russian Archipelago, in *Contemporary Change in Russia: In from the Margins?* Edited by Egle Rindzeviciute. Baltic and East European Graduate School Studies, N 3. Sodertorns hogskola, 2004. P.95.

²⁵ J.Hillis Miller. Derrida Enisled, *Critical Inquiry*, winter 2007. Vol. 33, N 2. P.265.

²⁶ Slavoj Žižek. *Organs without Bodies. On Deleuze and Consequences*. New York & London: Routledge, 2004. P.170.

²⁷ Johnny Rodin. Rethinking Russian Federalism. The Politics of Intergovernmental Relations and Federal Reforms at the Turn of the Millenium. Stockholm University, 2006.

²⁸ «Navigator» Political Information Agency web site, www.navigator.pskovregion.org/?1&code=53&subcode=54

²⁹ Shlosberg, Lev (2002), O chom prazdnik, *Pskovskaya gubernia*, July 17-24.

³⁰ Nekrasov, Sergei (2003), Feodal'naya respublika Pskov, *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, April 23.

³¹ “Krasnaya kniga krepostei” web site, www.rusfort.ru/encyclopedia/fort.php?name=ivangorod&part=events

In fact, the two versions of depoliticized discourse depicted above – those based upon ‘geographic essentialism’ and the ‘logic of difference’ – constitute the two sides of the same coin. Indeed, the reference to geography is the best pathway to underline region’s specificity and uniqueness. The opposite is also true: the accentuation of region’s difference usually boils down to stressing its locational peculiarity.

However, the idea of exceptionalism embedded in both types of depoliticized metaphors is open to politicizing effects. The basic condition of this transformation is that a region claiming its exceptional characteristics has to fill them with more general content. The universalization of exceptional cases as a gesture of politicization will be addressed in detail in the next section.

2. Metaphors of Discursive Politicization: Two Strategies

It seems that purely technical discourse has its functional limitations. In practical terms, it might be hypothesized that as soon as technical projects prove their success, they either start displaying political ambitions (a strategy of promoting local interests under the guise of the “pilot region” concept) or face political reaction from those whose interests are supposedly harmed. In more conceptual terms, since de-politicization presupposes the erasing of differences between the “self” and the “others”, this discursive operation seems to be unsustainable in situations with the articulation of the border problematique at its core.

As we have seen above, there is a variety of regions’ *individual* moves aimed at finding some external perspectives beyond the Russian system of center-periphery relations. Yet an alternative logic is also feasible, that one grounded in border regions’ ability to reify their subjectivity through some kind of *collective* actions based upon the principle of equivalence. Within this context, metaphors are meant to “sustain politics... to define friend and foe, same and other... (Metaphors. – A.M.) slip into politics. (They. – A.M) are ontopolitical scripts meant to anchor conventional assumption about who are political agents, where are they based, what is political, and how they behave where they are as political actors”³².

An alternative glance, thus, certainly gives a very much different picture of trans-border discursive landscapes. This logic, again, comes in (at least) two different yet interconnected versions – those related to the concepts of signification and hegemonic representation.

2.1. The Concept of Signification

Along the lines of a first variant, regions are perceived as ‘*signs*’ used by the Russian Federation and the European Union, in communication with each other.

The idea of sign could be derived from the concept of *representation*: for example, for Michel Foucault the sign emerges whenever a certain object is treated as representing another object. Signs manifest a specific type of inter-relations that link one idea or identity to another. In other words, it is not enough to establish the linkage between the signifier and the signified; one has to find out that the very idea of representation is seen as being completely legitimate, is shared by both signifier and signified, and thus is embedded in the very fabric of the process of signification. Signs, according to Foucault, have to somehow resemble the signified, on the one hand, yet simultaneously have to differ from them, on the other. Signs could be instruments of analysis, since, being once established and specified, they may be related with new experiences and play a role of reference points for explaining them³³. In Russia, a similar approach was developed, among others, by Vladimir Kaganskii who treats regions as “analogs of texts”, which makes regional studies “a journey to the world of contexts”³⁴.

³² Timothy W. Luke. MegaMetaphorics: Re-Reading Globalization, Sustainability, and Virtualization as Rhetorics of World Politics. Presented at the Symposium on Politics and Metaphors, International Society for Political Psychology, July 18-19, 1999, available at <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/tim/tims/Tim684.htm>

³³ Michel Foucault. *Les mots et les choses. Une archeologie des sciences humaines*. Paris: Gallimard, 1966.

³⁴ Vladimir Kaganskii. Metodologicheskie osnovaniya regional’nogo analiza kak kul’turnoi praktiki, available at <http://www.inme.ru/previous/Kagansky/Regiony.html>

In particular, the KO pilotness has to be interpreted in terms of this region's transformation into a "sign" of the readiness of both Russia and the EU to cooperate as strategic partners. St.Petersburg, in its turn, is a "sign" of Russia's belonging to the European culture and simultaneously Russia's expansion to the West. By the same token, in 1990s Novgorod won an international reputation of an "outspoken champion of liberal, market-oriented economic reform" and even "the model of present Western economic theory and business"³⁵.

There are several ways in which regions could reinvent, rearticulate and reactivate the sign-based metaphorical foundations of their trans-border discourses. **Firstly**, there are constitutive ambiguities inscribed into some of the key metaphors. Such of them as "gates", "doors" or "windows" might be read differently – either positively (as something which provides better communication between the neighbouring parties) or negatively (as something which is either fragile and vulnerable, or might happen to be closed in due circumstances³⁶).

A different type of uncertainty appears due to the frequent possibility of the double reading of certain metaphors: for instance, "window" could signify either a region's openness towards Europe, or, vice versa, Europe's attempt to find a pathway onto Russia³⁷. Besides, a "window" has a logical connotation with a wall, and, consequently, conceal hidden bordering allusions³⁸. The bordering – debordering dichotomy was nicely grasped by Hiski Haukkala – in reference to the Northern Dimension as a "market place where the European Union and Russia can meet on more equal grounds than would perhaps otherwise be the case", he notes that "the existence of a marketplace requires that there is a gate, or a hole, in the wall that separates the two"³⁹. This imagined wall seems to have a joint legacy: in Iver Neumann's judgment, "the bricks which go into Russian wall-building vis-à-vis Europe are burnished locally, but they are often made of material imported from Europe"⁴⁰.

Secondly, one region may evoke a number of different metaphors splitting its cultural identity. Thus, Svetlana Boym speaks about a discursive "duel between the two cities - Leningrad and Petersburg"⁴¹. The same constitutive split could be applicable to the figure of the city's founder: 'Peter the Great, cherished and cursed by generations of tsars and party leaders, seems to be an all-purpose hero, a modernizer and an Antichrist, a democrat and an autocrat'⁴².

This duality explains the multiplicity of metaphors pointing to this city's geo-cultural image - "a seaside margin", a "place for cosmopolitan intrigue", an "internal analogue of an external center"⁴³, and even "an alien, a stranger, imposed upon Russia"⁴⁴. In many cases metaphors contain strong allusions to the exceptionality of the region under consideration: the case in point is, for example, a variety of metaphors pointing to the stark specificity of St.Petersburg which is dubbed "a vampire of Russia", an "immigrant in its own motherland", "a foreigner in its own land", or a "rootless cosmopolitan". It is a commonplace to treat St.Petersburg as a sort of "foreign body" marked by enmity and alienation. Yet it is exactly these

³⁵ Blair Ruble, Nancy Popson. The Westernization of Russian Province: the Case of Novgorod, *Post-Soviet Geography*. Vol. 39, N 8, 1998, pp. 433-445.

³⁶ Nikolay Lubianskii. Okno v Evropu mozhet zakrytsia, *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, July 26, 2002.

³⁷ Russia – EU Summit (Moscow, the Kremlin, May 21, 2004). Press release N 31/04, Mission of the Russian Federation to the European Commission, Press Service, <http://www.russiaeu.org/pr31-04.htm>

³⁸ Leonid Poliakov. Post-Putin Condition, *Russkii zhurnal*, March 15, 2007, available at www.russ.ru

³⁹ Hiski Haukkala. A Hole in the Wall? Dimensionalism and the EU's New Neighbourhood Policy. The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, UPI Working Papers 41 (2003). P.16.

⁴⁰ Iver Neumann. Russia and Europe, in "Russia and Europe". Conference Proceedings. Edited by Jakub Godzimirski. Centre for Russian Studies, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, NUIP Report N 210, November 1996. P.28.

⁴¹ Svetlana Boym. The Future of Nostalgia. New York: Basic Books, 2001. P.129.

⁴² Ibid. P.165.

⁴³ S.A.Koroliiov. Beskonechnoe prostranstvo. Geo- i sotsiograficheskie obrazy vlasti v Rossii. Moscow: Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Science, 1997. P.67.

⁴⁴ Viacheslav Morozov. Sankt-Peterburg mezhdru territoriei i prostranstvom: metodologicheskie voprosy vzaimosviasi teorii i praktiki". "Megaregion – Network Confederation" web site, available at http://megaregion.narod.ru/stenogr_103002.html

exceptional traits that are constitutive for a region's turning into an emblematic and in a way "stylish" unit which has a potential to evolve in time into what would be considered as something indispensable for national identity⁴⁵.

Arguably, some of these metaphors are in conflict with each other: it is, for instance, the case of "*Russia's northern capital*" versus "*the capital of Russian province*" – the former seems to be a bearer of the idea of statehood, while the later contains an attempt to position this city as being deprived of the attributes of centrality and thus forced to struggle for being recognized as the best voice of second-rate cities. The image of "*Russia's crime capital*", with the practice of contract killing, rampant crime and corruption, further complicates this discursive battlefield.

The same goes for Kaliningrad as well. Not that many regions of the Russian Federation may boast about having such an impressive collection of geo-cultural images. A "*sleeping beauty*", "*trading/transit agent*", "*a learning region*"⁴⁶ - all these metaphors are extensively applied to Russia's Baltic exclave. Yet on the other side of the discourse, we see a different bunch of metaphoric images, such as a "*garrison*", a "*floating fortress*", "*unsinkable aircraft carrier*"⁴⁷ which are typical for Russia hard-liners who advocate that Kaliningrad has to retrieve its status of military outpost of Russia instead of the role of "window to Europe"⁴⁸.

The KO, speaking in terms of colored metaphors, is a part of what could be called «a gray zone», which lies somewhere in between the «white» (which, in a figurative sense, equates with the Western democracy) and the «black» zones (an area of despotism and all kind of illegal activities)⁴⁹. This approach is used by many authors to treat the «gray zone» as an «interim space saturated with crisis and doubts»⁵⁰, having allegedly in mind some parallels with the «gray» («shadow») economy metaphor widely applied to the KO. Another meaning embedded in the «gray zone» metaphor is uncertainty: countries that belong to it treat themselves as *buffer states*, located «in-between» the core power in the worst sense of this wording, being neither accepted nor denied by the EU. It is in this sense that Kaliningrad could be dubbed a replication of the spirit of East Prussian culture, associated with old Königsberg-style traditions in architecture⁵¹ and mental legacy. The best metaphor to express this "cultural marker" is "*Kalininsberg*"⁵², thus alluding to possible re-germanization of this city.

The discursive landscapes of "*pilot*" metaphor appear to be especially inhabited by a variety of alternative meanings and contents. The *first* approach to the pilot region is of liberal reformist background, presuming that the KO – due to the need of speedy economic development - might become a "pilot" for the sake of testing the feasibility of liberal reforms in economy (the so called "breakthrough technologies"). The *second* reading would argue that the "pilot region" metaphor is but a tool to get additional privileges for the KO from both the federal centre (in terms of securing budgetary funding and keeping the exceptional regulations for the "special economic zone") and the EU (in terms of proposed but later rejected idea of "associated member status"). The *third* interpretation has strong connotation with positions of power and Russia's demands for subjectivity in European affairs, which makes the whole "pilot" concept part of the EU – Russia great-power dynamic. The *fourth* explanative variant – mostly pertaining to the EU discourse - would assume that the region's pilotness has to be understood in terms of showing the benefits that enlargement might bring to "outsiders", yet without any special

⁴⁵ Evgeniy Anisimov. Gorod-kapriz Petra, *Vestnik Instituta Kennana v Rossii*, issue 2. Moscow: 2002. P. 37.

⁴⁶ Bjorn T. Asheim. Learning regions as development coalitions // *Concepts and Transformation*. Vol. 6, N 1, 2001.

⁴⁷ Paul Holtom. Kaliningrad: a pilot region for enhanced co-operation between Russia and the EU? Paper presented at "Russia's Integration into Regional Structures" Workshop organized by Nordeuropa-Institut of the Humboldt University, 11-13 October 2001, Riga, Latvia.

⁴⁸ Lurie, Svetlana. Prusskaya krepost', *Konservator*, N 15 (31), April 25 – May 1, 2003. P.11.

⁴⁹ Filip Kazin. *Zakat tranzitologii, ili seraia zona Evropy?* Center for Integration Research and Projects, St. Petersburg (October 2002) www.cirp.ru/publications/kazin/transition_cont.htm.

⁵⁰ Carl Schlogel. «Evropa – pograničnaya strana», *Vestnik Evropy* (N 9, 2003), <http://magazines.russ.ru/vestnik/2003/9/shleg-pr.html>

⁵¹ http://regions.ng.ru/printed/far/2001-05-29/6_lock.html

⁵² "Itogi", May 22, 2001. P. 21.

agreement with Russia on KO. The *fifth* – and perhaps the most adequate - reading is that of placing the KO in a trans-national environment, on the basis of advanced engagement with the European neighbors and relatively smooth adaptation to EU's standards. In the worst case, this multiplicity of interpretations might lead to de-valorization of the pilot region idea as such. Yet on the other hand, this situation opens new discursive opportunities for all parties involved in the social construction of the KO, since the playing with divergent meanings constitutes a good terrain for communication between all actors involved. The multiplicity of interpretations reflects and simultaneously exacerbates the variety of perspectives available for the KO.

In the meantime, this discursive ambiguity is a fertile terrain for the appearance – both in Russia and the EU - of metaphors with ostensibly negative connotation, like a «stepson» of Europe-Russia cooperation, a «double periphery», “an infrastructural / black hole”, “poor neighbor”, “honeypot for smugglers”, Russia's “Soviet hellhole”⁵³, a “trouble spot”, a “civilizational bankrupt”⁵⁴, an “adapting outsider”, a “bone of contention”, a “besieged fortress”, an “imperial bastion”, a “reservation” inside Europe, an “island of Bad Luck”⁵⁵; a “remote appendix” to Russia⁵⁶, a “colony”⁵⁷ and even a “hostage”. What further complicates the picture is that the European attitudes to the KO are exemplified in such metaphors as “Russian Trojan Horse” in the EU and a “pistol to the temple of Europe”. It is sometimes argued that the KO “is located on an economic fault-line: it is neither a gateway nor a crossroads... it is a dead end”⁵⁸.

Thirdly, “the battle for the story” unfolds whenever one metaphor is applied to a number of regions. This is the case, for example, of the “gateway” metaphor – it comes into force in a variety of regions, including the KO⁵⁹, St.Petersburg⁶⁰ and Murmansk. The same is true about the “window” metaphor inscribed into the narratives of both St.Petersburg and Kaliningrad. Both the KO and St.Petersburg are referred to as “the icons” of Russia's new openness to the West.

Metaphors could be essential parts of the “battle for centrality”. For example, a tourist flyer says that Novgorod is “the true heart of Russia”, while St.Petersburg wishes to be known as “the heart of the Baltic region”⁶¹.

There is a “battle for the scope” as well. For example, while the Baltic Sea Region might be called “a laboratory of powers”⁶², the KO also claims its mission as a “security laboratory”⁶³, or “the Baltic laboratory of Larger Europe”⁶⁴. “The window to Europe” metaphor could be used by some of Russian regions as well – potentially - as by neighbouring countries like Estonia⁶⁵. Here we have an interesting situation of the simultaneous usage and discursive conflation of one

⁵³ Chris Patten. Russia's hell-hole enclave, *The Guardian*, 7 April 2001.

⁵⁴ <http://www.academy-go.ru/Site/RussiaEC/Kaliningrad/Bespor.html>

⁵⁵ Valeria Sychiova. Ostrov Kaliningrad, *Itogi*, May 17, 2002.

⁵⁶ Paul Holtom. «Why is Kaliningrad Russian». Paper presented for a series of inter-disciplinary seminars “Borders”, Centre for Border Studies, University of Glamorgan (17 November 2003).

⁵⁷ <http://gov.kaliningrad.ru/news.php3?uid=1704200101>

⁵⁸ Sander Huisman. A new European Union policy for Kaliningrad. The European Union Institute for Security Studies, Occasional Papers N 33, March 2002. P.35.

⁵⁹ S.V.Kortunov. Kaliningrad kak vorota v Bol'shuyu Evropu, *Rossiya v Global'noi Politike*, N 6, November 2004.

⁶⁰ Vladimir Yakovlev's speech at the 8th session of the Consultative Council of the Subjects of Federation on the International and Foreign Economic Issues at Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, June 3, 1998, <http://www.ln.mid.ru>

⁶¹ Vatanjar Yagya. St.Petersburg – at the heart of the Baltic region? In Co-operation in the Baltic Sea Area. The Second Parliamentary Conference on Co-operation in the Baltic Sea Area. Report from a Conference arranged by the Nordic Council at Stortinget, Oslo, Norway, 22-24 April 1992. Pp.22-24.

⁶² Esko Antola. Falling Apart? Diverging Trends in the Baltic Sea Region. Paper presented at the Conference “A Laboratory in the Margin? The EU's and Russia's policy in Northern Europe”, Copenhagen, 26-27 September 2003. P.1-2.

⁶³ Oleg Reut. The Baltic and Barents Regions in Changing Europe: New Priorities for Security. Centre for European Security Studies, EFP Working Papers 2, 2000. P.51.

⁶⁴ Igor Yurgens. Baltiiskaya laboratoriya Bol'shoi Evropy, *Rossiya v globalnoi politike*, N 3, May – June 2004.

⁶⁵ Kolosov, Vladimir and Borodulina, Nadezhda. Rossiysko-estonskaya granitsa: bariery vospriyatii i prigranichnoe sotrudnichestvo, *Vestnik Instituta Kennana v Rossii*, N 11, 2007. P.44.

metaphor at different levels and by different actors. These – and perhaps many others - examples show that regions have to both share and compete for certain metaphors with each other.

Fourthly, the New – Old Dichotomy is also a meaningful part of Russia’s trans-border discourse. An essential characteristic of metaphor is its temporal dynamics and ability to manifest something new – as opposed to the old, supposedly outdated and obsolete. Thus, metaphors tend to project a certain cultural experience onto new spaces⁶⁶. One of appropriate example could be found in the “*New Hansa*” discourse as applicable to certain Russian regions (Novgorod in particular). It is argued that the revival of the Hanseatic legacy provides a blueprint for forging a peculiar type of narrative grounded in the idea of “overlapping and linking space... that will belong to both and neither at the same time, that will be beyond sovereignty”⁶⁷. Murmansk oblast was labeled as “*New Ruhr*” (alternatively - “*Northern Near East*”) for its immense natural resources⁶⁸.

There is a strong metaphorical content in the procedure of renaming some of Russian cities – the case in point is, for example, St.Petersburg, which, in Pertti Joenniemi’s interpretation, has to be understood as “*the New St.Petersburg*”. For Dmitry Zamiatin, St.Petersburg is especially prolific in successfully catalyzing new geo-cultural metaphors, being a constellation of images grounded in Kiev, London or Moscow⁶⁹. A number of toponymic metaphors inscribed into the city’s landscape (like “*New Holland*”) seem to confirm this⁷⁰.

The old – new debate possesses of political connotations since it is basically about displaying features of the imperial revival, or, on the contrary, about de-bordering and bridging the gap between Russia and Europe. Thus, the “*new Venice*” idea contains strong associations with skillful diplomacy, world-class culture, and well-developed trade relations, while in the “*new Rome*” metaphor one may discover some imperial and geopolitical allusions⁷¹. Other authors add another metaphor to the already impressing list – a “*new Jerusalem*”, suggesting that due to the skillful re-actualization of the images derived from other cities’ geographies, St.Petersburg turns into a meaningful resemblance of the Western civilization⁷².

There is another interesting twist in the “old – new” debate: the “new” adjective might spell “Russian”. This goes, for instance, for a “*Russian Hong Kong*” metaphor⁷³ applicable to the KO, which has to be understood as a “zone of export production”, with sufficient degree of economic and administrative freedom from the central authorities. Three alternative scenarios for St. Petersburg offered by the «Peterburg 2015» Club could be indicative of this discursive trend: “*Russian Venice*” (an option that gives priority to enhancing St. Petersburg’s cultural capital, and thus upgrading the tourist infrastructure⁷⁴); “*Russian Amsterdam*” (a scenario of turning St. Petersburg into a transportation hub and communication center for East-West commodities flows⁷⁵); and “*Russian Boston*” (an idea that lays the ground for making St. Petersburg one of the leading centers in Russian education⁷⁶).

⁶⁶ B.A.Uspenskii. Evropa kak metafora i kak metonimiya, <http://www.logic.ru/Russian/vf/Papers2004/Uspenskii62004.htm>

⁶⁷ Christopher Browning, Pertti Joenniemi. Contending Discourses of Marginality: The Case of Kaliningrad...

⁶⁸ Smirnov, A. K itogam mezhdunarodnoi investitsionnoi konferentsii “Vozmozhnosti regionov Severa-97”, at <http://www.ln.mid.ru>

⁶⁹ Dmitry Zamiatin. Kul’tura i prostranstvo. Modelirovanie geograficheskikh obrazov. Moscow: Znak Publishers, 2006. P.35.

⁷⁰ Valentin Prokhorov. New-Peterburg – zhertva bol’shoi stroiki, *Profil*, January 15, 2007. P.52.

⁷¹ Pertti Joenniemi. The New Saint Petersburg: Trapped in Time, *Alternatives* 28 (2003), p.590.

⁷² Grigory Kaganov. Sankt Peterburg kak ‘ikona’ zapadnoi tsivilizatsii, *Vestnik Instituta Kennana v Rossii*, issue 2. Moscow: 2002. Pp. 46, 48.

⁷³ <http://www.academy-go.ru/Site/RussiaEC/Kaliningrad/Chichkin.html>

⁷⁴ Travin, Dmitry. Peterburg v XXI veke: venetsianskii scenariy, at <http://www.csr-nw.ru/publications.php?code=144>

⁷⁵ Shelin, Sergei. Peterburg v XXI veke: amsterdamskii scenariy, at <http://www.csr-nw.ru/publications.php?code=145>

⁷⁶ Schiolkin, Alexander. Peterburg v XXI veke: bostonskii scenariy, at <http://www.csr-nw.ru/publications.php?code=147>

2.2. *The Concept of Hegemonic Representation*

A second type of the logic of equivalence could be conceptualized through the prism of the twin concepts of *representation* and *hegemony* as developed, again, by Ernesto Laclau:

“the means of representation are ... only the existing particularities. So one of them has to assume the representation of the chain as a whole. This is a strictly hegemonic move: the body of one particularity assumes a function of universal representation”⁷⁷.

The so called “partial objects” introduced earlier in this paper may not only pursue their individual goals and clash with each other; what is even more important, “partial object” is an organ / element “that resist its inclusion within the Whole of a body”⁷⁸ – an “island” eager to remain in some distance from the totality of the mainland. Jean Baudrillard is another influential theorist who formulated important methodological clues to rediscover the Russian model of trans-border regionalism. His legacy could be interpreted as arguing that any system (including, presumably, that one consisted of the center - regions relations) inevitably contains elements that undermine its coherence and structuration. Baudrillard points to the objects that challenge the uniformity of the system they formally belong to; therefore, by the very virtue of their existence they dislocate the existing hierarchy of established relations. In particular, he refers to “marginal”, “unique”, “odd”, “exotic”, “eccentric” objects that deny their inclusion/inscription into the structure on conditions equal to others. These objects, formally being parts of a certain system, tend to break out into other spaces – for example, those related with the historic memories or the culture of the past⁷⁹.

The logic of Baudrillard may be complemented and enriched by a reference to the idea of “the surplus of an element” addressed, in particular, by Žižek. The point here is that “an excessive element lacking its place would still sustain the fantasy of an as yet unknown place waiting for it”. This element is “thoroughly out of place”, a sort of “leftover”⁸⁰, something which can’t be easily accommodated and domesticated by the system, and tends to separate, to move away in search for alternative spatial or territorial affiliations.

These arguments can be projected onto such regions as St.Petersburg. The alleged ‘eccentricity’ makes “the Northern capital” a kind of “internal analog of an external center”⁸¹, a city irreducible to “Russia’s average” and, in certain sense, dissimilar to surrounding territories. Emblematically, it was a former governor Vladimir Yakovlev who presumed that “theoretically St.Petersburg could have gain associate membership in the EU, and could have been economically supported” by Europeans, yet eventually this scenario would lead to Russia’s disintegration⁸².

The KO is another example of the same sort. This enclave could be, metaphorically speaking, discussed as an analogue of a “unique” and “marginal” object, a sort of “*war trophy*” seeking to reach beyond the framework determined by the Russian federal system. Symptomatically, in order to fit into the “pilot region” concept, the KO has to be a different kind of region, showing capacities to become an actor “not like others” in many terms. The spectrum of ideas shaping the region’s specificity since mid-1990s included arrangement allowing for having at its disposal all taxes collected; being directly represented in the EU institutions;

⁷⁷ Ernesto Laclau. *Constructing Universality*, in: *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality. Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. London & New York: Verso, 2000. Pp.302-303.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* P.171.

⁷⁹ Jean Baudrillard. *Le systeme des objets*. Paris: Gallimard, 1991. Pp.61-63.

⁸⁰ Slavoj Žižek. *The Fragile Absolute*. London & New York: Verso, 2000. P.27.

⁸¹ Koroliov, S.A. (1997), *Beskonechnoe prostranstvo: geo- i sotsiograficheskie obrazy vlasti v Rossii*. Moscow: Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Sciences, p.67.

⁸² <http://www.alkor.ru/page/freespb/E-11.htm>

providing all Kaliningrad residents with one-year Schengen visas that allow transportation to and through Baltic countries, etc.⁸³

From the practical viewpoint, what stems from the above is that a certain part of Russia might be considered to become somehow closer to the EU – in cultural and institutional terms – than other inland territories. This strategy may presuppose the border territories' balancing between Moscow and Brussels for the sake of taking advantage of the resources of both of them. This role might be taken when an alternative (external) center of political activity is available. Yet conflicts are also feasible since the federal center is a major constraining factor of the autonomy of the border-located regions eager to Europeanize themselves faster than Russia as a whole.

Metaphors, therefore, should be viewed as images that constitute the playground for the relations of representation and hegemony. It was Giorgio Agamben who found a metaphorical context in the idea of a fragment that “pretends to be more than itself, hints to a more general, infinite dimension”. Each time we use a certain region as an example of something, we see that it “shows its belongingness to a class, but for this very reason it steps out of this class at the very moment in which it exhibits and defines it”⁸⁴.

This approach could be introduced through the conceptualization of an imaginary chain of equivalence that may be formed by Russian sub-national regions bordering on the EU. Some of the North West regions might indeed consider a role of country's informal representatives in Europe, as St.Petersburg, for instance, does from the outset. The KO may also play the role of representing the North-Western Russia in the Baltic Sea Region, and simultaneously may think of itself as a place for perfecting schemes of cooperation that could later be exported to other Russian regions⁸⁵ (for example, as an “*investment conveyer*”). In the meantime, the KO is seen in Moscow as a pilot case in terms of an indicator to determine whether and to what extent the EU takes Russia's strategic interests into account.

Many authors explicitly refer to regions' ability to perform the function of representation. Thus, for Yurii Lotman, in Dostoyevsky's writings St.Petersburg has ascertained its right to “incarnate the Russia's illness, its fears and horrors”⁸⁶. Sergey Kortunov argues that Kaliningrad is a model for Russia's integration into Europe – at the minimum, the function of the KO as a “*show window*” has to be extended to the entire Russia's North West⁸⁷. The fact that other authors claim that “Kaliningrad has lost some of its capacity to symbolize Russia's interests”⁸⁸, does not undermine my argument; on the contrary, this statement shares the principled believe in the KO's ability to perform the functions of representation.

Metaphors like “*Russia's cultural outpost*”⁸⁹ or “*a training institution for Russian periphery*”⁹⁰ – as applicable to the KO - could serve as good examples of hegemonic moves (as well as St.Petersburg's self-proclaimed role of a “*personnel's smithy*” for Russian public service⁹¹). In terms of Laclau, one fragment/element might disclose “the whole scene”. It is in this sense that “the partial object ceases to be a partiality evoking a totality, and becomes ... the name of that totality”⁹².

⁸³ <http://www.strana.ru/print/983534045.html>

⁸⁴ Giorgio Agamben. What is a Paradigm? August 2002, <http://www.europeangraduateschool.de>

⁸⁵ Yury Zverev. Kaliningrad: Problems and Paths of Development, *Problems of Post-Communism*, March – April 2007. P.23.

⁸⁶ Yurii Lotman. *Sovremenost' mezhdru Vostokom i Zapadom, Znamiya*, N 9, 1997.

⁸⁷ S.V.Kortunov. Kaliningrad kak vorota v Bol'shuyu Evropu, *Rossiya v Global'noy Politike*, N 6, November 2004.

⁸⁸ Pami Aalto. Semi-Outsiders or Close Outsiders? Russia and Its Kaliningrad Region in European Integration. Paper presented at the “New World Politics” conference, 12-13 January 2004, Hameenlinna, Finland. P.33.

⁸⁹ Andrey Klemeshev, Gennady Fiodorov. Perspektivy formirovaniya Kaliningradskogo sotsiuma, in *Kaliningradskiy sotsium v evropeiskom kontekste*. Edited by A.P. Klemeshev. Kaliningrad State University Publishers, 2002. P.6.

⁹⁰ Valery Ustiugov's interview, June 28, 2002, available at <http://www.strana.ru/print/151054.html>

⁹¹ Peterburg kak investitsionnaya laboratoriya. Center for Strategic Design – North West, August 27, 2002, at <http://www.csr-nw.ru/content/library/print.asp?ids=46&ida=675>

⁹² Ernesto Laclau. *Op.cit.* P.114.

The applicability of Laclau's conception of equivalences stems from the fact that it presupposes the existence of an external Other, an outside center which legitimizes the process of association within the chain of equivalence and ultimately might lead to the appearance of its potentially hegemonic representative. Within this group of regions there is some noticeable dynamics related to these regions' strategies of putting into practice their competitive advantages by means of developing the most effective and attractive models of trans-border cooperation. It is within this semantic context that one should discover the hegemonic content in such metaphors as "*pilot region*" (as pertaining to Kaliningrad), "*Europe's doorstep*" (as emerged within the Pskov political milieu), etc.

The major question for debate is whether a region seeking to perform a representative function needs to be a typical one ("like dozens of others"), or, alternatively, it ought to possess of original, distinctive and irreducible to the "average" features of its own, deeply embedded in local traditions. On the one hand, the pilot strategy of the KO is rather individualistic and develops in a competitive environment. Yet on the other hand, it inevitably contains strong universalising effects that eventually boost the region's claims for greater status within the federation as an "example", a "model" whose experience is applicable to other regions nationwide. A "*demonstration ground*", a "*contact territory*", a "*vanguard*" of Russia's rapprochement with Europe, an "*indicator*" and an "*interface*" of EU - Russia relations, a "*linking space*", an "*experimental zone*", an "*outpost*" of strategic partnership, Russia's "*business card*", a "*nodal link*", "*litmus test*"⁹³, and other metaphors seem to be quite telling in this regard.

In the meantime, the KO could be called "a *strategic merchandise* of the EU" in the negotiation terrain with Russia⁹⁴, "a *passed pawn*" in a complex geopolitical game between the EU and Russia⁹⁵, or "a *wicket-gate*" that Finland wishes to use to get an access to the energy resources of Russia's North West⁹⁶. In a similar interpretation, Kaliningrad may be viewed as a "*bargaining card* for Russia in its aspiration for centrality"⁹⁷. According to this reading, what has to be tested in the case of the KO is the EU intention to deal with Russia on the basis of strategic partnership. Thus, there might be an understanding of "pilot-ness" as a strategy of self-reinforcement, which makes it a part of the leadership discourse. This is so because it is a narrow group of world leaders that are capable of projecting/imposing their experiences elsewhere and thus define the developmental vectors for outsiders. This view, therefore, presupposes a hierarchy of territories and decision-making centers, and a competition for centrality between them.

The same goes for St.Petersburg as well. It is believed that this peculiar city "is the whole Universe where you can find everything"⁹⁸, "a living chronicle of the Russian empire, Soviet Union and today's Russia"⁹⁹. Not surprisingly, some believe that "in the future, it will be St.Petersburg and its elite who will influence and perhaps determine ... Russian policy towards Estonia and Latvia"¹⁰⁰. In this type of discourse one may find strong flavor of hegemonic representation in its purest sense, with evident universalizing effects. It is in this sense, perhaps, one has to understand Zizek's idea that a particular unit "is not an exception to the Universal but

⁹³ Charles Silva. Russia and the EU. How Can the Process of Rapprochement be Furthered? Report from the EU-Russia Forum for Foreign & Security Policy, Moscow, 15 February 2001.

⁹⁴ ES razvodit Rossii v tiomnuyu, at <http://www.apn.ru/lenta/2002/7/25/19933>

⁹⁵ Raimundas Lopata. Kaliningrad Anniversary: the First Steps of Georgy Boos, *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, N 1-2, 2005. P.147.

⁹⁶ http://www.itogi.ru/Paper2002.nsf?Article/Itogi_2002_05_13_11_2219.html

⁹⁷ Joenniemi 2001, p.331.

⁹⁸ <http://www.alkor.ru/page/freespb/C-16.htm>

⁹⁹ *Peterburgskii stil'*, N 2, 1998. P.5.

¹⁰⁰ Rene Nyberg. The Baltic Countries and the Northwest of Russia: A European Challenge, *European Security*, vol.3, N 3, Autumn 1994, p.533.

is the Universal; it does not reveal the failure or impossibility of the Universal, but precisely invokes the Universal”¹⁰¹.

What is, therefore, of primordial importance is that in the light of the “difference – equivalence” dichotomy the very idea of “partial objects” could be reconsidered: “the partial object is not a part of a whole but a part which is the whole”¹⁰². This utterance offers the most radical reading of conflation of the two logics: it is through a detail (a region-as-a-segment) that the whole political scene of the country could be disclosed and expressed. In terms of Laclau, “the partial object ceases to be a partiality evoking a totality, and becomes ... the name of that totality”¹⁰³. It is exactly what happens when a separate region shoulders the function of representing something that stretches beyond its particular identity: Kaliningrad is not just an individual region within Russia but a “little Russia” thus symbolizing Russia’s strategic interests in Europe¹⁰⁴; St.Petersburg is not just a particular city but an incarnation of Russia’s European devotion, and so forth. It is at this point that the regionalizing and universalizing discourses intermingle, and this intermixture is constitutive for the molding of the regional identity-building process.

It is at this point that a reverse side of the narrative of difference has to be tracked: “the particularized element does not simply remain as purely particular, but enters into a different set of equivalences (those constituting the identity of the dominant powers). So, strictly speaking, the moment of universality is never entirely absent”¹⁰⁵. The extrapolation of this precious methodological note onto the Russian trans-border terrain significantly diversifies regional cultural and political landscapes, since it implies that the external milieu always contains imaginary “chains” that Russian regions may wish to join. Thus, for Novgorod and Kaliningrad this “chain” seems to take the shape of a contemporary version of the Hanseatic League; the informal title of St.Petersburg as Russia’s “Northern capital” alludes to this city’s multiple associations with its Nordic and Scandinavian partners (for example, St.Petersburg is part of the “*Baltic Palette*”, a group of cities consisted of Helsinki, Tallinn, Riga and Stockholm); the revival of Karelian identity places this republic in a group of Finno-Ugrian territories dispersed within both Europe and Russia (Finland, Hungary, Estonia, Republic of Komi, etc.); and the most radical version of Kaliningrad’s autonomy was articulated through a concept of the “Fourth Baltic Republic”. All these instances are illustrative of how a border-located region of Russia may become part of international / transnational chains or networks of different territories.

By the same token, the KO and St.Petersburg may be dubbed “*symptoms*” in a sense attached to this concept by Žižek: “an element that ... must remain an exception, that is, the point of suspension of the universal principle: if the universal principle were to apply also to this point, the universal system itself would disintegrate”¹⁰⁶. Each of these particular regions embodies “the universal in the exception” and thus bears strong political connotations.

Conclusions

In this paper I intended to offer a conceptual interpretation of two different discursive strategies embedded in trans-border activities of Russian regions adjacent to the European Union. Three brief points have to be made in conclusion.

Firstly, on the one hand, these two strategies – that ones of politicization and depoliticization - seem to be in conflict with each other; yet on the other hand, they require each other as necessary conditions for the construction of regional identities. This is so because, one

¹⁰¹ Slavoj Žižek. *The Universal Exception: Selected Writings, Volume Two*. Edited by Rex Butler and Scott Stephens. London & New York: Continuum, 2006. P.329.

¹⁰² Ernest Laclau. *On Populist Reason...* P.113.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* P.114.

¹⁰⁴ Pami Aalto. *Semi-Outsiders or Close Outsiders? Russia and Its Kaliningrad Region in European Integration*. Paper presented at the “New World Politics” conference, 12-13 January, Hameenlinna, Finland. P.33.

¹⁰⁵ Ernesto Laclau. *Constructing Universality*, in: *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality. Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. London & New York: Verso, 2000. P.304.

¹⁰⁶ Slavoj Žižek. *The Universal Exception...* P.173.

may argue, “all social (that is, discursive) identity is constituted at the meeting point of difference and equivalence”¹⁰⁷, i.e. at a crossroads of politicization and depoliticization. The two strategies - and the logics that underpin them - often intermingle, and the interaction of them is, thus, constitutive for the identity building process in the border-located regions of Russia’s North West.

Therefore, the logics of difference and equivalence represent the two extreme points in the spectrum of regions’ identity-building policies. Each of the endeavours to fix border-located regions’ identities can be viewed as a fluid combination of different moves that ultimately are derivatives of both of these logics. The closer a region moves to the difference pole, the more likely it enters trans-national “chains of equivalences”. In the same vein, the closer a region gets to the equivalence pole, the more likely is that it acquires the role of a hegemonic representative.

What is even more interesting is to see how this chain of equivalence could be deployed in a political context defined by the logic of the sovereign decisions. Its operational significance seems to be under serious constraints in the light of President Putin’s restoration of the “vertical of power”, which presupposes the deprivation of sub-national units of their even relative autonomy vis-à-vis the federal center. Putin’s alleged decisionism does not seem to leave much room for tolerating any signs of/claims for hegemony of one particular region as a representative of a wider regional group, moreover against the background of uneasy relations with the EU.

Secondly, what unites some of the approaches introduced above is that they deploy metaphors in the debate concerning norms and rules. The metaphor of “*project*” is of particular salience in this regard, since a successful project experience generates a norm. In the same vein, the “*pilot*” metaphor might be read in its most literal/original sense, as a move to extrapolate (to project) certain norms/principles/values onto a wider terrain, social or territorial one. The potentially hegemonic nature of the “project” metaphor could be explained by the sheer fact that regions performing the pilot function ought to be regarded as norm-setters. For example, it was argued that the KO pilotness has to be interpreted in terms of this region’s transformation into a linchpin of the readiness of both Russia and the EU to cooperate as genuine partners. Moreover, the increasing density of the KO’s trans-national liaisons might eventually boost the region’s claims for greater status within the federation¹⁰⁸.

Thirdly, one of the ways to expand the research agenda in this realm is perhaps to pay a closer attention to the interrelatedness of metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche. A particular case of the passage from metaphors to metonymies is exemplified by the images of regions as “bigger” or “larger”. A case in point is the idea of “*Larger Petersburg*” which encompasses the growing “appetites” of St.Petersburg towards adjacent parts of neighbouring Karelia which are dubbed a “*big dacha*” (as well as a “*forest hotel*”, “*St.Petersburg’s lungs*”, “*St.Petersburg’s vent*”, etc.) These metonymic images, which seem to constitute an important part of St.Petersburg’s identity, point to the northern capital’s longing for territorial expansion and hegemony¹⁰⁹. It is believed that St.Peterburg ought to launch cultural expansion to other North West provinces of Russia and become their “genuine leader”¹¹⁰.

Of even greater interest is that for Laclau, the strategy of discursive hegemony does not certainly stop at its metaphorical stage, since it contains a strong potential of turning into synecdoche. Metaphors have to be seen as an initial step in the process of hegemonic politicization, which takes its most pronounced form in synecdoche. This might hypothetically happen if a metaphors produced by one of regions gets broad recognition as representing its “real” meaning; in other words, when a certain region obtains a sort of monopoly over the

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. P.80.

¹⁰⁸ Birchenback, H. (2003) *Za Evropeiskiy dom v Kaliningrade*, *SCHIFT Working Paper* N 72, www.schiff.uni-kiel.de

¹⁰⁹ G.A.Isachenko. *Osvoenie i vospriyatie landshaftov i rol' gosudarstva v formirovanii identichnosti, in Identichnost' i geografia v postsovetsoi Rossii*. Edited by Mark Bassin and Konstantin Aksenov. St.Petersburg: Gelikon Plius Publishers, 2003. P.196.

¹¹⁰ V.Shinkunas. *Rossiiskii Severo-zapad dolzhen stat' bufernoi zonoii, at http://www.geocities.com/west_west_99/shinkunas.htm*

articulation of this metaphor as a discursive tool serving a particular purpose of a given regional unit. For example, it might be assumed that there are several regions that might claim to play a role of a “*laboratory*” of the EU – Russia interactions, or a “*threshold to Europe*”. However, if one of them succeeds in anchoring this or that metaphor in its regional milieu, that would mean that a certain particularity represents something which could have been attributed to a wider “chain of equivalence”. This discursive operation is largely about associating a metaphor with one of its possible bearers/promoters, that one which ought to fill it with a specific (region-tailored) content.