



Individual Advanced Research Opportunities Program

Research Report

The opinions, recommendations, and conclusions of the grantee are his/her own and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IREX or the US Department of State.

Name: David K. Bridges

Title: Doctoral Candidate, Corcoran Department of History

University: The University of Virginia

IARO2004-2005

Country of Research: Moscow and Kaliningrad, Russia

Title of Research Proposal: *In Moscow's Image? Constructing Soviet Identities in Kaliningrad Province, 1945-1970*

Topic of Research:

With my research in Russia, I am looking at the first 25 years of the westernmost Russian province of Kaliningrad, which was carved out of German East Prussia at the conclusion of World War Two. Ethnically cleansed of the remaining German population in the late 1940s, the province was repopulated for the most part with "settlers" from the central provinces of the Russian Republic. Using archives in Moscow and Kaliningrad, I sought to examine postwar sovietization from both the perspective of the state and of its subjects, to demonstrate how the notion of "being Soviet" evolved from late Stalinism to the early Brezhnev era. My approach is multifaceted in that it examines Kaliningrad in terms of its political, social, and cultural history. I am concentrating on several key themes in Kaliningrad's history. First, I am examining the dual processes of ethnic cleansing and resettlement as tools of the Stalinist state in forging Soviet identities based on ethnicity. In the early foundational years, the state's sole concern with Kaliningrad (aside from military interests) was exploiting the memory of the war and of East Prussia in order to construct a Soviet history and identity of East Prussia. My research revealed that

this process was far from successful, both in its implementation and its reception. After Stalin's death, the new leadership aimed for more "subtle" methods of sovietization, which inadvertently created new arenas for Kaliningraders themselves to contest the state's attempts at forging Soviet identities. The most notable of these "arenas" were architecture and town planning, i.e. the use of public spaces, as the state sought to erase the remains of Prussian architecture and supplant it with Soviet forms in the 1960s and 1970s. A basic question that runs through my exploration is: Do people *need* a history?

Relevance and Contribution to Field:

Very little research has been done on Kaliningrad. What little there is in German and Russian. As modern-day Kaliningrad has become an important international issue due to its exclave status within the European Union, my research will contribute to a better understanding of this geographical oddity in Europe. Also, Kaliningrad's birth and early development overlap with late Stalinism, which is the least explored period of Stalin's rule. An examination of Kaliningrad in this period will, at a minimum, further our understanding of the goals and methods of the postwar Stalinist state given a *tabula rasa* on which to erect a new "fortress of socialism" on the Baltic. While not writing a comparative work, I hope that my study will raise questions about postwar sovietization in Eastern Europe as well and how it differed from postwar sovietization in the USSR itself. Moreover, there remain many unanswered questions with regard to the role played by ethnic cleansing in the process of sovietization, and my study has the potential answer at least some of them. Finally, by examining Kaliningrad through the Khrushchev period and into the early Brezhnev years, I intend to show how sovietization evolved after Stalin. As such, a major goal of my study is to juxtapose how the Soviet system operated at a local level under Stalin and later under his successors. Did the rejection of the most coercive forms of Stalinism result in the state's using more "subtle" techniques of sovietization such as symbols, statues, patriotism, and the built environment? Did ordinary Soviet citizens have any recourse to influencing the state's designs? If so, what were their motivations for doing so?

Approach and research methodology; list of research sites:

I used a very wide variety of archival sources in my work in order to capture, as much as possible, the complex social, political, and cultural forces at work in the quarter century of Kaliningrad. In Moscow, I concentrated on the Party's archives (RGASPI and RGANI). In the small amount of scholarly research done on Kaliningrad so far, all of the Moscow-based research was done at the state archive, GARF. While I did not ignore this source, I sought to find materials that had not yet been considered in the party archives. In Kaliningrad, however, I concentrated on the state archive, GAKO, to balance out my project. Furthermore, the party archive in Kaliningrad is quite small and has been much slower at releasing new materials. Nonetheless, I do have some documents from the Kaliningrad party archive.

I used party and state documents from institutions as varied as the Kaliningrad Resettlement Administration to the Party's Agricultural Department in Moscow to the minutes of the wartime Big Three conferences at Tehran, Yalta, and Potsdam. I also used several personal files of prominent Kaliningraders to make my story more personal and to explore individual reactions to the state's notions of "being Soviet." For example, I used the personal archive of local Kaliningrad historians Energiia and Ivan Kolganov, who were the first to attempt to write a history of Kaliningrad in the 1950s. At GAKO in Kaliningrad, I was also able to scan a number of high-quality photos of Kaliningrad since 1945. These photographs are supplemented by my personal photographs from my travels around the province. I plan to use these in future publications. I was also able to obtain many excellent secondary sources on Kaliningrad's history, which were in abundance because July 2005 was the much-celebrated 750 anniversary of the founding of Königsberg/Kaliningrad. Finally, I scoured several local Kaliningrad newspapers and journals that are not available in the United States.

Research findings and preliminary conclusions:

I must stress that these thoughts are preliminary. I am still reviewing and digesting over one thousand individual notes. I also purchased many document collections and secondary sources in Russia that I am only beginning to explore.

The creation of Soviet Kaliningrad after World War II was done in the most brutal Stalinist manner: ethnic cleansing, coercive resettlement, draconian labor discipline. This did not surprise me. However, I was surprised at the large degree of negligence in developing the province in the last years of Stalin and the early years of Khrushchev. Once the new population was in place by 1950, Moscow essentially viewed Kaliningrad as no more than a strategic war trophy. The cities of the province lay in ruins well into the 1960s. Yet, I found time and again that the new Soviet (mostly Russian) population wanted to "belong" to Russia – not be a separate "island." Indeed, most forms of resistance to Soviet rule that I encountered reflected not a desire to have a separate identity from Russia and the USSR, but to use the province's Prussian past as their connection to a Russian history. For example, when many Kaliningraders challenged the Party's decision to destroy the ancient Königsberg Castle, they did so on the basis of Russian and Soviet connections: the Castle had hosted Peter the Great, General Suvorov's father was a governor there, and German smugglers of Lenin's *Iskra* had been tried there in the early twentieth century.

Much as I had anticipated, modes of sovietization changed drastically after Stalin's death. Brute coercion and violence were diminished as instruments of identity

creation, while the symbolism and utility of the built environment became the preferred method. Yet, in this shift, a certain “epic heroism” of the Stalin years was lost. While the founding years of Kaliningrad were often depicted as an epic feat of Soviet will, the later years turned to the more mundane tasks of building homes, institutions, roads, and schools. However, with an official local history that began in 1945 and a newly destalinized history in the 1950s and 1960s, Kaliningraders were essentially left with no officially sanctioned local history. Discovering this has led me to a much larger question: Do people *need* history? For in this period, Kaliningraders began to become actively involved in trying to forge some sort of local history that connected them to “mainland” Russia. Was this because of the “history vacuum” left by destalinization? I argue that such is the case and that the endeavor to forge a Kaliningrad history led to conflict with the state and party, which were trying to maintain their own versions of history. However, I must stress that throughout the entire period of my study, the state apparatus in Kaliningrad was anything but efficient. Time and again, I read episodes of party and state workers’ dismissal from their posts for everything from drunkenness to “cohabitation with German women.” Indeed, during this period, the state and party proved far more adept at destruction (the Prussian memory and population, for example) than at the creation of Soviet identities.

Future research agendas:

Over the next couple of years, I will be writing my dissertation. During this period, I will conduct some additional research at the Library of Congress, particularly in terms of the all-Union Soviet press. Additionally, I hope to return to Moscow next summer for a short research trip to follow up on several items I discovered in Kaliningrad that referenced documents held in the Moscow archives.

Policy recommendations:

Kaliningrad province is unique in Russia. It is a Russian exclave now surrounded by the European Union. So far, this status has created more problems than opportunities. Kaliningraders now must acquire transit visas to travel by rail to mainland Russia via Lithuania. To travel to neighboring Poland or Lithuania, Kaliningraders must obtain a visa. While Poland has a consulate in Kaliningrad that issues visas, Kaliningraders must travel to Moscow to obtain other visas. Also, a large number of Kaliningraders have had their Polish and Lithuanian visas annulled because of smuggling. On the other side, Kaliningrad’s European neighbors face the same complicated and arcane Russian visa regime that applies to the rest of Russia, which greatly restricts foreign investment in Kaliningrad.

To grasp the current Kaliningrad “question,” it is essential for U.S. policymakers to understand its history, how it came to be. Kaliningrad is emerging as a de facto “window to the West” for Russia. However, my sense is that the province is hamstrung by Moscow. I did not observe any serious separatist tendencies, but

Kaliningraders – especially the youth – travel to Europe much more often than to Russia. As Poland and Lithuania continue to prosper, Kaliningraders are questioning why they are not. Also, there is enormous frustration among Kaliningraders regarding the EU visa standards in crossing Lithuania. So far, that anger has been directed toward the EU, not toward Moscow. However, the scenario for an “Amber Revolution” was discussed more than once in the printed media while I was there. Although I do not see this as a serious question at this time, it could change in the coming decades. So, my recommendation is to understand Kaliningrad and to watch it closely.