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## **Perception of border cooperation and the nature of relationship with the neighboring countries by residents of border regions (on the example of Pskov region)**

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### **Аннотация**

In the modern world, the state border acts not only as an international legal institution, but is also a product of border areas residents' activities and one of the most important markers of ethnic and political identity. The purpose of the study — assessment of the perception by border regions residents of Pskov of the development level and the nature of relationship with neighboring countries (Estonia and Latvia), as well as an evaluation of the territorial mobility of residents. As the object of research, municipalities of the Pskov region, bordering with neighboring states, were selected. To analyze the assessment of the effectiveness of cross-border cooperation by border regions residents, a formalized survey method was used, in which 150 respondents from border municipalities took part. Results visualization was performed using a statistical method (construction of graphs and tables in IBM SPSS). A significant part of the respondents is not aware of the existing programs of cross-border cooperation, although the majority of people believe that such cooperation should be encouraged. The respondents named the political situation in Western countries and the lack of agreements between the countries bordering Russia at the federal level as problems that do not allow sufficiently

developing cross-border cooperation. Territorial mobility of the respondents is low, and the attitude of respondents to the residents of neighboring countries virtually does not depend on their political preferences.

**Ключевые слова:** border region, border area, border municipalities, border, boundary, cross-border (transboundary) cooperation

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<sup>1</sup> **Introduction.** In the modern world, the state border is not only an international legal institution that ensures the inviolability and integrity of the state territory, but is also a product of border area residents' activities, the result of long geopolitical development and one of the most important markers of ethnic and political identity. It seems essential to study the practice of cross-border daily activities, which is influenced by the immediate proximity of the state border and which is associated with ensuring cross-border interactions.

<sup>2</sup> The article presents part of the survey results, the questions of which relate to the awareness of the border municipalities residents of the Pskov region of the ongoing, implemented programs of cooperation with neighboring states. The questionnaire also included questions about the necessity for such cooperation, its forms and probable conditions that complicate the development of cross-border relations between the Pskov region and neighboring countries. Besides, the fact of mobility of the Pskov region citizens towards neighboring countries is assessed and the attitude of the Pskov region citizens towards neighboring states is evaluated.

<sup>3</sup> **The purpose of the study** is to analyze the perception of the proximity of the state border by border areas residents of the Pskov region, as well as the impact it has on the attitude and mobility of the Pskov region residents in relation to neighboring countries.

<sup>4</sup> **Informational base for research (sample of sociological survey).** To assess the effectiveness of cross-border cooperation by residents of border regions, a formalized survey method was used, in which 150 residents of border municipalities of the Pskov region, located on the borders with Estonia, Latvia and the Republic of Belarus, took part.

<sup>5</sup> Due to the small size of the sample, the main emphasis was placed on the Pechora region, the most integrated region in terms of the intensity of border crossings by residents of Pskov towards the countries of the European Union. Due to its not a big

size, it was decided to focus on the most mobile part of the local population — young people and middle-aged people.

<sup>6</sup> The sample consisted of 58 % of women and 42 % of men. Among the respondents, natives of the Pskov region prevail (86 %), and 14 % of respondents were immigrants from other regions of Russia and other countries. Among immigrants from other Russian regions and other countries, the absolute majority are those who moved to the Pskov region more than 20 years ago (80 %).

<sup>7</sup> The structure of employment of the surveyed contingent is diverse. About a quarter of the respondents are workers in education and science (22.67 %). Students and pensioners are largely represented (15.33 % and 13.33 %, respectively), employees in the armed forces and law enforcement agencies (8.67 %), as well as those employed in the building sector (7.33 %) and transport (6 %).

<sup>8</sup> In terms of education, the largest share was made up of respondents with higher education (42.67 %), and more than a quarter of respondents have specialized secondary education. An insignificant share was made by those who have general secondary (4 %) and incomplete secondary (1.33 %) education.

<sup>9</sup> The sample structure based on income per family member looks asymmetric: excluding those who found it difficult to give an answer, the median value is 10–15 thousand rubles, which indicates the prevalence of low-income categories of the population. A quarter of respondents (28%) indicated income per family member in the range from 15 to 20 thousand rubles. There are only a small number of respondents whose income is 25 thousand rubles and higher.

<sup>10</sup> Thus, the respondents are mainly natives of the Pskov region, are distinguished by a young age, a high level of education, a variety of employment spheres and a low level of income.

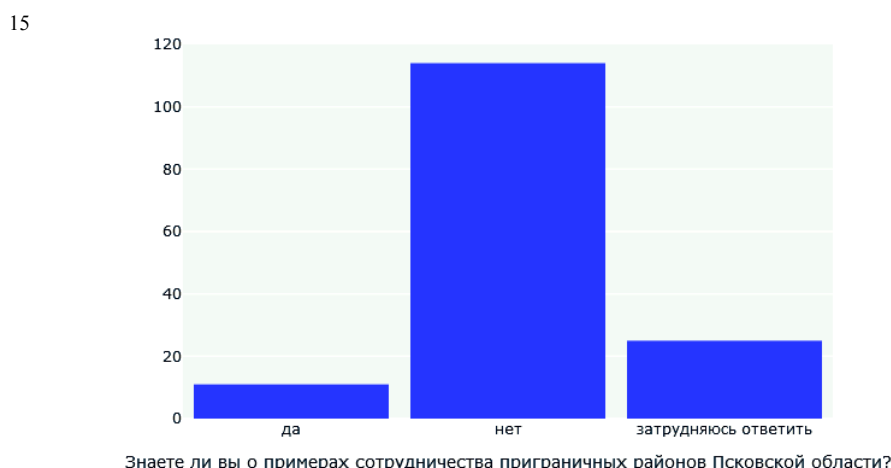
<sup>11</sup> **The degree of knowledge on the problem.** Border activity is not only determined by the border regime, but also influences it itself [3]. In the theory of borders, the high importance of the relationship of localities for states was proved and it was established that local territorial communities are not passive "observers" of the activities of the central authorities, but they themselves have an impact on the regime and nature of the state border [15–17].

<sup>12</sup> It is significant to study the perception of the border (the nature, evolution and channels of influence on social ideas about the border, relations between neighboring states and regions, cross-border cooperation), including the corresponding discourse not only at the levels of "high" geopolitics — the positions of experts and politicians, but also at the "low" level — public opinion [19].

<sup>13</sup> In the subject field of the study, one can highlight the works of Russian geographers such as V. L. Kagansky [2], B. B. Rodoman and B. M. Eckel [1; 14], that dealt with issues of relations between the Russian Federation and neighboring countries. They are theoretical in nature and relate to the delimitation and demarcation of borders. A significant methodological basis that allows one to assess the importance of border functions in the framework of cross-border cooperation is the work of V. T. Kudiyarov [6], as well as works conducted under the leadership of V. A. Kolosov [3; 4; 15; 16]. In

addition, a number of publications should be mentioned, which present the results of surveys on similar topics of residents of the Pskov region, living in areas bordering with Estonia and Latvia [5; 7–9; 18].

14 **The results of the research.** The awareness of the residents of the border municipalities of the Pskov region about the programs of cross-border cooperation can be called low (Fig. 1). The greatest degree of awareness is recorded regarding the region's participation in the Russia-Estonia 2014–2020 cross-border cooperation program [12], but even almost half of the respondents (43.33 %) know nothing about it (Table 1). Least of all respondents are aware of the participation of the Pskov region in the Council of the Baltic Sea States [20] (60.67 % of the respondents reported that they did not know anything about it).



**Fig. 1.** Question: Do you know any example of crossborder cooperation in Pskov region? Answer: “1” — YES; “2” — NO; “3” — I find it difficult to answer.

16 **Table 1** Public awareness of how Pskov region is engaged into international cooperation (%)

Type of international cooperation:	-2	-1	0	1	2
Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between the EU and the Russian Federation	38	15	8	25	14
The Council of the Baltic Sea States	61	8	14	15	2
Crossborder cooperation program	43	7	25	17	7
Movement in the local border belt	48	14	12	17	9
Creation of Euroregions	68	7	13	10	1

17 The awareness of the respondents about specific examples of cooperation between the border regions of the Pskov region and neighboring countries is also low. Only 7 % of respondents were able to give specific examples. As a rule, they refer to cooperation in the field of ecology. Projects such as the Estonia-Latvia-Russia Cross-Border Cooperation Program within the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (launched in 2010) [10], project LV-RU-II-053, “Improving environmental management through joint actions in the border areas RU-LV” within the framework of the bilateral Program of cross-border cooperation “Russia — Latvia” for the period 2014–2020 [13], the project “Reka Sinyaya — vodnoe bogatstvo tryoh stran”, Rybnadzor were named.

18 Projects related to their daily life are more vital for respondents, rather than politics. One of the respondents describes the positive result of the Estonia — Latvia — Russia CBC (cross border cooperation) Program in his home municipality as follows: “Within the framework of the project, 2 streets (Veleiskaya and Bolnichnaya) were repaired in Krasnogorodsk, and a children's playground for road safety was installed on the territory of the House of Children's Art”.

19 According to the majority of respondents, the greatest barriers to cross-border cooperation are the “rewriting” of history in Western countries and anti-Russian statements by politicians, as well as the destruction of monuments to Soviet soldiers.

20 The respondents named stereotypes both towards Russians and residents of neighboring countries as the least significant factors for the development of cooperation.

21 The main positions that complicate the development of cooperation in border regions, according to residents, are mainly related to interstate relations, not interpersonal ones. There are some differences by age groups, for example, according to respondents aged 30–59, the visa regime complicates cooperation to a lesser extent than for respondents of young and old age.

22 As other factors hampering cooperation, the respondents named “Russia's passive attitude to international cooperation in border regions”. The importance of agreements is noted, first of all, not at the regional, but at the federal level: “The absence of joint economic (or cultural, tourist and other) contracts (programs, agreements, etc.) between Russia and these neighboring countries (at the level of the governments of these countries), providing, one way or another, the participation of the border areas of the Pskov region in them (at least the use of their territories); since independent cooperation of the border areas of the Pskov region in such relations, I think, is practically impossible (without such agreements reached at the federal level)”.

23 In the opinion of the absolute majority of respondents (Fig. 2), it is necessary to encourage international cooperation in the border areas of the Pskov region (only 2 respondents spoke against).

24

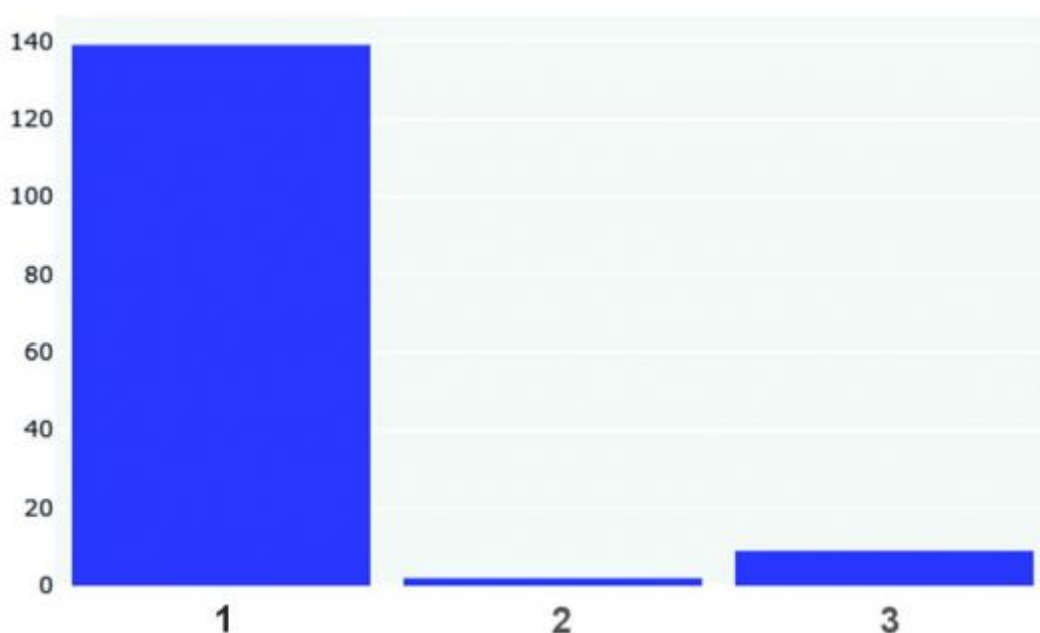


Fig. 2. The need to promote international cooperation in the border areas of Pskov region (number respondents)\* \* Question: Should any form of international cooperation in Pskov region be encouraged? Answer: “1” — YES; “2” — NO; “3” — Not sure.

25 Most of those who spoke in favor of encouraging international cooperation, as the most significant measures, suggested the conclusion of agreements on cooperation at the state level (62.67 %) and attracting investments in various sectors of the border regions (50 %). The importance of improving the visa regime and concluding agreements on cooperation between enterprises and institutions of neighboring regions is also noted (Table 2).

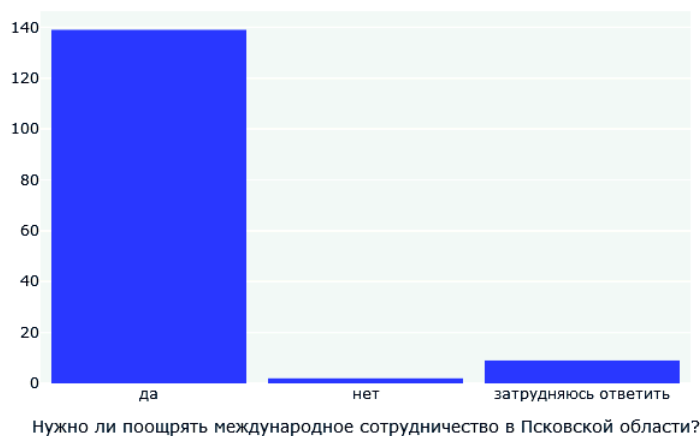
26 *Table 2* What are the specific ways to promote international cooperation in the border areas of Pskov region

Q: In what form should it be encouraged?	Percentage
A: Through cooperation agreements between states	63
A: By improving the visa regimes between countries	36
A: Through cooperation agreements between institutions of adjacent regions	35
A: By attracting investments into various sectors of border regions	50
A: Other	1

27 In general, it can be stated that a significant part of the respondents is not aware of the current programs and facts of cross-border cooperation, while the absolute majority of them believe that cross-border cooperation should be fostered. The respondents highlight the political situation in Western countries and the lack of agreements between the countries bordering Russia at the federal level as problems that prevent effective development of cross-border cooperation.

28 As for mobility issues, it is important to mention that the majority of respondents have never visited the European Union countries (Fig. 3). Respondents visiting the European Union tend to do so once a year or less. None of the respondents visit the European Union once a month.

29



**Fig. 3.** Frequency of EU member states' visits done by residents of Pskov region (%)\* \*Question: How often do you visit the EU? Answer: “1” — several times per year; “2” — once a year or less; “3” — never been before.

30 The most frequently visited countries are the Baltic countries: Estonia (18.67 %), Latvia (13.33 %), Lithuania (2.67 %) and the Republic of Belarus (5.33 %). 1.33 %

of respondents visited Germany and Poland, less than 1 % — in Austria, Ukraine, Finland and Sweden.

<sup>31</sup> The main purpose of trips abroad (Table 3) for both men and women is tourism, in second place is the purchase of goods, and in third place is family and friendships. Women are a bit more likely than men to travel abroad as tourists; men are bit more more likely than women to travel to other countries in connection with work and education. None of the respondents travels to other countries for business purposes.

<sup>32</sup> *Table 3 Purposes of out-of-state trips*

Purpose, sex	Percentage
Tourism male	35
Tourism female	32
Purchasing goods male	22
Purchasing goods female	22
Business male	Null
Business female	Null
Education male	5
Education female	2
Friendship and family relations male	19
Friendship and family relations female	23
Job male	8
Job female	1
Other male	3
Other female	1
Not sure male	43
Not sure female	51

<sup>33</sup> However, it is worth mentioning that the level of mobility is low not only in relation to Western countries. It is also low in relation to other regions of Russia (Table 4), but there are few respondents who have never been to other regions of Russia. The level of mobility in relation to other CIS countries is even lower (Table 5). There are no respondents who visit the CIS countries several times a month.

<sup>34</sup> *Table 4 Frequency of visits to the regions of Russia*

Q: How often do you visit regions of Russia?	Males, percentage	Females, percentage
Several times per month	2	1
Several times per year	24	10
Once a year or less	75	86
Never been before	Null	2

<sup>35</sup> *Table 5 Frequency of visits to the Republic of Belarus, Kazakhstan and other CIS countries*

Q: How often do you visit regions CIS countries?	Males, percentage	Females, percentage
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Several times per year	3	5
Once a year or less	60	74
Never been before	37	22

<sup>36</sup> In general, the following conclusion can be made — the territorial mobility of the residents of the Pskov region, who took part in the survey is low. As the purpose of their trips, they choose areas located nearby, travel infrequently. In the opinion of the majority of the respondents, the attitude of the residents of Estonia and Latvia towards Russia after the political events of 2014 did not change, or slightly worsened (Table 6).

<sup>37</sup> *Table 6* How has the attitude of Estonian and Latvian inhabitants toward Russia changed after 2014

Q: Estonians and Latvians attitudes toward inhabitants of Pskov region?	Males, percentage	Females, percentage
Improved significantly	2	1
Generally improved, but just slightly	8	6
Has not changed	33	34
Generally deteriorated, but slightly	33	30
Deteriorated significantly	17	21
Not sure	6	8

<sup>38</sup> According to the majority of respondents, the attitude of Russians towards Estonia and Latvia after the political events of 2014 did not change, or changed insignificantly. The share of women whose attitude towards Estonia and Latvia has not changed is higher than the share of men (Table 7).

<sup>39</sup> *Table 7* How has your attitude towards residents of Estonia and Latvia changed after 2014

Q: Your attitude towards Estonia and Latvia	Males, percentage	Females, percentage
Improved significantly	6	Null
Generally improved, but just slightly	16	10
Has not changed	54	78
Generally deteriorated, but slightly	3	10
Deteriorated significantly	16	Null
Not sure	5	1

<sup>40</sup> The answers to these questions confirm the previously stated assumption that the residents of the Pskov region see obstacles to the development of cooperation with neighboring countries in interstate rather than interpersonal relations.

<sup>41</sup> In the course of the survey, the nature of the respondents' attitude to the strengthening of NATO's military presence near the borders of the Pskov region, i.e., on the territory of neighboring countries, was clarified. The level of negative attitude to the strengthening of NATO's military presence near the Pskov region is highest among people of retirement age and lowest among people aged 30 to 59 years (Table 8). On the whole, a negative attitude towards NATO's military presence near the Pskov region prevails.



42 *Table 8* Attitude towards strengthening the NATO's military presence near the Pskov region

Military presence of NATO	18–29, percentage	30–59, percentage	60+, percentage
Positively	Null	2	Null
Indifferently	20	18	Null
Negatively	76	73	100
Not sure	5	7	Null

43 A similar age specificity is also present when respondents are answering the question whether the possible strengthening of the military presence of the Russian Federation in the region meets the interests of the region's residents. The older the generation, the stronger its militaristic sentiments (Table 9).

44 *Table 9* Attitude towards possible strengthening of the Russian military presence in Pskov region

Military presence of Russia	18–29, percentage	30–59, percentage	60+, percentage
Definitely, YES	29	33	38
More likely, YES	39	24	38
More likely, NO	22	22	5
Definitely, NO	10	18	14
Not sure	Null	3	5

45 **Conclusions.** A significant part of the respondents living in the border municipalities of the Pskov region is not aware of the current programs and facts of cross-border cooperation. Moreover, the absolute majority of them believe that such cooperation should be stimulated. As problems hindering the development of cross-border cooperation, the respondents highlight the political situation in Western countries and the lack of agreements between countries bordering Russia at the federal level.

46 The territorial mobility of the respondents is not high. As the purpose of their trips, they choose areas located not too far, and travel rarely, and this applies not only to trips abroad, but also to domestic Russian destinations.

47 The attitude of the respondents towards the residents of the neighboring countries almost does not depend on their political preferences, but the majority of the respondents speak out negatively about the strengthening of the military presence in the territory of the neighboring countries.

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## **Abstract**

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