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Borderland and border residents in the world's perspective: Look at yourself and the changing world

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## **Acknowledgement**

In the first place, my gratitude is addressed to the Sky. Indeed, our destinies determine and our Meetings predestine exactly there.

I thank for the meeting with interesting and smart people who not only brightened my life in Northern remote provinces, called the Russian-Norwegian borderland, but also helped me to understand better myself, to define the circle of my interests in the borderological and philosophical context.

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## **Abstract**

The author of this work is a border resident with 26 years of experience and the Soviet background, i.e. the perception of the border as a protective barrier.

My experience in the borderland coincided with the fall of the iron curtain and the establishment of human contacts across the border.

The discovery of a before unknown world, trying to understand "the other", awareness of myself in this "other" world occurred against the background of convergence and active dialogue between our countries.

Some later the cross-border cooperation became my job. Norwegian was the main reasons for it. My enthusiasm to Norwegian language grew up from interest to the culture and the wonderful people I was lucky to meet in Norway.

My attitude to the profession has become deeply personal. Each new project or meeting was seen as a small victory over the spirit of the cold war.

The issue of borders, their transformation in the era of globalization, the identity of border residents, the topic of the dialogue of cultures and civilizations was raised by a number of philosophical and political works.

What is a border in philosophical, political, anthropological and psychological aspect? What are its tasks in the modern world? Are there differences between border residents and those who live far from the border? How they perceive their territory and identify themselves? What is the role of dialogue in the borderland? These questions have become seriously interested me when I became a student of the master program of Borderology.

Currently, on the background of the changing political situation, the perception and position of ordinary people is of particular importance because in today's global world, almost every person becomes the subject of international relations.

But the subject is not free from influences. Often people become repeaters of ideas and opinions that they see on television and other media.

It illustrates by the events of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the ensuing destruction of interpersonal relationships on both sides of the Russian-Ukrainian border.

For me the conflict in Ukraine, relations between Russia and the West, their influence on Russian-Norwegian relations has become a real personal drama, comparable to the collapse of Kant's thought about the eternal peace.

How robust will be the human relationships here in the Russian-Norwegian border area on the background of dramatic world events and under the influence of the media?

Because just here East and West, Russia and NATO meet. If there are some kinds of threats for interpersonal relations in the borderland because of the international events? Can the border community to resist the negative trends?

This research has an attempt to answer these questions. It was carried out in 2014-2015, i.e. after beginning of the Ukrainian crises and aggravation in Russian-Norwegian relations.

We will hear the opinions of the Russian and Norwegian border residents who were so kindly to participate in questioning and interviews. We will use a lot of publications from local newspapers which reflect as well the position of local society. Hope these answers and our conclusions will help to new research on relations in the borderland. But first and foremost, they should be interesting to practitioners, people involved in cross-border cooperation, as well as politicians, in whose hands are often the fate of war and peace.

The author shares the views of two diplomats - former Consul General of Russia in Kirkenes Mikhail Noskov, who said in an interview to the "Sør-Varanger Avis" newspaper about the future of Russian-Norwegian relations: "I'm more of an optimist than a pessimist." (Olsen, 2015E) and former Consul of the Kingdom of Norway, Deputy head of the diplomatic mission of the Consulate General of Norway in Murmansk Gøril Johansen, who noted in an interview to the "Pechenga" newspaper: "But the strongest feature of the Russian-Norwegian relations in the North is the friendship between people. It is real and very strong" (Bazanov, 2015B).

**Key terms:** border, borderland, border resident, the political situation in the world, the new "cold" war, information warfare, local media, Borderland's human relations, the border dialogue, eternal peace.

## Table of content

Acknowledgement.....	i
Abstract .....	i
Table of content.....	iv
Introduction .....	1
1.0 Chapter 1 Family story or why I am so interested in eternal peace.....	4
1.1 My relationship with the border .....	7
2.0 Chapter 2 The change of the political situation in the world: relations between Russia and the West - a new cold war? .....	15
2.1 The Ukrainian Crises (Euromaidan). .....	16
2.2 The annexation of Crimea and The conflict in the South-East of Ukraine.....	16
2.3 Different approach of Russian, Ukrainian and Western media to coverage of political events - the information war. ....	17
3.0 Chapter 3 Extrapolation of the situation on the Russian-Norwegian borderland.....	20
3.1 Sharpening of the Russian-Norwegian bilateral relations and reaction of local communities to these events.....	20
3.2 The refusal of the Prime Minister of Norway to participate at the anniversary celebrations of Victory day in 2015 in Moscow. ....	26
4.0 Chapter 4 The attitude of the residents of the Russian-Norwegian border to the changing of political situation in the world.....	28
4.1 Questioning: target group, scope of study, research results. ....	28
4.2. Interviewing. ....	31
4.2.1 What is the borderland?.....	33
4.2.2 Who is a border resident?.....	37
4.2.3 Is there a common identity of the inhabitants of the Norwegian-Russian borderland?.....	42
4.2.4 Experience in the cooperation. ....	45
4.2.5 Borderland in changing .....	50
4.2.6 Perception of political events and their influence on cross-border relations. ....	57
4.2.7 Sources of information used by respondents and the degree of confidence in them. Does daily life in the borderland on the perception and evaluation of information? .....	68
4.2.8 How can relations develop in the borderland, given the political situation in the world? Can the border community influence on the political situation? .....	79
Conclusions .....	87
Bibliography.....	90
Appendix 1 .....	98
Appendix 2 .....	99

## Introduction

When I opted for the cross-border cooperation as a profession in 2006, the Russian-Norwegian relationship experienced its bloom. At that time the establishment of the Pomor economic zone between our countries was discussed at a serious level. It should have united Pechenga district and the municipality of Sør-Varanger into industrial and logistics conglomerate for development of the Shtokman gas condensate field in the Barents sea. We seemed to witness the new Golden Age.

At that time I was very lucky to work under the leadership of the Mayor of the Pechenga district Victor Mavrin. He was an independent person of philosophical and practical thinking. He observed the basis for economic, cultural and human development of the border regions in close cooperation. Economic cross-border relations could, in his opinion, provide sustainable relations between our countries. As the head of the border region he tried to implement the principle of subsidiarity, presented by Viggo Rossvær as the basis for eternal peace in his article "First Philosophy in the Border Zone" (2014).

Common views on the development of their municipalities provided solid foundation for good interpersonal relations with the mayor of the Sør-Varanger commune Linda Randall. Although Mavrin did not speak English, or Norwegian, and Linda Randall could not speak Russian, they found a common ground easily, because they thought alike.

That period of time was marked by the signing of "The Declaration of cooperation of twin-cities between Pechenga district and the municipality of Sør-Varanger". The document was a good example of interaction between local and central authorities as well. It expressed mutual will to develop cross-border cooperation in a new modern way. As Victor Mavrin noted in an interview to the Norwegian scholar Peter Haugseth "it was seen as a fundamental document, which meant the start of this twin cities relationship, and new border relations" (2014: 27)<sup>1</sup>. And the mayor of the Sør-Varanger commune, Linda Randall in the same interview gave the following comments: "This was something new, we shouldn't hold us to what we always did, otherwise there would be no revolutionary changes" (Haugseth 2014: 27).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "det ble sett på som et grunnleggende dokument, som betydde starten på dette tvillinbyforholdet, og nye grenserelasjoner" (Haugseth, 2014: 27)

<sup>2</sup> "Dette var noe nytt, vi skulle ikke holde oss til det vi alltid hadde gjort, da ville det jo ikke være noe revolusjonærende endring " (Haugseth, 2014: 27)

Though in 2009, there had been several successful seminars and roundtables, aimed at filling this concept with definite content, nothing revolutionary happened. But we can mention the visa-free regime established between our municipalities in 2012 as a consequence to these processes.

The reason why the concept of twin cities didn't get any further development rests, in my opinion, in deterioration between the West and Russia. As Peter Haugseth believes "we need more letters on twin cities from the national politicians"<sup>3</sup> (2014: 33), which were not followed from 2008.

Munich speech of the President Vladimir Putin on the 10<sup>th</sup> of February 2007 was an alarming signal for me. It became apparent that not everything was as simple as we would like to see. By that time border relations between Russia and Norway became very personal for me. As I could I tried to strengthen them with my weak forces. I was active at all meetings and seminars in "twin cities". Eleven years of my life are given to this activity. It may sound selfish, but I would not like to see my efforts were wasted.

In February 2014, right before the dramatic events in Ukraine, we conducted a cross-border seminar "Nikel and Kirkenes seen with each other's eyes". The event gathered about 80 Russian and Norwegian residents of border areas. The participants shared their experience as border residents and the perception of the neighboring towns. Meeting of border residents has caused a positive resonance in the local mass media (Olsen, 2014A; Vorobyova, 2014).

Mutual interest in each other and at the same time, lack of knowledge about the neighbor, is the main conclusion of the seminar in my opinion.

After that, when the crisis in Ukraine, my homeland, began and when the relations between Russia and Norway, Russia and the West began to deteriorate significantly, I thought how we, border inhabitants, can counter these negative trends. So the idea of the Dialogue border club appeared. The idea about the active border crossing, changing people's ideas about themselves and each other, lies at the basis of the concept of the club: "Having

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<sup>3</sup> "man trenger flere «tvillingbybrev» fra sentraltpolitisk hold" (Haugseth 2014:33)

crossed the border we have gained experience enough to be able to predict in some way what will happen next time we do the same. What interests us here is that when you first time cross the border, you meet yourself rather than the other. You bring with you your own imagination, your prejudgment and conceptualization etc. of what you will meet. Based on that you actually meet and judge what you see. In this tiny and often not lasting process you change, not radically, not even noticeably, but you change” (Methi 2014: 140).

Practically, it meant the opposing of human relations to the rhetoric of big-time politics, and growing of knowledge about the culture and language of each other through joint activities. We in the border area must put all our forces against the ambitious political moves and political tension. War is easy to trigger, but hard to stop. This situation is another argument for why it is important in between-human contact (Olsen, 2014 B,C,E).

Then I wanted to know what other people on the borderland thought about the global political situation. Do they share my concern and my desire to keep peace, as we are so different, concerning culture, traditions, education, political views? Was the Russian philosopher Pavel Florensky right to claim: “Where there is no difference, there may not be compound” (2003:51).

Whether my assumption that the borderlands, where the civilizations meet and clash (Huntington, 1996), the fate of war and peace takes place, and inner personal opinion influences at least something.

I believe that this subject should be studied, because humanity as a whole is balancing on the fragile brink, and the ambitions and irresponsibility of big-time politicians can lead the world to a real catastrophe.

## **1.0 Chapter 1 Family story or why I am so interested in eternal peace**

When I started writing the introduction to the master thesis, namely, changing of the political situation in the world, the aggravation of relations between Russia and the West, the new cold war, I remembered the events happened thirty-two years ago. It was the beginning of the Perestroika and the end of the cold war. I was 19 years old then, and I accepted all changes with great enthusiasm: the fall of the Berlin wall, the disappearance of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, the turn towards democracy in my own country, rapprochement with the West. The future promised to be bright. There seemed to be no signs of return to the old times. But after few decades the history is beginning to repeat. At that moment the whole life of my mom passed before my mind's eye. She experienced so many life shocks in the short historical period. How compressed is the time and the life of one generation, that seems to contain not only dramatic life-changing event, but, the whole history. Though there could be much more, if mom were still in life today.

Mother was born in the East Ukraine in 1925 and died in the North in Nikel, on the Norwegian border, in 2001.

Collectivization and famine in Ukraine in 1932-1933, that according to some estimates perished up to 3, 5 million people. Thus her life began. Mother and grandmother survived due to the fact that the grandmother's son-in-law was the chairman of the kolkhoz. Children's memory absorbs everything once and for all. Still there is the road before my eyes, which my little mother and grandmother was passing to the village where grandma's son-in-law was the chairman: turgid with hunger they went slowly by the road, and along the road sat similar unhappy people and asked for bread. Nobody gave bread. There was nothing to give. My mom and grandmother were fed up, took some food and went home by the same way. But now there were people, dead of starvation besides the road.

Then there was the war and famine again. They picked up meat of dead horses from the front line under the exploding shells. There were the Germans on quartering in the house and some troops of Kalmyks. Grandmother hid her daughter from them at the neighbours.

In 1943 mom was sent to Germany as Ostarbeiter. It happened only in the 1943, although she had been attempted to send several times before. But she wasn't going for medical reasons. She had lost an eye in childhood due to the slack of kindergarten teachers.

Mom was lucky because she was taken to the family of a simple Austrian farmer Anton Weidenberg (I still remember this name). These people took seventeen-year-old Ukrainian girl into their family as the eldest daughter. Considering her poor health, the mother would hardly have survived in a concentration camp or at industrial factory.

It is noteworthy that the Lord's Prayer (Our Father) was heard by me for the first time from my mother and it was in German. Anton Waidenberger's family was apparently a pious Catholic family. The favourite children's game was the Church service. Mother learned the Lord's Prayer exactly there because her father shared communist ideas, and religion was not welcomed in her family.

In our family album there is a photograph of a small house in the Alps where my mother lived, and it is kept as a relic. But there, among beautiful nature and wonderful people (my mom told me how her masters had received and fed her friends, the Ukrainians who worked in fascist families and were fed from the pig's, trough like the prodigal son) her biggest dream was to return home to her mother. One day when she was herding cows in the mountains, one of the cows lost the bell. And without it, the cow could have been lost as well. Mother was ashamed to return home without a bell (she had always had responsible attitude to work), and she guessed that if the bell was found, she would return home. Miraculously, but the bell was found in the mountains among the high grass.

When the war ended, her masters, who loved the hard-working Ukrainian girl, fluent speaking German, tried to persuade her to stay: "Where are you going, Helena? There is only ruin and famine in Russia now". Mum was a gentle and pliable to persuasion person. But that time she expressed inexorability: "Just home! I'd rather starve and eat oil cake".

In adolescence, I reproached my mother, "Mom, you could be the owner of a farm or gas station, as the grandmother of my classmate, remaining in Austria and then moved to America

and we would not be living in poverty." The only argument my mother was of that "Tanya, but then I you wouldn't have you". Yes, one can't argue with that!

In 50-ies my mother went to Western Ukraine for some recruitment. It required specialists and employees of various sectors of the economy. She worked at the dairy. Her experience there shaped my attitude to the Ukrainian nationalists - "The Banderivtsi". They came at night and killed doctors and teachers from Eastern Ukraine. Perhaps the origins of the current conflict in the East of Ukraine rest in that time, where the rejection of the nationalists and the fear of them passed down from generation to generation. Mom has never been the Communist party member and knew how to get along with different people. So she survived, but she told how her heart sank while waiting for those knocks at the window.

I'm not going to tell you about severe illnesses and personal tragedies that befell my mother on her life path, and go straight to the 90-s. Mom didn't feel any joy about the collapse of the Soviet Union and the separation of Ukraine from Russia, quite the contrary. Besides, we became the citizens of different States. When I moved her to the North in 1997, we also had to experience a lot of good and bad. Bad was associated with the state bureaucracy, good - with friendly attitude of the northerners.

Mom died in 2001. She received the Russian citizenship a few days after death.

When I think what a terrible blow could be a war in Ukraine, in the places where she was born and grew up, where our relatives lived or live, I'm even glad she didn't live to see these unthinkable days. Although, many Norwegians and Ukrainians step beyond their nineties.

But if mom was alive and relatively healthy, we would have certainly gone to Austria to see the place that promised the homecoming. And maybe would meet people who remained humane despite all historical dramas.

Perhaps, my family story is the ground of my reverent attitude to eternal peace.

## *1.1 My relationship with the border*

In my notion, as far as I can remember, the border has always seemed to me something unusual. It attracted me with its mystery and sense of danger. What is there behind this, beyond the limit? Perhaps there is something strange and hostile. But how interesting it would be to find myself on the other side!

Eventually my concept of a border has changed, enriched with new experience.

And if I was asked now, what the border is for you, I would reply, without hesitation, that it is meeting point. Meeting – attraction - dialog – new meeting. Meeting at the point where there is much of uncertain, but everything coincides, and therefore everything is possible. Moreover, the border has become a life axis for me, around which my professional and personal interests are formed. But let's relate the facts as they actually happened.

I was born and grew up in Ukraine, or more precisely to say, in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in a small town named Zmiev of Kharkov region not far from the border with another Soviet Socialist Republic - Russian Federation (RSFSR). Notwithstanding that both republics were soviet and socialist; there were some differences between them. And I, as a child, felt them. I remember our journeys to relatives “abroad” to Belgorod, the first Russian town, very well. It was a quite special feeling if I compare it with trip to our relatives, who were living in Ukraine in Donetsk, for instance. All the time I had such a feeling that might be formed by my mother that Russia is an extra country. The Russians are more kind, open and fair than us Ukrainians. The real Russian man is a man of universal sense. He can understand all and help all. In the same time we Ukrainians are more individuals, we want all to ourselves - “vse do sebe” (ukr), owners, and more disposed to corruption (how can we say now).

That time it was just 2 hours by train and approximately the same by bus. It was practically impossible to define where Ukraine ended and Russia started. “Mama, is it already Russia?”, - I looked at the window with impatience and asked my mother at every turn. I wanted to see visible evidence of our differences.

In this case I remember the narrative of the former Norwegian Consul General in Murmansk Øyvind Nordsletten about borderline between Norway and Sweden. One's his family was

travelling to Sweden. Their little son was asking his parents just like me where the border started. At one moment they crossed the little stream with a little rickety sign “Sverige”. The son was visibly disappointed. I am quite familiar with these feelings.

Indeed, I also imagined a border like something unusual. It was a kind of fortress bastion separating my beautiful socialist motherland from "damned burzhuins» (Gaidar, 1933). Anyway, I thought it was a place where the best human qualities are checked. In my childhood it was - the courage, bravery and willingness to sacrifice your live for the motherland. I read a lot of books about border and border guards. My favorite hero was the legendary Soviet frontier guard, the hero of the Soviet Union Nikita Karatzupa. When I played in the garden I imagined myself sitting in wait, to trace the German or American spies, just like Karatzupa with his dog Ingus. Karatzupa was distinguished by his ability to recognize lots of human and animal traces. He arrested 338 frontier transgressors, abolished 129 spies and saboteurs.

I was really going to find traces of spies, but every time I could not find the right thing in my own wardrobe, my mother said to me, “Tanya, how are you going to be a frontier guard”? Later, in my youth, I began to associate the concept of “border” in greater degree with cultural differences and human relations.

I got my first experience with foreigners when Perestroika began. I was a student in the Hotel College of “Intourist” system in Kiev. That time “Intourist” was a state-owned company that had a monopoly on reception of guests from abroad throughout the vast Soviet Union. It was the official state travel agency of the Soviet Union. It earned foreign currency for the country and was a very prestigious place. The competition for entering the “Intourist” College was about 25 persons for one place. Neither Kharkiv or Kyiv universities could boast with such a contest.

Besides specific subjects of hotel and tourism management, we also studied Spanish and English. As I remember I was attracted not only by possibility to study two foreign languages, but also by the opportunity to practice them while working, that is to speak by international communication. Since the Soviet Union was completely closed state (our frontier was on the padlock thanks to the brave frontier guards among other things), free contacts with foreigners, to put it mildly, were not welcomed. Working in international

tourism was a real opportunity to get in touch with the outside world. I was not interested in buying of import clothes from foreign tourists and then reselling it for a higher price (it was called “fartsovka” that time). I did not intend to escape abroad. But I was very sincerely interested in people, foreigners. Who are they? I remember very well my first meeting with foreigners-Polish, Spanish, English, American, German, Italians. They seemed to be aliens from another planet for us then. I had a great interest in talking with them and did not feel anything hostile. It was like opening a new world to yourself. They were like we, however, different from us by language, clothing, and behavior. They were dressed better, behaved more relaxed, but still quite cautious as if they were afraid of something. I think there were reasons for that. For example, I was shocked when one of the managers in a hotel in Moscow copied addresses and phone numbers from one guest’s notebook. We, trainees, were on the guard in the corridor at that moment. Certainly, we were taught in the college that we, future “Intourist” employees, would be fighters of the ideological front and would bring of the communist ideas to the foreign citizens. In our curriculum it meant that the history of the CPSU, political economy and the classics of Marxism-Leninism was given much more time than foreign languages. Then in the “Intourist” hotel it proved that almost no one at the reception could speak foreign languages. But these hotels had the exclusive right to receive foreign guests. Corruption flourished in full bloom. It was practically impossible to be employed there without having friendship or better relationships with management of the hotel or paying to the right person a very solid sum. At least, it was like that in Kharkov in late of 80s. I had only mother, a person with a child’s soul who could not imagine how to bribe. So I didn’t get any job in the “Intourist” hotel.

But I managed to get the job in the wonderful place next to Yalta in Crimea. It was a very simple tourist hotel which was owned and managed by Kiev military district. There was absolutely no need to the classics of Marxism-Leninism or foreign languages. But one should exercise a very important skill - to execute stupid orders of the chief, naval retired captain, and to be able to survive in the prestigious resort of Yalta with the minimum wage in the USSR of 70 rubles. Servicemen and their family members were the biggest part of our guests. Of course, there were no foreigners at all. There, in this hotel, I was convinced that military service at the border was not my cup of tea.

Crimea is worth mentioning because it's the border location. The marine border with Turkey passed there. Sevastopol was the base of Black Sea navy and restricted area. To get there you had to have a special permit. It was also forbidden to be on some beaches and swim at night time. As Josef Mandelstam, the famous Russian poet once said about Crimea "where Russia broke down to the Black Sea, dark and unknown" (1991:62).

Same for me, this border was a kind of a steep cliff and a turning point in my life.

I moved from the North coast of the Black Sea to the Southern coast of the Barents, to the Russian-Norwegian border. Only love can make a person to commit such an abrupt climate and life jump.

In Soviet times, the main reason for moving to the Far North, in particular to Nikel, were enthusiasm (just after the war) and money, of course. Most of people, who came here to make money, did not see this place as a permanent residence. Here it was possible to earn good money and then move to the middle or to the south of Russia, Belarus or Ukraine. In addition to increased salary (Northern allowances), there was the area of the better supply of consumer goods. The Soviet Government underlined the strategic importance of the nickel production to the Soviet state. The border zone was closed here just because of that too. Friends and relatives from other regions of the USSR had to get a special permit to visit Pechenga district. But it gave an extra sense of safety to people, as I understand it now. Many of old Nikel inhabitants get nostalgic while recollecting those times. All Nikel residents lived like one happy young family. Doors of flats were not locked, and very often several families were living in one flat. There was no crime. Earnings were significantly higher than in the south, holidays two times longer than in the south. Once in two years the state cover travel expenses for the family. One could get a free health resort voucher to the Black Sea resort in the Caucasus or in Crimea. The northerners hardly limited themselves while having rest in the South even without any vouchers. For us, the USSR was like the whole universe, surrounded by hostile elements.

My situation was neither too exceptional nor quite typical at the same time. My reason for moving was the wish to make a family. In other words, love led me to the real border I dreamt about in my childhood. And it was love that kept me here once.

Although when I began my life in the North, I'd got too little interest in border. I was keen on love, studies and struggle with acclimatization. That time I was working in the children library.

In 1997-1998 the intensification of cooperation between the Nikel and Kirkenes libraries took place. At that time, however, as now, very few librarians spoke foreign languages. And those who spoke preferred to work with texts and did not feel confident to talk with foreign colleagues. Then my imperfect English and communication skills with foreigners came in handy. Here I would like to add that most of Russians are rather afraid and feel too shy to communicate with foreigners. Not everyone dares to contact easily. I'm by nature devoid of this fear; on the contrary, my interest immediately pushes me to communicate. Language is not an aim in itself, for me it is just a key to a person. Besides verbal we have a lot of nonverbal means of communication. Smile, voice, eyes can tell more to a person of any nationality than millions of words. The most important thing is the attitude towards the person. The main thing is not to be afraid to be funny. If you are learning something new, you become a child in some degree. And a child is open-minded, funny, heart-stirring, and defenseless. "If you don't change and become like a child, you never get into the kingdom of heaven (Matt 18:3, New International version). And you will never learn a foreign language. So, children were my first Norwegian teachers.

That time we implemented new forms of work in our children library. And we organized an amateur puppet-theater called Books and Dolls. I was a "stage director", a scriptwriter and an actor. My colleagues, the really Russian craftswomen made scenery, sewed and knitted costumes for dolls. They were excellent in playing dolls too. We staged Russian folk tales and works of children's authors. Creative work was in full swing, and we were noticed by public and thanks to the activity and contacts of our director, who spoke English well, we got an offer to long-term (10 days) tour to Northern Norway. It was in 1997, when my first independent journey abroad took place. In our group of three persons only I spoke English. But since the Norwegian preschoolers did not speak English, we recorded the texts of the performances on a tape cassette in that Norwegian, which we believed to be right. After endless repetitions, the phrases on the tape coincided with moves of the puppet characters from Russian fairy tales.

However, in real life everything turned out to be more complicated. Bad quality of recording, translation faults and accent had led to the fact that the tales taken with such enthusiasm by Russian children were not understood by Norwegian ones. In the middle of the tour (as it came to its southern point to Mosjøen) I realized that we needed something to do. And then in kindergarten I started talking with Norwegian children. There were a lot of toys there. I pointed to the house with a question in my eyes, and the children joyfully answered: "Dette er et hus!". "This is a house!" - They shouted. "And this?" - I pointed at the next subject. "This is a room, this is a table, this is a girl and this is a boy," - they vied with each other in telling. Norwegian children were quite enjoyed by teaching an adult Russian lady who did not know obvious things. All in all the contact began. And, in addition, I got few dozen of Norwegian words as a present from the world's best teachers. Then during all the shows I went to kids and we played together in the shown tale: "Mouse draws for the cat, the cat draws for the dog, the dog draws for the granddaughter, the granddaughter draws for the grandma, the grandma draws for granddad, the granddad draws for the turnip" - "Musa drar etter kata, kata drar etter bikja, bikja drar etter daterdatera, daterdatera drar etter bestemora, bestemora drar etter bestefaren, bestefaren drar etter nepa". Our Russian "Turnip" turned out to be very similar to the Norwegian song "The old Man and the old Woman" - "Guben og gamla". Yes, although my first personal encounter with Norway was the strongest cultural shock for me and a complete collapse of my Soviet stereotypes about "abroad", it gave me the first and most important lesson for my future work:

1. Children and people are same everywhere
2. In our deep folk roots, expressed in folklore, we are also quite similar.

Thank you, my dear little Norwegian teacher!

Then the year of 2003 came, the year of my personal living crisis.

Having achieved everything possible in my profession as a children's librarian, after 13 years of creative work with books and children, I left the work I adored, for just going nowhere. It seemed to me that there was nothing new I would do here. I had been learning Norwegian for 6 years at that time and the demand for it was huge in the Norwegian-Russian border area, so I did not worry for my future. I had a feeling of incredible freedom and inspiration. Apparently, that was the time to cross the border seriously.

By some chance I got a job in the Culture and youth affairs Department of the Pechenga district administration. Many years of previous experience let me working with young people. But at the same time, the district administration involved me to border cooperation more and more, considering my language skills.

So my childhood dream about the border came true. God works in mysterious ways. But fortunately I don't have to hunt down the spies. I am a border guard vice versa. I don't search enemies, but find friends, don't close, but open, don't separate, but unite.

One of the most important moments in my life was the meeting with an interesting woman living on the Norwegian side of the border. It was meeting May Griff By. I'm absolutely sure that if I had not met her, I would have never realized the essence of human relations in the borderland and would never understand what kind of people the Norwegians are. At that time, when we met, she was an advisor on international affairs in the Sør-Varanger commune. Now she's a happy pensioner. May attended Russian courses, so she could speak Russian a little. She used all her Russian vocabulary with great joy, when the delegations from Russia were coming. Moreover, her attitude to Russians was always extremely friendly, regardless of the guest status. She greeted and treated our drivers like her personal guests. They had never met such relations in Russia. I don't know any of Russians who would not have kept warm memories of meeting her. Let me remind that the Russians are often confused by meeting foreigners and don't feel free. But her sincere attitude, open smile and a bit of Russian words could win any heart.

At the same time May has always been firm and inexorable in discussing of fundamental cooperation topics. And her political preferences were always by western democratic point. May is an incredibly strong person. At that time she had to struggle with the illness, but she never complained. She admires the sea, is crazy about fishing, and likes nature. It seems to me I noticed some glimpses of the ancient Vikings' women in her eyes when she looked at the sea.

For me she became reliability, responsibility and honesty itself, characteristics, I met upon among other Northern Norwegians. Let's address to the Russian writer Mikhail Prishvin, who was travelling in North Russia and Norway in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He

wrote in his essays' book «For the magical small round loaf ": «There is something, why Norway is dear to us and why you can find the little corner for it in the heart besides to the mind. The same, but in other words I was told a lot by Russian pomors (coast-dwellers). Our Russian sailors meet the British and the Germans, but always give preference to the Norwegians: the best people are the Norwegians, I've heard hundreds of times" [1987:307].

I could entrusted my innermost thoughts to my colleague and receive some wise advice. We have always supported each other. As a younger and less experienced I wanted to achieve some extraordinary results very quickly. I was often disappointed when it was going not as we would like. "Don't worry, Tatiana, we are working for future generations." - she said.

Fate has given me a lot of meetings and good friends on the other side of the border. A portrait gallery of wonderful Norwegians rises before my eyes, when I am hearing that on the other side of the border our enemies live or when I come across with Russophobe's mood in Norway.

The growing anxiety for the future of human relations here in the Russian-Norwegian borderland and the changing political situation was the reason to choose the topic of my master thesis, since the border area has become my second motherland.

I share wise words of the Norwegian Explorer and humanist Thor Heyerdahl, who wrote: "One of the most useful lessons the life had taught me, is that human remains human, whether he is a Norwegian, Polynesian, American, Italian or Russian, whenever and wherever he lives - in stone or atomic age, under palm trees or at the edge of the glacier. Good and evil, courage and fear, intelligence and stupidity does not recognize geographical boundaries; they are in every human... We are all people, we should remember this and strive for friendship, understanding and cooperation, so that mankind can survive on our small planet, correcting all that was ruined in centuries due to lack of knowledge and respect for neighbours" (sited in Musskiy 2008-2017)

## **2.0 Chapter 2 The change of the political situation in the world: relations between Russia and the West - a new cold war?**

It is rather difficult to make a single-value estimate for present political situation in the world. But still it is necessary to do as this situation is not only the background of Russian-Norwegian relations in the border-zone but also has increasing influence upon their development.

The aim of this thesis is to find out the attitude of the border-zone residents (and the author is among them) towards the changing political situation in the world. The characteristics established will contribute to this aim.

Many Russian and international experts estimate the relationship between Russia and the West as materially adverse.

“By all estimates the relations between the Russian Federation and the European Union have reached the lowest point. What both sides saw 20 years ago as an important and mutually beneficial project has been ruined by the military and diplomatic crisis concerning Ukraine. That crisis was, in turn, the result of a long period of stagnation and mutual misunderstanding” (Bordachev 2016:3).

“The relationship between Russia and the West is at the freezing point” (Sæther, 2014).

We will not go deeply into global roots. It is, probably, the eternal opposition between East and West: “Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet, Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat” (Kipling, 1886). Or maybe we are dealing with a clash of civilizations predicted by Samuel Huntington (1996).

Present cooling in relations was not sudden; it had been preceded by a row of global events and inner processes in Russia and Europe. The President of Russia Vladimir Putin stated openly these growing controversies during the Conference on security in Munich on the 10<sup>th</sup> of February 2007. Some experts compare this speech to the Fulton speech by W. Churchill, which began the Cold war. “To some degree he did the same as Churchill – proclaimed disagreement with existing status quo. Putin stated that Russia will no longer stand the West

bids defiance to her interests and objections (for example, by expansion of NATO, division of Yugoslavia, recognition of independence of Kosovo); the united Euro-Atlantic space mustn't be built in such a way" (Arbatov, 2016).

"The declaration in Munich is sometimes compared to Fulton speech of Winston Churchill. If it is correct than only in one point: the Munich speech was the forerunner of the Cold war 2.0. It was a grave sign of eroding of post-soviet world, and the story, which end was proclaimed by Francis Fukuyama in 1989, is returning. Another speech has grown from the Munich's one. It is its sequel and logical ending – the declaration on the Crimea referendum from the 18<sup>th</sup> of March 2014. There appeared national traitors and the "fifth column". Munich found its end in Crimea and Donbass." (Kolesnikov, 2017).

### ***2.1 The Ukrainian Crises (Euromaidan).***

But still there has not been any open opposition during next 10 years. The political crisis in Ukraine in 2013-2014 was the detonator to it due to the decision of the former government to stop integration into the EU. This step caused massive protests in the centre of Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities, which got the name of "Euromaidan" in mass media and social nets on analogy with events of 2004. As a result, Victor Yanukovich was removed from the presidential post and nationalists' forces came to authority. A row of decisions made by new government (voting on repeal of law on principals of state language policy, preparing of the lustration law) caused mobilization of big part of ethnic Russians against new authorities of Ukraine. It was strengthened by informational overview of the events and radical bans of some politicians.

### ***2.2 The annexation of Crimea and The conflict in the South-East of Ukraine.***

Russia executed an operation of annexation of Crimea as a countermeasure. The conflict in the East of Ukraine burst out as a reaction upon these events as the citizens are historically and economically more connected with Russia.

The attitude to the Russian language, spoken by the majority in the East of Ukraine, played the biggest if not the critical role here. In the book “Power of national identity” G. Schopflin (2000) as cited by Krikhtova (2014) writes that ethnic group can identify itself by huge number of meanings (history, territory, mentality), but the language is a central marker of national identity. The language is especially important for citizens of Eastern Europe. Their ethnicity is determined by the language, which is more important than self-identity and citizenship.

The report of the Norwegian newspaper “VG”, made in the war-torn region, speaks about the same: “But residents of these rural communities, they are attempting to protect, hold to a great extent with the pro-Russian forces. Ninety per cent of the villagers don’t want us to be here. They hold with the Russians and don't realize the value in keeping our country Ukrainian”, press-secretary of the battalion states to VG (Thorp Bjørnstad and Henden, 2017).

Pro-Russian activists in Donetsk and Kharkov wanted to hold the referendum along the Crimean pattern. The Ukrainian authorities decided to engage a weapon and prevent “the Crimean scenario”.

Thorp Bjørnstad and Henden (2017) present the following facts about the conflict, referring to NTB:

“Military conflict began in Ukraine in the middle of April in 2014, when pro-Russian separatists rebelled in the East of the country. Since that time about 10 thousand people, half of them were civilians, were killed. About 1, 3 millions of citizens of this region had to flow. 3, 1 millions of citizens of the Eastern Ukraine need humanitarian aid. In September 2014 the parties – the Kiev government and pro-Russian separatists in the East – signed an agreement, which would have to stop the conflict. The agreement wasn’t fulfilled. And the following agreements either. As well as the “Minsk” agreements were also not executed”.

### ***2.3 Different approach of Russian, Ukrainian and Western media to coverage of political events - the information war.***

Events in Ukraine and Crimea flooded first media pages. But their estimation is poles apart in Russian, Ukrainian and Western mass media. The real information war burnt out. “Information warfare has become, alongside geo-economics (sanctions and counter-

sanctions), one of the principal battlefields in the new confrontation between Russia and the West” (Trenin, 2016).

So on central Russian channels the events of the Maidan are represented as an anti-government coup supported by the United States and the European Union, which led to the overthrow of the legitimate authorities. In Ukrainian and Western media, the same event is presented as a revolution of dignity, displacing the corrupt pro-Russian government of Viktor Yanukovich.

Also, the annexation of Crimea is interpreted completely opposite. The Russian side represents it as a restoration of historical justice on the basis of the Crimea people’s free will in order to avoid bloodshed. In the eyes of the West, it is the annexation using armed forces ("green" people) and a flagrant violation of international law.

The conflict in the South-East Ukraine, which is continuing even nowadays and took many thousands of lives, not mentioning material losses, is presented by the Russian media as a struggle of militia not wanting to submit to the nationalist government of Kiev. Ukrainian and Western media represent it as a hybrid war of Russia, supporting separatists.

Biased, often propagandist methods of news management, which input Russophobia and anti-Ukrainian moods, influenced the society in a dramatic way. There are several occasions when families broke apart because of political views of spouses. Political talks among relatives and close friends ended in quarrels. Ordinary people, who can’t take information critically, personified this opposition and transferred negative attitude from the politics to their relatives. The person loses individuality and identifies himself as part of definite political group. Interpersonal relations are built on the pattern “we- they”, substituting “I- you”. The opponents stop viewing close ones as definite people. The person becomes a bearer of definite ideology, which is alien and hostile. To my mind these personal losses are the most severe, as they create stereotypes and the image of enemy. Such wounds are very slow or even impossible to heal.

Current events fully coincide with the model of media influence on the society, presented in the paper by Ball-Rokeach, S. and DeFleur (1976). As per the authors, as higher the level of personal importance of the information in media is, as stronger it influences the social mind. Moreover this dependence becomes stronger if the society can't be called trouble-free and there is some crisis in it. In case when society is torn by inner contradictions, it is very easy to neutralize discontent of citizens by the image of outer enemy in media.

In this research it is crucially important to examine the way the Ukrainian crisis echoed in Russian-Norwegian border-zone and interpersonal relations.

### **3.0 Chapter 3 Extrapolation of the situation on the Russian-Norwegian borderland.**

Here it should be mentioned that for Norway and Norwegians this conflict, though connected with the nearest Eastern neighbour, is something far. For Russians in return, namely for the citizens of Pechenga district, it is a deeply personal thing. Many people, living in Russian border zone, have roots in Ukraine; they communicate with relatives and friends there, and have the information firsthand. Moreover, in summer of 2014 308 refugees came from war-flooded Donetsk and Lugansk regions of Ukraine to Pechenga district. They got all necessary assistance (Olsen, 2014F, J).

#### ***3.1 Sharpening of the Russian-Norwegian bilateral relations and reaction of local communities to these events.***

The annexation of Crimea and conflict in the South-East of Ukraine led to vast aggravation in Russian-Norwegian interstate relations. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway stated its position as follows:

“We cannot fail to respond to Russia's unacceptable behaviour towards Ukraine. Norway has reacted by condemning the illegal annexation, reducing contacts at the political level, suspending military cooperation and joining restrictive measures introduced by the EU and a number of other countries. In our reaction we stand together with our allies and our partners in Europe” (Brende, 2015).<sup>4</sup>

The Norwegian government puts the full blame on Russia for everything happening in Ukraine:

“Through its actions in Ukraine, Russia has violated these (international) rules. Norway has not turned its back to Russia. It is Russia that has turned its back to basic values” (Brende, 2015).<sup>5</sup>

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Vi kan ikke unnlate å reagere på Russlands uakseptable fremferd overfor Ukraina. Norge har reagert ved å fordømme den ulovlige annekasjonen, redusere kontaktene på politisk nivå, suspendere det militære samarbeidet og slutte opp om restriktive tiltak som EU og en rekke andre land har innført. Vi står sammen med våre allierte og våre partnere i Europa i vår reaksjon (Brende, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Gjennom sine handlinger i Ukraina har Russland brutt disse (*internasjonale*) reglene. Norge har ikke vendt Russland ryggen. Det er Russland som har vendt ryggen til grunnleggende verdier (Brende, 2015).

Norway actively joins the Western sanctions:

“Despite massive international pressure, Russia has not demonstrated any willingness to change its unlawful course in Ukraine. Norway will therefore introduce strengthened restrictive measures that are equivalent to those introduced by the EU of the 12<sup>th</sup> of September” (Norway. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014, para 3).

Norway freezes military contacts with Russia:

“Military bilateral cooperation has been suspended since March 2014, since the illegal annexation of Crimea and destabilization in Eastern Ukraine. The Government has considered the issue again and decided to continue the suspension of all bilateral military activities until the end of 2015” (Norway. Ministry of Defense, 2014, para 3).

Norway has frozen cooperation with Russia at the highest political level as well. In particular, meetings of the Ministers of ecology were called off almost at once after the conflict in Ukraine.

“The meeting would have been held at the Moscow Ministry of Natural Resources next week. Climate and Environment Minister Trine Sundtoft canceled Tuesday's participation. Russia was informed on the same day that Norway would not attend the meeting” (Olsen, 2014D).

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The Norwegian position towards Russia in a new political situation was stated by the minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway Børge Brende during the Kirkenes conference in February, 2015. In his speech the Minister lashed out at Russia's actions in Crimea and Ukraine, blaming it of violation of international law, restrictions of public freedom, thus proving Norway's joining to Western sanctions and economic losses of local business:

“Russia, with a border of just a few kilometers from here, is also the Russia that uses military power against its neighbors in Ukraine. Norway cannot accept such a policy. We must distance ourselves from Russia's actions. Defending the principle of

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<sup>6</sup> “Møtet skulle etter planen vært holdt i Naturressursministeriet i Moskva i neste uka. Klima- og miljøminister Trine Sundtoft avlyste tirsdag sin deltakelse. Russland fikk samme dag beskjed om at Norge ikke stiller til møtet” (Olsen, 2014D).

international law that justice should be preceded before power is fundamental, not least in a northern area perspective.

We face Russia not letting its own civil society to operate freely. It refuses to cooperate with organizations, including those here in Norway. Several of you have learned this here in the hall.

Alone, Norway cannot do much that is noticed. What we can do is to stand with close-up countries - those countries that share our democratic values and are willing to defend them.

Therefore, we must agree to the restrictive measures against Russia, even if it is not good for ourselves” (Brende, 2015).<sup>7</sup>

The Governor of Murmansk region – Marina Kovtun, represented Russia at the conference. Murmansk region is the only one Russian region, which has the border and which maintains economic, cultural and friendly connections with Norway during many years. (The first agreement of friendship between Murmansk region (USSR) and Finnmark (Norway) was signed in 1988, and in October 2014 the new agreement was signed).

It is possible that the Minister didn't take these facts into consideration, for his speech was obviously addressed to central authorities, and not to the head of the region with friendly attitude to Norway. In reply the Governor Marina Kovtun was forced to change her speech on social and economic development of Murmansk region and answer the Minister:

“ - I cannot answer following the position of the Minister, because it is the privilege of the Foreign Minister. But I can answer as a Russian, and as a woman with a Ukrainian surname, I am married to the Ukrainian, we have children who speak two languages - Russian and Ukrainian- equally good. For 33 years they have spent every summer in Ukraine and we have many relatives and friends there and experience this as a personal tragedy. Marina Kovtun drew up the many refugees from Ukraine who came to Murmansk:

- They have come to Murmansk, to the Arctic, from Ukraine. To rescue from bombing, death and hunger.

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<sup>7</sup> “Det Russland vi har grense til bare noen kilometer herfra, er også det Russland som bruker militær makt mot sitt nabofolk i Ukraina. Norge kan ikke akseptere en slik politikk. Vi må ta avstand fra Russlands handlinger. Å forsvare folkerettens prinsipp om at rett skal gå foran makt er grunnleggende viktig, ikke minst i et nordområdeperspektiv.

Vi står overfor et Russland som nekter sitt eget sivile samfunn å operere fritt. Som nekter dem å samarbeide med organisasjoner blant annet her i Norge. Flere av dere her i salen har fått erfare dette.

Alene kan ikke Norge gjøre mye som merkes. Det vi kan gjøre, er å stå sammen med nærstående land – de landene som deler våre demokratiske verdier og er villige til å forsvare dem.

Derfor må vi stå sammen om de restriktive tiltakene mot Russland selv om det svir også for oss selv” (Brende, 2015).

Russia has not taken anything that did not belong to Russia. We have taken back the territory that has been Russian throughout the history. And Crimea has returned by its own will, said the Murmansk governor and also drew eastern Ukraine into the picture. She pointed out that fascism rises again, with Nazi and fighting brother to brother. 70 years ago we fought fascism. Now it's back, and for Russia it is a bigger tragedy than for Europe, Kovtun thought and added that situation "hurts my heart" (Olsen, 2015 C).<sup>8</sup>

For the first time such a topical political issue was stated at the Kirkenes conference and put into the agenda of Barents cooperation. The situation became even worse when the Minister left the audience during the speech of Russian Governor without any notice as it had been done before when the conference had been opened by important guests (the Queen, Crone-prince or ministers). The tone, rhetoric and behavior of the Minister evoked no enthusiasm among the audience (the author was a participant of the conference). My Norwegian colleagues were embarrassed by Minister's behavior and apologized for him. I'm not the supporter of annexation of territories according the Crimean pattern. But there was a feeling the Mr. Brende wasn't interested in the audience's opinion. The words of the minister drew a harsh reaction of local citizens:

"The sharpest one in criticism was Geir Thorbjørnsen from Barel, who believed that Foreign Minister Børge Brende had badly seen his audience at the Kirkenes Conference when his speech was addressed to Moscow. All the debaters agreed that the problem is not in the North, but on the contrary, it is here where one has an opportunity to come up with a solution, it is here where the most positive contact between Norway and Russia takes place. Here, it is "business as usual," as several of the debaters pointed out"-

as Yngve Grønvik, the journalist of "Sør-Varanger Avis" stated in his report from trans-border cafe«Løsninger ligger i nord» (Solutions is located in the north) during the Barents Spektakel (2015 A).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> -Jeg kan ikke svare på samme måte som hans posisjon, for det er utenriksministerens privilegium. Men jeg kan svare som russisk menneske, og som kvinne med et ukrainsk etternavn, jeg er gift med en ukrainer, har barn som snakker to språk like godt, russisk og ukrainsk. De har tilbrakt hver sommer i 33 år i Ukraina, og har mange slektninger og venner der, og opplever dette som en personlig tragedie.

Marina Kovtun trakk fram de mange flyktninger fra Ukraina som har kommet til Murmansk.

- De har kommet til Murmansk, til Arktis, fra Ukraina. For å berge seg fra bombing, døden og sulten.

Russland har ikke tatt noe som ikke tilhørte Russland. Vi har tatt tilbake territorium som har vært russisk gjennom hele historien. Og Krim har kommet tilbake av egen vilje, sa Murmansk-guvernøren og trakk også fram Øst-Ukraina. Hun poengterte at fascismen reiser seg igjen, med nazikors og kamp bror mot bror. For 70 år siden bekjempet vi fascismen. Nå er den tilbake, og for Russland en større tragedie enn for hele Europa, mente Kovtun og la til at situasjonen; "for meg gir et såret hjerte"(Olsen, 2015 C).

<sup>9</sup> "Kvassast i kritikken var Geir Thorbjørnsen fra Barel, som mener at utenriksminister Børge Brende hadde sett sitt publikum dårlig an på Kirkeneskonferansen når talen hans var rettet til Moskva. Alle debattantene var enige om at problemet ikke ligger i nord, snarere tvert imot, det er her man har mulighet for å komme til en løsning,

Here we bring some extracts from the editorial by Randi Andreassen in the same newspaper (2015 B):

“In Kirkenes on Tuesday and Wednesday, the Foreign Minister Børge Brende has repeated and repeated to all questions both about the sanctions and about Russia's request for raising the airline in Tanafjorden that "history will judge us if we did not react against Russia's violation of international law in Ukraine". He is absolutely right. As a good neighbour, it is of course our duty to say when the neighbour does something wrong. Something else would just be missing. But the relationship between Norway and Russia is not just about the West and Russia. It is very much about how we have managed, - managing and shall manage our close neighbourhood, our common border history and not least fate community in the north as liberation 70 years ago gave us . The common destiny, which Norway as a nation, should not only dispose of for the benefit of Norway and its people, but also to understand its importance. Especially for the people in the North and ultimately for the whole country. This also cannot be repeated too often.”<sup>10</sup>

Here in the North there is an unspoken rule when partners can have different political views but they are not discussed and are of course not imposed to partners. In a year the speech of the Minister at the Kirkenes conference was much softer. The newspaper “Sør-Varanger Avis” speaks as follows:

“Last year strong reactions came locally after Børge Brende initially had a fairly hard tone from the speaker’s platform at the Kirkenes conference, and so had left the hall before the Murmansk Governor Marina Kovtun finished her speech. Brende used much time to point out the importance of the cross border cooperation this year. He stated several times that it is important to maintain the contact also at difficult times, if one is going to get results. He focused on the existing opportunities for collaboration, and pointed out that the one as a neighbour must be able to live with disagreement. On the questions from the Finnmarken on press-conference after his

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det er her den mest positive kontakten mellom Norge og Russland foregår. Her er det «business as usual», som flere av debattantene påpekte”(Grønvik, 2015A).

<sup>10</sup> I Kirkenes tirsdag og onsdag har utenriksminister Børge Brende gjentatt og gjentatt til alle spørsmål både om sanksjonene og om Russlands forespørsel om heving av flyvraket i Tanafjorden at «historien vil dømme oss om vi ikke stod sammen mot Russlands brudd på folkeretten i Ukraina». Det har han helt rett i. Som god nabo er det selvsagt også vår plikt å si ifra når naboen gjør noe galt. Noe annet skulle også bare mangle. Men forholdet mellom Norge og Russland handler ikke bare om Vesten og Russland. Det handler i svært stor grad også om hvordan vi har forvaltet, - forvalter og skal forvalte vårt nære naboskap, vår felles grensehistorie og ikke minst det skjebnefellesskapet i nord som frigjøringen for 70 år siden ga oss. Et skjebnefellesskap Norge som nasjon skal og må forvalte til beste for Norge og det norske folk, men også forstå betydningen av. Spesielt for befolkningen i nord, men også til syvende og sist for hele nasjonen. Det kan heller ikke gjentas for ofte (Andreassen, 2015B).

speech he stated that the dispute over Ukraine and Crimea is not a bilateral issue between Norway and Russia, but an issue between Europe, the USA and Russia.

The foreign minister believed the autumn refugees-situation, where entry of refugees from Russia came to an end in November, is one of several examples of Norway to succeed in their cooperation with Russia, also at times characterized by controversy within the central questions "We must cooperate and we must have a dialogue" (Olsen, 2016 A).<sup>11</sup>

But the Governor Marina Kovtun doesn't participate at the Conference for the second year in a row. Here we bring the comment of "Sør-Varanger Avis" above the title of "Governor again doesn't come to the Kirkenes Conference":

"Brende, had very hard outcomes against Russia during the conference in 2014 (*it was in 2015*) when Marina Kovtun was presented. Something in turn led to intense reactions from the business community in Sør-Varanger, which believed that for the sake of cooperation it had been smarter to keep a nicer tone. Børge Brende muted on the 8<sup>th</sup> of February. Next year, he held the conference's opening lecture again, but then the first Vice Governor Alexey Tyukavin was presented in the audience" (Olsen, 2016 C).<sup>12</sup>

Maybe it is just a coincidence, but the circumstances resemble sanctions and counter-sanctions. It's a pity that dialogue, trust and self-respect which have been elaborated during two decades here in the North, can be broken by hard and plain-spoken politics as well as by harsh words of the person who didn't have much connection to this and had little notion of border-zone issues.

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<sup>11</sup> I fjor kom det sterke reaksjoner lokalt etter at Børge Brende hadde først en rimelig hard tone fra talerstolen på Kirkenes-konferansen, og så forlot salen før Murmansk-guvernør Marina Kovtun var ferdig med sitt innlegg. Brende brukte i år langt mer tid på å påpeke viktigheten av det grensekryssende samarbeidet. Han fremholdt flere ganger at det er viktig å opprettholde kontakten også i vanskelige tider, dersom en skal få resultater. Han fokuserte på de mulighetene som finnes for samarbeid, og poengterte at en som naboer må kunne leve med uenighet. På spørsmål fra Finnmarken på pressemøtet etter innlegget påpekte han også at uenigheten om Ukraina og Krim ikke er en bilateral sak mellom Norge og Russland, men en sak mellom Europa, USA og Russland. Utenriksministeren mente høstens asylsituasjon, der innreisen av asylanter over Storskog fra Russland tok slutt i november, er et av flere eksempler på at Norge lykkes i sitt samarbeid med Russland også i tider preget av uenighet i sentrale spørsmål. Vi må samarbeide og vi må ha en dialog (Olsen, 2016A).

<sup>12</sup> "Brende hadde veldig harde utfall mot Russland under konferansen i 2014 da Marina Kovtun var til stede. Noe som igjen førte til krasse reaksjoner fra næringslivet i Sør-Varanger som mente det for samarbeidet sin del hadde vært smartere å holde en penere tone. Børge Brende dempet seg da sist 8. februar neste år holder han igjen konferansens åpningsforedrag, men da altså med første viseguvernør Aleksej Tjukavin til stede i salen" (Olsen, 2016C).

### ***3.2 The refusal of the Prime Minister of Norway to participate at the anniversary celebrations of Victory day in 2015 in Moscow.***

The PM of Norway Erna Solberg thought it inappropriate to participate at the anniversary celebrations of Victory day in Moscow. The explanation was published on the site of the Government of Norway:

“We have respect that this is Russia's celebration of victory in the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War and we would like to highlight the end of a world war together with Russia. A number of international leaders have, however, made it clear that they find it difficult to stand in the stands in Moscow and greet the soldiers that have been occupying and annexing Crimea and to carrying out the illegal armed actions in Eastern Ukraine, side by side with Russian politicians and generals who have made the decisions on these illegality. Also, Prime Minister Solberg has therefore declined to participate” (Brende, 2015).<sup>13</sup>

But at the same time, local community of Sør-Varanger took the decision of national leader hard: “It is not to be Putin who will be praised in 9<sup>th</sup> of May, it is the war's many millions of the fallen victims to recall”<sup>14</sup>, - Randi Andreassen stated in her editorial “You should come, Erna” (2015E)<sup>15</sup>. At the end of the article the author, expressing gratitude to millions of Russian victims of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, underlines the fact that Norway can go against the Putin’s policy, but not on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May: “Norway can protest against Putin's policy in all other days in 2015, but not on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May”. (Andreassen, 2015E).<sup>16</sup>The article got many positive feed backs from Norwegians as well as from Russians.

It is noticeable that heads of Sør-Varanger and Finnmark expressed their own, different from central authorities position (Sandø, 2015C). They took part in anniversary celebrations in Nikel and Murmansk. “Sør-Varanger Avis” commented on this decision of local authorities:

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<sup>13</sup> Vi har respekt for at dette er Russlands feiring av seieren i 2. verdenskrig, og vi vil gjerne markere verdenskrigens slutt sammen med Russland. En rekke internasjonale ledere har imidlertid gjort det klart at de finner det vanskelig å stå på tribunen i Moskva og hilse soldater som har vært med på å okkupere og annektere Krim og å gjennomføre ulovlige væpnede aksjoner i Øst-Ukraina - side om side med russiske politikere og generaler som har fattet beslutningene om disse ulovlighetene. Også statsminister Solberg har derfor avslått å delta. (Brende, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> “Det er ikke Putin som skal hylles 9. mai, det er krigens mange millioner falne som skal minnes”(Andreassen, 2015E).

<sup>15</sup> Du må takke ja. Erna (Andreassen, 2015E).

<sup>16</sup> “Putins politikk kan Norge protestere på alle de andre dagene i 2015, men ikke 9. Mai” (Andreassen, 2015E).

“The Mayor participates at the celebrations in Nikel, while Prime Minister Erna Solberg as known, rejected the invitation to Moscow as a reaction to the situation in Crimea/Ukraine. While Solberg faces a cold shoulder to the invitation from Moscow, the relationship is considerably warmer in the North.

County Mayor Runar Sjøstad was considering the situation last week and had sought advice from the Central hold, but on Monday morning he said to Sør-Varanger Avis that he would travel to Murmansk together with Deputy Mayor Bente Haug and one representative from the county administration” (Olsen, 2015D).<sup>17</sup>

We should mention here that the delegation of the neighbouring commune in Nikel was representative as never before: the Mayor and his Deputy, the Head of administration. Moreover the school orchestra of Kirkenes participated at the celebrations. Norwegian children played the Russian anthem at the meeting. The historical club of Sør-Varanger and citizens came to Nikel to commemorate their liberators. The position of border municipality and citizens was a sharp contrast to politics and rhetoric of central Norwegian authorities.

Observation of political activity and media attention towards it let drawing the following conclusion: the events could have been the basis for far more severe dissidence, but local authorities as well as local media hadn't become enemies. It is very good news but one can't avoid some cooling. Different values and attitude is a natural thing, but it is very important to search ways for dialogue and coexistence. Many voices of the orchestra create a symphony. Mikhail Bakhtin speaks about “polyphonic novel by Dostoevsky”, we speak about polyphony of the border-zone (Bakhtin 1979:5).

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<sup>17</sup> Ordføreren deltar i feiringen i Nikel, mens statsminister Erna Solberg som kjent avvist invitasjonen om å være med på feiringen i Moskva som en reaksjon på situasjonen i Krim/Ukraina. Mens Solberg vender en kald skulder til invitasjonen fra Moskva, er forholdet betraktelig varmere i nord. Fylkesordfører Runar Sjøstad var i forrige uke i tenkeboksen og hadde søkt råd fra sentralt hold, men sa mandag formiddag til Sør-Varanger Avis at han reiser til Murmansk sammen med varaordfører Bente Haug og en representant fra fylkesadministrasjonen (Olsen, 2015 D).

#### **4.0 Chapter 4 The attitude of the residents of the Russian-Norwegian border to the changing of political situation in the world.**

This study was carried out in two stages during 2014 and summer 2015.

Target group of study was Russian and Norwegian border inhabitants, very active or quite active in cross-border cooperation. Research methods were selected as follows: questionnaires, interviews and participant observation.

##### ***4.1 Questioning: target group, scope of study, research results.***

Questioning was conducted in spring 2014. The questionnaire in Russian and Norwegian languages contained 14 questions. 20 respondents were interviewed during it. 10 of respondents were Norwegian residents and 10 were Russians. Seventeen of them have friends on the other side of the border, and three of the Russian respondents have acquaintances. The majority of respondents (15) have business or a work related to the neighboring state.

The purpose of this study is to identify the extent to which our cross-border community is affected by the major geopolitical processes, and whether there is a possibility of a peaceful way to counteract a negative effect at the level of human contacts.

Here is the analysis of the responses.

First question (Do you think the situation in the Norwegian - Russian border area has changed since March?) was answered by both target groups almost equally. Half of the respondents considered the situation in the borderland hadn't changed since March of that year. Another half thought such changes had happened.

Those who believe that everything remains as previously, motivate this opinion by facts that friendly relations between the people are still the same, the number of Norwegian tourists is not diminishing in Nikel, all activities and projects are implemented as previously. Those who hold the opposite opinion, indicate the difficulty and sometimes impossibility of doing business, reducing flow of Russian tourists to Kirkenes and the number of their purchases, stricter control at checkpoints and appearing awareness of closing the border.

70% of respondents see certain risks to human relations in the border areas because of the political situation in the world. Both Russian and Norwegian respondents noted possible obstacles for people and good moving across the border up to its complete closure. Regarding human contacts, one of the respondents indicated the possibility for transferring the cooling relations between the two countries to relationship between people. One of the Russian respondents emphasized the danger of cooling and greater mistrust in relations between people. 4 Norwegian respondents concerned this as probable. One of the Russian respondents indicated complete interruption of contacts and friendly relations between former friends. (For me personally there is an analogy with the situation between Russia and Ukraine). One of the Norwegian respondents noted lack of interest of politicians to the lives of ordinary people as risks for cross-border community. One of Russian respondents indicated even the risk of an open military confrontation.

Most of the respondents learn about what is happening in the world from the Internet, the TV and newspapers are on the second and third places. Two respondents: one Norwegian and one Russian get information by communicating with people. Approximately half of the respondents use both their national and international information sources.

The issue of global changes can be called quite problematic. However, almost all respondents have the diverged view on this topic. Three respondents (two Russian and one Norwegian) called excessive US and EU intervention to relationship between Ukraine and Russia as the main reason for that. Two Russian respondents noted struggle for power and political influence, the reluctance of politicians to agree with each other. Two Norwegian respondents stated almost the same, namely lack of dialogue and use of military means. Russian and Norwegian respondents mentioned the fight for resources and money. One of Norwegian respondents identified ignorance, lack of knowledge and injustice. Here we should note the differences in views of Russian and Norwegian respondents. The Russians point out globalization, impact of the Internet and social networks, global conspiracy.

The Norwegians emphasize the influence of the dictatorship, nationalism, religion, extremism, militarism, corruption, lack of democracy and freedom of expression.

**How residents of border areas may help to overcome the negative influences?**

Russian and Norwegian respondents are unanimous in answering this question: to continue and strengthen cooperation in the field of business, tourism and culture. Further, it should be noted the strengthening of human contacts, greater exchange, increase of mutual knowledge and mutual respect for the opinion of a neighbor, non-interference in internal affairs, ignoring the media propaganda. And only one Norwegian respondent noted that one can't oppose with anything.

### **How do respondents see life in the borderlands within next 10 years?**

Majority, as from the Russian so from the Norwegian side, hope for greater openness of the border, until its abolition, intensification of collaboration and mutual penetration, strengthening of economic connections and human contacts. Only one respondent from each side is not sure in future and does not know what to answer.

The evaluation of relations between Russia and Norway are lower than between Nickel and Kirkenes. 16 of respondents estimated the last as good and very good. The majority estimates relations between Russia and Norway as middle, nearer to positive. Only one Norwegian respondent estimated them as very bad.

Four respondents (two from each side) consider closing of borders between our countries impossible or small credible. It would be a sad event for absolute majority. But 6 participants (2 Russian and 4 Norwegian) would begin to undertake some measures. One of Russian here would prefer to move to Europe. Four participants will not undertake anything.

Thus, evaluating the impact of general geopolitical processes in the world on the current situation in the Russian-Norwegian border area, we can characterize it as minor. Relations between people were not affected or minimally affected in 2014. However, there have already been economic consequences. They are associated with introduction of sanctions and declining in purchasing power of the population on the Russian side of the border. Business of the Norwegian side suffers increasing losses.

Judging by answers concerning general European values, such as democracy and freedom of speech, Russian respondents don't show much interest to them.

In general, it can be concluded that there is an overall optimistic vision of life in the borderland.

#### ***4.2. Interviewing.***

For the purpose of getting extra information we held interviewing of Russian and Norwegian citizens in spring-summer 2014 and in summer 2015.

Questions (15) were presented in Russian and Norwegian. The interviewing was held in Russian and Norwegian according to the language of respondent. The author held it personally without assistance. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed into Russian. Places of interviewing were changing according to places where the respondents lived. The author interviewed the majority of Russian respondents in the working office. I spoke with Norwegian participants at their working places or at home.

There was no stiff scheming although there was a list of questions. Interviewing was like conversation, so it can be put into non-formal sub-type of this method. Such format let developing some interesting topics, which arose during the interview and getting acquainted with the experience of respondent.

Overall there were 19 respondents: 10 Russians and 9 Norwegians. Among Russians there were 8 men and 2 woman. Among Norwegians there are 5 men and 4 women. 7 Russian respondents live in Nikel, 2 respondents live in Kirkenes and 1 respondent lives in Apatity. 6 Norwegian respondents live in Kirkenes, 2 live in Vardø and 1 lives in Murmansk. This made the geography a bit wider and let getting the view on the nearest border zone from aside.

The target group was border zone citizens, having contacts with the neighbouring territory, active in cooperation and experts. Among experts there were two diplomats (Russian and Norwegian), one regional politician (Norwegian), and two editors of newspapers (Russian and Norwegian). There also were two local politicians (Russian and Norwegian), one representative of local authorities, three freelancers, and one pensioner. The age of respondents is from 30 up to 70 years old.

Three interviews, namely with the General Consul of Russia in Norway Mikhail Noskov (Bazanova, 2015A), the General Consul of Norway in Murmansk Gøril Johansen (Bazanova, 2015B) and the editor of the newspaper “Sør-Varanger Avis” Randi F. Andreassen (Bazanova, 2016) were published with consent of respondents in shortened version in the newspaper “Pechenga”.

Selection of respondents was held by the method of “snow ball”: I asked respondents to recommend people I could interview on this topic next.

Due to limited resources and difficulties by contacting, there are people outside the research. It is those who don't have contacts on the other side of the border, who don't cross the border and having no interest in border-zone topics. There is a hypothesis that they are the majority from both sides of the border. We don't have statistics about their number in Sør-Varanger commune. But according to interview presented in Barents Review 2012, 72, 3% of inhabitants of bordering Pechenga district have never cross the border with Norway.

Thus this thesis represents the opinion of the most motivated in cooperation and interested in contacting part of the local population.

The list of the questions can be relatively divided into four groups.

The first group describes the attitude of the respondents towards the border-zone and neighbours from the other side. We can also include the question of border-zone identity here.

The second group discloses the personal experience of the respondents as border-zone inhabitants and participants of cooperation.

The third group characterizes changes in the border zone within the global political situation. The fourth group shows the sources of information and their credibility for the respondents.

### 4.2.1 What is the borderland?

In this chapter we will discuss the notions “border” and “borderland”. How they are determined in terms of linguistics, classified in the border theory, and perceived by the border residents themselves.

The Cambridge Dictionary of English gives the following definitions:

“Border (division) also borderline the line that divides one country or place from another

Border (edge) a strip that goes around or along the edge of something, or the edge itself”

(Cambridge Dictionary, 2017).

The Russian word for the “border” is translated into English in different ways, depending on the meaning:

Boundary – an edge or limit of something (граница, предел)

Border - division, edge (граница, кайма, бордюры)

Frontier- border between two countries (граница между двумя государствами, пограничная зона).

“Boundaries, borders, frontiers, borderland are known as edge concept in geography and indicate dividing lines or zone between geographical areas, especially states” (Hønneland, 2010).

Geir Hønneland (2010:4) distinguishes these notions as follows:

“Boundaries are the lines that demarcate where one state ends and another begins. Border usually refers to the restricted sections of the boundary where crossing take place. A frontier traditionally refers to the transition zone between two states where the boundary is not fixed. ...The borderland is the entire area around the border, boundary and frontiers on both sides”.

The fact that several words are used to define a border reflects its historical evolution: “the vocabularies of space began to reflect this evolution, refining meanings so as to differentiate between boundaries, borders, borderlands and frontiers” (Sevastianov, et al. 2015:16).

“Understanding of a border has been different not only in the recent centuries and decades. Its different understanding and conceptualization live on today, as well” (Sevastianov, et al. 2015: 32).

The American political scientist Oscar Martinez, after many years studying the borderlands between the United States and Mexico, suggested another well-known universal typology for the degree of openness of borders, which has been modified by other authors. Martinez identified four main types of borders:

“**Alienated borders** rigidly divide two countries, border areas are militarized scenes of confrontation and conflict, transborder traffic is minimal and cooperation between the parties is virtually nonexistent.

Most land borders in the world, however, would qualify as **coexistent borders**. Such borders are primarily for the filtering of transborder flows, while the parties maintain contact and cooperate when required to solve common problems.

**Interdependent borders** arise between countries that have achieved a high degree of political rapprochement and mutual trust and which have coordinated foreign policy: the visa regime is lifted, border areas are fully demilitarized, and there is the development of intense cooperation between the authorities of both states at different levels, as well as business entities and NGOs. Finally, **integrated borders** are completely open; cross-border agglomerations and regions with their own governments are created, regulating the most important spheres of activity.

A special kind of alienated border is a frontal border, which divides countries whose populations usually belong to different ethno-linguistic and religious groups with different political cultures; those countries are included in different economic and military-political blocs; and the relationship between their citizens are often burdened with the past and mutual distrust” (Sevastianov, et al. 2015:38-39; Van der Velde and Martin, 1997).

And this is exactly the type of border that used to exist between Norway and the former USSR.

According to our informants of the older generation, during the Cold War the border was totally closed; the peoples’ contacts were minimized.

Currently, we are observing a process of transformation of the Russian-Norwegian border from alienated to coexistent. This evolution is reflected in the responses of informants who have been living in the border area since the time of the “iron curtain”.

The proposal to establish a common economic zone of industrial type, the so-called Pomor Zone, may be regarded as an attempt to move to a higher level of integration, approaching the type of interdependent border. Indeed, the period of 2008 was characterized by a relatively high degree of political approaching based on the common economic interests of the two countries, in particular, joint development of Stockman Field.

Researchers notice that in the modern world the paramount feature of development of borderlands is their openness, when the state borders increase their contact functions, while the barrier functions decrease (Arsentyeva 2012:25) .

“Since the end of the Cold War era, state borders have increasingly been understood as multifaceted social institutions rather than solely as formal political markers of sovereignty” (Sevastianov, et al. 2015:29)

The border, the borderland in all its complexity and dialectics is presented in the informants’ responses. What do the informant mean by the notion “borderland”? Geographical, political, cultural, mental, and psychological aspects can be distinguished here.

### **Geographical aspect**

This is how the residents identify the Russian-Norwegian borderland, geographically:

- it is Murmansk Region and Finnmark County (Interview 1)
- it is 30 kilometers on the both sides of the border where the permit of the border area resident is effective (Interview 11)
- it is administrative areas adjacent to the border (Interview 10)
- it is the territory east of the Tana River, not only 30 km along the border, but the whole Varanger Peninsula (Interview 9)
- it is Pechenga, Nikel, Zapoliarny, Rajakoski (Interview 6)
- It is Russia, Finland, and Norway (Interview 13)

**Political aspect** is expressed in the response of a Russian informant as follows: “I live in the borderland, that means, that I have certain like-minded people in other countries, who can be, to a certain degree, my enemies, but, maybe, just the opposite – allies (Interview 16). Here we can see repercussions of the alienated border, and a forerunner of potential conflicts.

A Norwegian informant formulated it more neutrally: “it is a line in the map, related to a decision on division of territories. But... it is to a larger degree a political, bureaucratic dimension” (Interview 14).

### **Mental, cultural, and psychological aspect**

Many informants specifically emphasize the **contact function of the borderland that is determined by the relative geographic proximity** and they define it as a territory where the whole network of human contacts is effective: “But if you approach it from a philosophical viewpoint, then both Murmansk and Vadsø are border towns. Indeed, we can see a very large amount of contacts. They are Vardø, Vadsø, Alta, Murmansk, and even Kirovsk and Arkhangelsk” (Interview 11).

Mental is a broader notion. For example, a resident of Murmansk may consider themselves a border resident, if they have contacts with people from the neighboring countries (Interview 6).

The difference and similarity of cultures, as a typical trait of the borderland, is mentioned by many informants, and it is, in their opinion, something attractive:

“What is much more important and interesting to me, is culture. On the one hand, it is the presence of a common culture. Talking about Vardø – it is the presence of common features with the culture of the Russian North-West. And this is specific of Vardø. I am very interested to meet people from the Russian side of the border and see common traits and differences. It is interesting to meet and discuss what brings us together and what requires more effort. To me, the border is both a geographical and mental concept, cultural and historical traditions. And I am much more interested by those cultural and historical moments” (Interview 14).

In the Norwegian informants’ understanding the borderland is the Center of the Universe where a lot of events and activities take place, and where high-level politicians come (Interview 4, Interview 15).

Also, Norwegians note the feeling of neighborhood, belonging to the common history (Interview 7).

Russians define the Russian-Norwegian borderland as a place for meeting and comparison of cultures, traditions, standards and ways of life, more often not in favor of Russia (Interview 2, Interview 8).

### **Self-awareness, self-identity**

Russians note higher expectations from a person who lives near the border:

“This is a territory where special requirements are put forth to a person, they represent not only themselves but also their country, their state” (Interview 3).

Many informants mention a process of increase of the border’s contact function and advantage of such process in their everyday life in the borderland. They note the opportunity to freely visit the adjacent area, which did not use to be available, or was available to just a few (Interview 18).

Thus, as the authors of “Introduction to Borderstudies” formulate it, referring to the French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre, “...territory takes on meaning through the everyday practices and lived experiences, which occur within and beyond it.” (Sevastianov, et al. 2015:25).

#### **4.2.2 Who is a border resident?**

The notion of “border resident” is closely linked with the notion of “borderland” and it seems very easy to give it a geographic definition. These are people living in the borderland, and this can be either a 30-kilometer zone within the border or a wider area covered by the network of human contacts. In other words, it is an area where border and borderland are part of everyday life. How do border residents themselves define this notion? Informants’ answers offer several characteristics or conditions for a person to be called a border resident.

First of all, the notion of a “border resident” is **geographical and is determined by place of residence:**

- By law a border resident is a person living within 30 km of the border. In Norway it is Sør-Varanger, in Russia it is Nikel and Zapolyarniy. People who live there and who are eligible for the Grenseboerbevis (border resident’s card) (Interview 11).
- Everyone who lives in the border area. Everyone who lives not far from the border, who is influenced by it (Interview 15).

We can see a formal approach in these answers - “border residents” are all people (without exception) living in immediate vicinity of the border. A person is affected by the sheer fact of living close to the border regardless of his/her attitude to this.

However, most answers paint a different portrait of a “border resident” which is defined by an active personal attitude to the fact of living by the border.

It can be **self-sentiment, ownership, relations, interest:**

- A border resident is a resident of border area or who feels like a border resident. It is mentally defined. If a person has some relations across the border whether it is family or something else. Probably this lies in the foundation of a feeling that you are part of it and consequently you are a border resident (Interview 10).

- We know that there two categories of people living on both sides of the border – those who are interested in getting to know people living on the other side and those who are not that eager to do that. However, I believe it is common everywhere. In my understanding a border resident is someone who is open, interested, sociable and engaging other people. This is a true border resident. Just living here is not enough (Interview 7).

- It is a person living close to the border of another state. And this resident of borderland has a big advantage of meeting border residents of the other state without huge obstacles which may be faced by residents of other areas (Interview 2).

Thus, the contact function of the border is implemented through border residents. Without their active engagement, the border remains only a geographical or a political marker.

In contrast to their fellow citizens who live in hinterland and get their knowledge about “the abroad” either from mass media or from their tourist trips, border residents are largely guided by **the information and knowledge obtained through their personal everyday experience:**

- Residents of borderland know what is happening abroad. At least just across the border. Those who live far away may have most incredible perceptions of what is happening abroad. This is not just some abstract foreign land. These are specific people and specific cities. Some cultural, political or spiritual events ... Those who live in Nikel know that Norwegians are not only lumberjacks and fishermen (Interview 6).

- In my understanding it is a person of their country who knows a little more and is a little more curious about their neighbor across the border than others. By virtue of living here we are curious, whether we like it or not, about what’s happening on the other side. One way or another you’re involved in these events (Interview 3).

An opinion of another informant can be used to confirm that:

- I am interested in absolutely everything. To see how they do it. For example, celebrating some event. How people do that. There are always differences in how

some events or festivals are celebrated. For example, I didn't see a single police officer on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May. Even if they were there they were not wearing their uniform. This was done differently from how we do it, for example (Interview 8).

**Engagement in cross-border activity** can also be attributed to a "border resident":

- To me border residents are people who are actively engaged in cooperation both professionally and personally. It is those who are ready to leave their niche and support cooperation, they are interested in development. To me these are border residents with a capital B, this makes them different from all those living near the border. These are people who are involved both in their domestic and international processes, in relations between East and West. It is someone who crosses the border and not just reads about something in the papers. Sharing life with somebody else – food, impressions, friendship, everything that is based on shared experience (Interview 4).

- In the beginning of my cross-border evolution (it was 2005-2006) it felt like something unknown: it was some distant place where you could buy something interesting. Over time horizons expanded and it was no longer just coming to buy something and going back but using it for many other purposes. Advantages of our location, borderland (Interview 17).

From the answers of two informants we can see that views of border residents are more guided by their borderland location rather than big politics:

- These are people living in the border zone and not concerned with politics (Interview 13).

- They are people just like us with the same ideas, with the same good thoughts about the development of their country and a peaceful life. My opinion is that these people want to live in peace regardless of politics. I see that they want this (Interview 16).

Thus, a border resident in informants' perception is a rather complex conglomerate linked to the area of residence which creates favorable conditions for contacts and getting to know the world through border crossing and joint activities. However, this possibility is used only if an individual has an interest toward something strange or unknown. Therefore one can make a conclusion that the degree of border's influence on the mentality of border residents is dependent on the degree of their border related activity and personal motivation.

A border exists only to the degree of its presence in our everyday life.

In this context it makes sense to try to define what percentage of those living near the border can be considered true border residents or border residents with a capital B as our informants called them. That is people connected to the border not only by place of their residence but also mentally crossing the border.

As of today, about 5500 (virtually half) residents of Sør-Varanger have received the border resident's card (grenseboerbevis).

Since the regime was introduced 31 May 2012, about 5,500 border permits have been issued by the local Russian General Consulate. That means that close to half the population in the Kirkenes municipality are eligible for visa-free travel (Staalesen, 2016).

Russians are less active in this regard. Only about 2500 out of 37,000 residents have exercised their right for local border traffic. However, it should be noted that many prefer to travel abroad using a Schengen visa.

The latest survey published on 22.03.2017 in a popular group Na Severe (In the North) of the Russian social network VKontakte (In Contact) with about 26000 users showed that 66.8 percent of residents of the Pechenga District had never been to Norway (2017).

It is a little lower than 72.3 percent in 2010 (Barents Borders, 2012).

To confirm that below are some fragments of the interview:

- As group's administrator I must say that the interest to Norway is quite low, surprisingly low. We post information about Norway periodically and usually these posts get fewer likes than other posts about the Pechenga District or Murmansk region. And this struck me - most people are not border residents even though they live in the area. But on the other hand, I noticed that people who leave Pechenga and settle in some other areas of Russia – they have an awakening of this identity that they are from the Pechenga District, that they lived at the border and that they are somewhat different (Interview 12).

- Judging by the fact that up to 40 percent of border crossings are made using border resident cards, it is those who are potentially active border residents. But it is difficult to say how many of them are “true” border residents, meaning those who utilize the potential of the border zone, not only filling up gas or buying cheap Coca-Cola. There are many barriers for cooperation – language, culture, prohibitions, but

still there are quite a few active ones. I don't know the statistics. But only a few of those who come to buy petrol simultaneously establish contacts.

**- What's the situation on the Russian side?**

- I believe the picture is about the same. But opportunities are limited for other reasons. Many don't have the visa, they are not interested in Norway (Interview 4).

- Yes, there are people who are only interested in discounts and who are absolutely uninterested in language and culture (Interview 8).

Thus, informants confirm our presumption that a large number of border have little interest in what is happening on the other side of the border. Even those who cross the border relatively often are primarily interested in practical issues like shopping or petrol. Aspiration to make contacts, get to know the culture or language is very rare. However, we believe that the sheer fact of crossing the border changes the person and forms a special border identity (Methi 2014: 140).

However, "a border between "own" and other cultures is established not only by circumstances outside of our control but also by our free choice" (Emchenko 2011:68).

This issue is directly related to self-identification or identity.

New philosophic e-encyclopedia Platonanet (2016) offers the following definition of "identity":

**"Identity** – a category in social sciences and humanities (psychology, social philosophy, cultural anthropology, social psychology, etc), used to describe individuals and groups as relatively stable "self-identic" wholisms.

Identity is not a property (i.e. not something an individual is born with), but an attitude. It is formed and anchored (or conversely redefined, transformed) only through social interaction. In the strict sense of the word identity may be attributed only by individuals, as only individuals have the quality of agency and thus are capable to attribute or not attribute certain **meanings** to oneself".

Geir Hønneland, analyzing opinions on identity of scholars like P.M. Goff and K.C. Dunn, makes a conclusion: "Identities are fluid, but not constantly changing. Identities are relational, but the effect of process of othering differs according to the situation. Likewise, the propensity of individuals to move back and forth between multiple identities varies with the context" (2010:5).

### **4.2.3 Is there a common identity of the inhabitants of the Norwegian-Russian borderland?**

In this chapter we will look at whether there is any evidence that residents of the Russian-Norwegian borderland have a common identity.

Informants are of quite different opinions - from “Yes, probably there is. Border unites” to “No, there cannot be one, the cultural code is too different”.

After reading Geir Hønneland’s “Borderland Russians: Identity, Narrative and International Relations” (2010) and “Barentsbrytninger” (2005) I was curious to find out what residents of borderland thought about common identity.

“In line with the theory of flexible identities, it is assumed that modern humans a greater extent than was the case in the traditional society, feel a sense of belonging to different social groups and political levels” (Hønneland 2010:119).

Very often people did not understand what “identity” meant and they needed an explanation of the notion. The majority had difficulty with this question. The question then had to be rephrased as follows: are border residents different from other residents of their country living far from the border. Also: is there anything in common between Russian and Norwegian border residents.

Informants’ opinions varied. Some believe that these are **regular citizens of their countries**, not especially different from others:

No, there is no difference. It’s just that they (border residents) have the possibility to be in the border zone on the other side of the border for 15 days. There is no other difference. Just residents, they’ve got this right (Interview 8).

It’s all simple. We are all people. No one has found any cases of special kindness, responsiveness or mutual help in the borderland context (Interview 17).

Some believe that one should rather talk about a historic **common Russia-Finnish identity**:

- Border with Norway is very small and short. If you asked me about Russian-Finnish borderland, then there obviously is such identity. What to say. If there are

Finns or Karelians in Karelia and if there are Karelians in Finland, then these perception is determined by entire history. As for Norway, it is difficult for me to say. I've never met people who had half of their family on the Norwegian side and the other half in Russia. But I worked for seven years just along the Norwegian border – as a young specialist working with copper and nickel in and around Pechenga and I did hear from people that there really are some relations with Norway. And I myself sitting on a mountain top in Nikel can see a bird in flight – this one is ours, and there it is Norwegian. There's a church on the other side of the river. I have witnessed all this. Thus, there is some feeling of borderland among residents there, but of course it is not as profound as with Finland (Interview 10).

Norway does not have that much in common with Russia as Finland does which has a shared history with Russia (Interview 4).

Those who admit that there are common features among border residents, emphasize their **desire to interact with others, benevolence and calmness:**

- This is a desire to make contact with your neighbor and language is often a barrier for that. It's much easier with kids. A good example is cross-border club Dialogue, it is an evidence of a joint aspiration to collect information. Most of all it is about enthusiasm and desire (Interview 4).

- I've been told about this deliberateness. But I noticed that, there is no rush, especially after Moscow. Maybe it is general development and not some natural factors that is at play here. People are very benevolent, sincere and open-hearted. I saw this equally warm attitude both in Russians and Norwegians living in the North. Really, there are more similarities among us rather than differences (Interview 1).

Also, **high tolerance and open-mindedness** were noted:

- I think it is difficult to compare people on different sides of the border. They are very different, even though they live in borderland. However, there is something in common, but it is difficult for me to say what it exactly is. But of course, the fact that they can cross both national and cultural borders and they get used to it that this is next to them – maybe this unites them. They see being different, or otherness in a more positive light (Interview 12).

Some believe that thanks to direct contacts, possibility to travel and cross the borders a **special openness** is formed, which distinguishes the border region from hinterland. Informants also highlight **selfless readiness to help each other:**

- Yes, even though we live in our own state, but we cross the border and help each other. I talk with Russians on Facebook using Google Translate and we help each other. It works well (Interview 13).

- All of them help each other. And they do not always expect you to pay for this, but to help them in return. The way it used to be in the south of Norway (Interview 5).

Some informants indicate that there is a **universal human identity**:

- I believe that all people share a common identity as we are created to a common template. We are absolutely similar, both inside and outside. We all have arms, legs, head, ears. But we are endowed with our personal traits, thoughts, free will. And it is our free choice how we will use what's inside our heads. We are influenced both by environment, culture and organization of our society.... Inherently, there are no differences. We are formed by everything - nature, culture, political order (Interview 7).

- I would not single out any particular difference in this respect. Most likely we are very similar. Probably cuisine is somewhat specific, there is culture and certain traditions. Nevertheless, people are very similar. We just speak different languages. And for someone, especially when you don't speak other languages, this immediately marks a barrier, a watershed. And subconsciously it forms this perception that we are so different. But we are not that different as it appears. But if you speak the language and especially if you live in this country you adapt very quickly and realize how close and similar we are. Very often our proverbs are the same. We have similar worries and problems. People want to fall in love, start a family, have a child, procreate, go to work, they want their work to be interesting and well-paid, they worry about some everyday problems at home and they are happy when things go right. This has always been my belief (Interview 1).

Informants also believe that **crossing the border forms a common identity**:

- Common identity is more characteristic of the elderly. Of those, who grew up in the Pasvik river valley, who swam across to the other side and had relatives there. But this was suddenly cut short. Therefore, I believe it is the elderly who have similar mentality and identity. I do not think it is still there to a large extent. But it may happen that it will come back. Because now there is much traffic across the border – the Russians come to us to shop and we go to them. I see common identity in this (Interview 15).

- The simple fact that we often travel across the border shapes us in a different way. There (in Valday) many have never ever been abroad. Here everybody knows that the border is near even though some don't travel across it. Everybody has friends or relatives or knows someone who travels abroad. We are far more aware of the fact

that there's another life near us. Almost a 100 percent are aware of their relation to the border in one way or another (Interview 6).

Living in a similar climate and nature forms common features among Russian and Norwegian northerners, which can be called “**northernness**”:

- First of all, if we talk about Norwegians, they are more calm, quiet and non-confrontational. In general, many European countries and Nordic countries (Norway, Finland) are just like Russian northerners – they are all calm. All are closer to our bear, the animal. We are all calm northern people, calm and quiet. However, if you mess with us, there will be noise. I just see some connection in this that we all here come from the same environment, namely nature, we are alone here. The North calms us down (Interview 16).

- Everybody grew up in a similar climate and that has had an impact on people, on the fact that they are similar, to an extent (Interview 9).

One informant expressed an interesting opinion indicating **interpenetration of cultures**:

Norwegians say that those who spend time with Russians are in a way Russian themselves. A lot of similarities. I heard this opinion often (Interview 6).

Thus, we have obtained a wide range of opinions about common identity of residents in the Russian-Norwegian borderland - from a complete negation to an acknowledgement of a certain commonality based on universal human values, harsh climate and to a certain extent by the border itself. One can state that this commonality stems from being from a common northern region. This shapes features like openness, sociability and readiness to come for help and this is what makes Russians and Norwegians living in the north different from southerners in their respective countries.

#### **4.2.4 Experience in the cooperation.**

In this chapter we will look at borderland life experiences of our informants, to what extent they are involved in the general cultural space and how active they are in cross-border cooperation.

For some informants it is part of their **professional or public activity**:

- My experience is very diverse. Primarily as head of the Sør-Varanger Avis newspaper. We published several issues in Russian in the 1990s. On 28 August 1990

the Sør-Varanger Avis in Russian first hit the streets of Nikel. For three years we published the Barentsnytt newspaper. We have had an agreement with the Sovetskya Pechenga (and later Pechenga) newspaper since then, since 1990. We didn't achieve any big results because there were frequent changes of people on the Russian side. But we maintained contact, we knew about each other and we could contact each other when necessary. In addition, we cooperated with newspapers in Murmansk, from time to time, but we did have contact. It did not evolve into anything bigger. There is a big difference between mass media in Russia and in Norway. Even though we had contacts, they were difficult to convert into concrete cooperation projects. I also participated in the cultural life. I collected money for construction of the church in Nikel. I also participated in women's delegations in the 90s (Interview 7).

- This is cooperation between universities, organization of research days and border seminars, cooperation with the Pikene på broen art group. I had only a few local cross-border projects, my focus was more on the big cultural projects. .... there is no hierarchy here in terms of what project is more or less important. In a way, it is an evolution. I am generally interested in observing process here at the border, especially on the Russian side. Each project carries some impressions, experience, meeting people, it's interesting to listen to life stories, especially those of Russian neighbors (Interview 4).

- When I became director the geological institute 8 years ago, my predecessor took me to Rovaniemi to introduce me to the management of the Geological Survey of Finland. We'd enjoyed purely professional relations for a long time. And I carried this tradition further, developed geotourism here, obtained a European grant. We had very close contacts with the Finns, and with the Norwegians, too. But not that close. And this all created in me this benevolent attitude to them based on some joint programs. We are trying to develop these contacts regardless of any political confrontations. We talk, we write. I have just been invited to talk at a big congress in Finland. Norwegian colleagues will be there too. So, my feeling is that we are not far from each other, that we must be friends, must talk to each other. But I am afraid it is not that feeling of original borderland. It is a feeling that we are close, and we talk and work for some common goal (Interview 10).

- Yes, when delegations come from Arkhangelsk to participate in the Pomor festival to maintain historic ties I am responsible for hosting art student groups. We organize exhibitions showing the history of Norwegian-Russian relations, which they present through their works. This is very interesting for us and it is a big event when people from Arkhangelsk come.

I am very much involved in interregional cooperation and we have several Barents projects every year. I travel to Russia twice a month, on average. This is Vardø-Arkhangelsk-Pechenga. Sometimes I visit Moscow and Saint Petersburg (Interview 14).

Some informants note that it was the presence of another culture that was a decisive factor for them to choose to live by the border and it then motivated them to participate in projects:

- I have regular contacts, I know a few Norwegians. By and large, this has interested me since I was a child. Maybe it is the reason why I am in Nikel because I was very much impressed with the otherness of Norwegians as a child. I want to relive that positive childhood experience again and again when meeting Norwegian culture. I've been participating in projects since 2007, starting with the Pezaniki city project and I have worked with Norwegians. My last job was cooperating with Sør-Varanger Avis – I made infographics for them (Interview 12).

Some informants mention the Dialogue border club alongside other successful projects:

- First of all, it is the Dialogue club. We now subscribe to Sør-Varanger Avis and we see that there are many joint events, though we do not visit them that often. School No. 3 cooperates with the Pasvik School. The Pasvik School comes to visit several times a year. Every year we sent a child there to study free of charge (Interview 2).

One Norwegian informant has family contacts in addition to her volunteer activities:

- The most interesting is our Dialogue club, it is just a fantastic project. I also participated in the cooperation as a politician and participated in the Red Cross activities – cross-border cooperation projects, visits, seminars, meetings. I also used to cross the border quite often because of my former family (Interview 15).

Some informants note lack of consistent long-term cooperation experience except for one-off events:

- No participation in projects, there were no projects with foreigners, just with the KGMK<sup>18</sup>. There were some occasional visits by people from Norway, who just participated in some workouts at the gym of the sports school. This was just it, nothing else (Interview 16).

- We published news from Sør-Varanger in Sovetskaya Pechenga. I worked there just for a short time back then, but still. Otherwise there were some sporadic things. We tried cooperating with Sør-Varanger Avis but there was a language barrier (Interview 3).

Responding to the question of whether there is a common cultural space in the borderland, one Russian informant said:

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<sup>18</sup> Kola MMC

- Yes, there is. I have not been involved in this for a long time but there was a rather long period of intensive cultural exchange. But I was part of a church at the time. There were continuous contacts both on the other side and on this side. And a choir. And there were concerts. It has slowly dried up by now.

As for the cultural space I can feel it personally. In Norway I was able to fulfill my dream of playing the organ. I came there in 1998-1999 and I was allowed to play it. Of course, I was unable to play anything back then. However, after several short visits I did learn something. I even played at a concert once.

This all stems from that, from conversations about cultural space.

I cannot imagine how shocked I was when I tried to switch on the organ and I pressed the wrong keys by mistake and switched on the bells instead. And I did not even realize that. People rushed to me and said don't press this because it is the bell. I was afraid I would be fined. But nobody touched me (Interview 6).

Informants have a personal interest towards foreign culture and desire to compare it to one's own:

- If I have an opportunity to take part in a cultural event I try to do it. I am interested in absolutely everything. I want to see how they do it. For example, celebrating some event. How people do it. There are always differences in the way events or celebrations are organized. I did not see a single police officer on the 17th of May. Even if they were there, they were not in uniform. In other words, it was different from the way we do it (Interview 8).

- I have been going to Norway for three years. I am interested in how people live and in the language. I try to learn. I am especially curious about children's life in Norway because I help my daughter raise my grandchildren. I am very interested in how little children live in Norway. I compare it to our country. I had not had any feeling of Norway being near until I started going there (Interview 18).

Based on the answers, our informants are active people who are interested in cooperation. Their borderland life experiences are related to their occupations, civic activities, family, friends, people they know and a sheer interest in a foreign culture.

For the majority of informants, the possibility of meeting a foreign culture and gaining new experiences is an important component of living in the borderland. Understanding one's own culture and oneself via the comparison and juxtaposition with another culture is, in our opinion, the most attractive thing in crossing the border. Let us revert to the work by A. M. Sergeev "One's Own (the Inner) and External Observer's Position" for a philosophical understanding of this process: "With reference to the near, we have no perspective or scale of

distance. As a result, we are unable to distance ourselves from the near and assume the position of an external observer with reference to it. To use a philosophical expression, we find ourselves unable to perform an act of reflection with reference to what is most closely integrated with us and what we therefore take to be exclusively our own...” (2009:42).

Quite often, a person meeting another culture takes a position of an external observer, which enables distancing from oneself and thus understand it: “An external observer can best understand what is being observed when and where he is capable of a disinterested and dispassionate view, i.e. in the situation of his own extraterritoriality with respect to what is going on, something which is primarily connected with a sensory break with it. Man is able to penetrate the essence of what is happening when he takes the position of an outsider with respect to the visible” (Sergeev 2009:42-43).

Informants’ answers evidence the fact that there is an emerging common cultural space of the borderland and a border resident as a carrier of a special culture: “Being primarily heterogenic the culture of a transborder region forms a man who is called marginal (stemming from Latin *marginalis* – boundary, peripheral, being on the edge). In this case marginality is not associated with the process of separation from one’s social class or lumpenization...., rather it means a person who makes a conscious choice of living and participating in the cultural life and traditions of two different peoples” (Emchenko 2009: 2).

Summing up who a marginal borderland man is, Emchenko makes the following conclusion: “A person belonging to transborder culture becomes marked in a special way: without losing one’s national identity he or she becomes also a regional representative of interpenetrating cultures, a key figure” (2009:4).

Features of a marginal person highlighted by this author such as “emergence, transience, polymorphy, tolerance, lability, and proclivity for energetic perception, acquisition and artistic reprocessing of «foreign» cultural values, and readiness to share one’s own, cultural hybridity, biculturalism» (2009:4), are quite noticeable in our respondents, residents of the Russian-Norwegian borderland.

#### 4.2.5 Borderland in changing

In this chapter we will discuss how the border residents describe the changes that have taken place in the Russian-Norwegian border land since the end of the Cold War, the fall of the “iron curtain”, and opening the border.

The Russian informants emphasize that in the times of the “iron curtain”, a foreigners’ visit to Nikel made an impression of something exotic. Children would often look at them as possessors of things not available to a Soviet child, for example, chewing gum:

- People who arrived on bright buses. They took pictures. And they were those who we could ask for something – a sticker or chewing gum. They were hard to get at that time. We looked at them and saw people from whom we could benefit. Even though our teachers cried shame upon us, saying: “You should be worthy citizens of your country, stop begging” (Interview 16).

Let us compare the same informant’s opinion of the attitude of today’s children in Nikel to foreigners:

- Today the children’s attitude is different from ours back then. Everything we wanted to have then, is within reach. Everything glares and blinks. Go and buy anything you want. And children are no longer interested in having something from foreigners, guests, but they are interested in the Norwegians themselves. Look, they are different, and they speak differently. Curious. Why is it, for example, that 8 out of 10 are blond? Whereas we have only one (Interview 17).

One can argue that the life with open borders forms a new generation of border residents.

Today arrival of Norwegians is no longer something special, it has become habitual:

- Today all this is so natural and simple already. Today all this is so habitual, regular: they come and go. They like it here, so what. It is good that they like it. (Interview 16).

- At my time I took part in participation, although it is tautology, of course, in participation of a Norwegian wind orchestra in a concert here. I was carrying a banner. When they came it was The Event. They marched through the town, carrying two banners in front. I was carrying one. And at that time a visit by Norwegians was a big thing. And today it has become habitual. Today the border zone is effective, border residents can come even every day. And you drive along the road, and in the opposite direction you see files of cars, literally, with Norwegian number plates, and

it does not take anyone, let's say, by surprise, it attracts no attention, at all. It has become habitual. It has become routine (Interview 1).

One Russian informant believes that, even though changes have taken place, **nothing new in principle can be seen in terms of cooperation, so far:**

- It seems to me that no changes have taken place. We have been in cooperation since 1970's. In general, the situation is the same. It feels like we continue to exist in such a Soviet regime. Some kind of delegations are traveling back and forth, make official speeches, but in quality it hasn't taken us any further. Because those people who can integrate into the Norwegian society, they just leave the region and do not participate in development of anything. But comparing with 1987, when a bus stood here and they threw out chewing gum at the square, kids would pile on each other for that chewing gum. Now Norwegians are no longer anything exotic, and it is no longer perceived as something absolutely alien. There are more of them on the street, and many have been to Norway, too. In this respect, since the Soviet time there is now less of that conflict, contrast. But, in general, I think, the changes are still ahead of us, if any (Interview 12).

By contrast to the respond above, another informant emphasizes **significantly more active contacts, both professional and personal:**

- Since 1980's we have started interacting more actively. I can feel it. We used to have geology projects with the Finns now and then, but not really large-scaled. When I became a director, we greatly expanded our contacts. And not only professional ones: we started traveling to each other's congresses more often, talk to each other, make joint publications. We have arranged a three-year geo-tourist camp, and published two books. What I am saying is that it did not use to happen, and now it does. I mean, in this respect more active relations are obvious (Interview 10).

The informants give a positive assessment of the changes that have happened, describing them as **normalization of cross-border neighbor relations:**

- More friendly relations emerge. In the past, we used to have occasional one-time contacts, more or less. Today, it is more accessible. People meet each other, make friends. Now we have, let's say, a normal life of two neighbors. As Anatoly Smirnov, the first Consul General of Russia in Kirkenes used to say, a good neighbor is better than a distant relative (Interview 1).

- There was some kind of credit of trust. Some idealism towards each other, because of lack of knowledge. Then such sober relations have established. It is quite a natural process, nothing special (Interview 6).

As the main change in the border land, people of the older generation indicate:

- The fall of the “iron curtain”. Russia has become accessible. Each year small changes took place, and it became easier and easier (to cross the border). Visa is easier to get (Interview 9).

Norwegian informants also emphasize the **transition to informal relations in the border land, increase of the number of people-to-people contacts, more freedom of mobility:**

- A lot of changes have taken place. The border used to be more closed. Traveling to Russia was a big problem. When the border opened, it has become a lot easier to travel in both directions. In the past, only wrestling competitions, cultural projects, or school cooperation opened an opportunity to go to Russia. Now one can travel freely. People can freely come to Nikel or Zapoliarny (Interview 19).
- When I started, the Barents idea was very young. And what happened was organized institutionally, in many ways. And now cooperation and friendship live independently. People act on their own. For example, what I can see here. Some projects are launched via the Consulate. Representatives call or write that they want to go to Murmansk. What shall we do, what shall we do? But the majority of the projects, the majority of delegations just go by themselves. Sometimes we do not even know what they do. This is very good, because it shows that they are in contact with the Russian partners themselves, that cooperation is permanent, every day, they do not need bureaucrats to plan something. The people are common musicians, sportsmen, at universities they think of something themselves how to cooperate (Interview 11).

At the same time, **business and educational activities are becoming more intensive on the Norwegian side of the border:**

- In general? Everything was full of Russia being close, many visitors from Russia, in spite of the recent rouble drop in value. It fills the everyday life here. Or, for example, I could go with my family to the Victory Day celebrations in Nikel, it is also very special. Common people have started to cross the border, especially from Murmansk, rather than just seamen. A lot of interest from the Government to the Northern territories. A lot of new enterprises, Kirkenes business association (Kirkenes næringsshage). Growth of competence, of the number of educational institutions, which is related to my life here, too (Interview 4).

**Modern technologies** have also had a considerable impact on the life in the border land. **Cooperation has become much easier**, - a Norwegian informant believes:

- Of course, now everything is much easier. Including the means of communication. For example, invitation. Back then, one had to send an invitation with a courier, and look for someone who could travel across the border. Now we have e-mail, telephone and all we need, Facebook. Talking of technologies. We live in a totally different world. I remember when we published the first newspaper in Russian, how difficult it was to deal with the Soviet Embassy in Oslo, Moscow, etc. Now all this is done very simply. And one understands that cooperation has become much easier to do. When we published Barentsnytt at that time, the article had to be physically transported across the border, then it was translated. Today we don't have to do that. Thus, we are living in a totally different world, if we look at the possibility for doing something together. In the past 25 years, there has been a real explosion (Interview 7).

The liberalization of the visa regime and modern communication technologies have allowed to reduce the distances, **Nikel and Kirkenes have become closer to each other**, even if the geographical distance remains the same – the informant emphasizes:

- The distances have become shorter. Nikel has never been far away, geographically, but it was really far in the late 1980's – early 1990's. Of course, simplification of visa formalities had its effect, but all the communication means have become easier to use. With the permit for local cross-border travel one can get to Nikel in no time. It used to take people weeks of waiting every time. Now, with the permit for local cross-border travel or a multi-entry visa people even don't have to think about it. And this is true on the both sides of the border. And, naturally, the easier the communication is, the easier it is to get to know each other (Interview 7).

**The opportunity to establish personal contacts** is also mentioned as the main change that creates conditions for successful cooperation:

- In my assessment, personal contact is a paramount condition to implement anything, in principle. If people don't know each other, they cannot engage normally in cultural or sports exchange, or cooperation between newspapers. The personal acquaintance, personal contact should go first of all (Interview 7).

This also facilitates building an adequate image of each other, and **breaking old stereotypes**:

- We have communication, we know about each other. Of course, there are scary things, too. Problems related to the stream of prostitution, for example. In its basis is utmost poverty, need on the Russian side. But it brought about prejudices based on the consequences of the Cold War. People used to think that if we let a lot of Russians in, we will have an outburst of stealing, crime etc. But as publications in Sør-Varanger Avis show, shop-owners claim that according to their observations, it

is not poor Russians who steal but Norwegian grannies. And the police chief says that the crime rate has not increased since we opened the border. Mafia has not emerged in Kirkenes. Of course, there have been scary things through the whole history. But such things happen everywhere. The statistics show that crime has not increased in Kirkenes since the opening of the border. And stereotypes have started to go. But I also believe that on the Russian side scary images of Norway, such as spies, American stooges etc. have started to go away in Nikel (Interview 7).

The younger generation of Norwegian border residents describe the changes in the border land as follows:

- Quite early on my memory the border was opened; our class traveled to Russia during Gorbachev times. That was a big difference. But, because we were small, it didn't look amazing to us. But for those who were older, it was unusual. They had been practically closed. Then the Pomor visa came along and people started traveling for shopping. But they were Russians, mostly. Later, the visa-free regime, and then there was an explosion on the other side. Norwegians rushed across the border for shopping. First it was only petrol. Now, more and more people travel to have meals, go shopping, have a haircut, fix a car etc. Not the way it used to be, when people were afraid of coming into town, they filled the tank and went away at once. Big changes have happened in that. Now they have made acquaintances with Russians, and prejudices begin to go. At first, they were afraid of a certain austerity. Russians look rather closed. But I know they are not. It is only the impression of appearance, but when you know them better, you understand that Russians are very hospitable and kind. For us it is common to greet people on the street and smile at them, but in Russia they may think you are an idiot (Interview 15).

The same informant takes note of interpenetration of cultures, in particular, clothing culture, stressing that in appearance Russians and Norwegians are becoming more alike. The distinct line that used to exist between them is blurring:

- It can be seen in clothing. In the past, if you sat on a bench on the pedestrian street in Kirkenes, you could tell easily: there comes a Russian, and there – a Norwegian. Now everything has leveled and it may be difficult to distinguish. Earlier, Russian ladies would come in skirts and high-heeled shoes to any event. Now it is trousers and the clothing is practically the same as we wear. In the past, Russian women wore high heels even when hiking; now it is usual sportswear (Interview 15).

An opinion of a Russian informant, who has recently been living in the border land, is interesting. She takes note of the changes in the urban environment and infrastructure, and more active cooperation:

- I came to Nikel in 2002, and until 2009 I did not even have a passport. I did not travel and had no idea what it was like there across the border. I had been to England, though. That is why Nikel today is a huge difference from Nikel in 2002. First of all, now Nikel is much cleaner. Then, let us see how the infrastructure develops, how many shops, cafes, playgrounds, parks there are. A good step it was to make the street names in English. The only big drawback is that they are all in small print. Now I think that in comparison to 2002, more joint festivals with Norwegians are held. There is a feeling that the dialog and cooperation with the Norwegian side is constantly ongoing. In Nikel, I believe, big changes for the better take place. And I started traveling to Norway in 2009. It is good here, just the way it was. The roads are being improved (Interview 2).

The assessment of the changes in the border land varies depending on the informants' age, duration of their residence in the region, and personal experience.

People of the older generation stress the fall of the "iron curtain" and opening of the border as the most significant fact, which resulted into the territory of the neighboring state becoming more accessible, and the flow of travelers has increased on the both sides of the border. Foreigners coming to one's native town are no longer an exotic phenomenon, they have become something usual which does not call for a special reaction. This can be said about various joint events that used to be seen as a big thing, but now they are a mere fact of the cultural or sports life.

Liberalization of the visa regime and establishment of the border resident permit (grenseboerbevis) in 2012 has facilitated an increase of cross-border traveling. The visa-free border crossing procedure for people residing within 30km of the border on the both sides legally formalized the notions "border area" and "border residents":

1. The border area of the Russian Federation shall consist of the territories of the Municipalities of Nickel and Pechenga which lie within a 30 km zone from the state border between the Russian Federation and the Kingdom of Norway, as well as the territories of the Municipalities of Zapoliarniy and Korzunovo.
2. The border area of the Kingdom of Norway shall consist of the territory of the Municipality (kommune) of Sør-Varanger which lies within a 30 km zone from the state border between the Russian Federation and the Kingdom of Norway.

"Border residents" shall mean citizens of the Russian Federation, citizens of the Kingdom of Norway and citizens of other countries who have been legally residing in the border area for at least the 3 previous years.<sup>19</sup>

The quality of the contacts has changed, too. They have become more natural: no more euphoria, romanticism and increase interest towards the neighbor. Instead, there are everyday relations, with a place for friendship, but also, conflicts.

The relations between people, earlier formal, are now more informal. The people decide themselves what they will do in the neighboring country, and who to build relations with.

The urban environment and infrastructure of the border towns have begun adjusting to the guests from the other side. While in Kirkenes the street names were translated into Russian long ago, and the personnel speak Russian in shops, in Nikel this process started after 2012. Signs with translation of street names into English have been made, also, they are trying to translate menus in restaurants and cafes into Norwegian or English, and signs in Norwegian have appeared on the shops. The situation with languages in Nikel remains unsatisfactory, very few people speak English or Norwegian, the same can be said about the service.

Informants point out at these challenges (Interview 3, Interview 4, Interview 16, Interview 18).

But this barrier does not exist between the children:

Children have in much easier (Interview 4).

Kids find a common language very easily. I took over master-classes a couple of times. They easily find a common language. The children are modern now. They have different dynamics. In our time we were afraid of looking funny, or for some other reasons. They were too bright for us. Yes, they are interested in each other. I see them sitting together, talking. Giggling. It means, all is good (Interview 17).

We can see that in 25 years of Barents cooperation a new generation of border residents has emerged, who are free from prejudice and barriers of the Cold War time. As Gøril Johansen noticed in her interview to the Pechenga Newspaper, "now we have a new generation grown

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<sup>19</sup> AGREEMENT between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Kingdom of Norway on facilitation of mutual travel for border residents of the Russian Federation and the Kingdom of Norway (Oslo, 02.11.2010)

up, the Barents generation, those who as children used to travel to Kirkenes or Arkhangelsk, played in a football team or in an orchestra. There are many-many different projects. Or students who spent some time in Arkhangelsk or Murmansk, or Tromsø” (Bazanova 2015:13B).

Thanks to liberalization of the visa formalities and new technologies, the distance between Nikel and Kirkenes has decreased, according to the informants.

The behavior and dressing style has changes. Russians, especially women, have made their clothing more democratic, while Norwegian women are trying to look more elegant, especially at joint meetings.

Thus, the processes that have taken place in the border land, have had an impact on both formal framework of the cross-border interaction, and also on the everyday relations and people’s behavior.

The complex of all the described changes makes favorable conditions for building a common cultural space where “the border between “one’s own” and “alien” culture is established not only by circumstances beyond our control, but also by our free choice” (Emchenko 2009: 68).

#### **4.2.6 Perception of political events and their influence on cross-border relations.**

In the previous chapters we made an attempt to demonstrate how the change in the political situation, in particular, the annexation of the Crimea by Russia and the war in the South-East of Ukraine have influenced the Russian-Norwegian relations at the level of state. We described the consequences of the political events and their diametrically opposite assessment by Russian and Ukrainian mass media, for the personal relations on the both sides of the Russian-Ukrainian border.

In this section we will see the opinions of the Russian-Norwegian border residents concerning the impact of these events on the life in the border area and people-to-people relations.

In their responses the informants, generally, state that changes have taken place at the central level. At the same time, here in the North the relations remain the same:

- I haven't noticed them. Particularly, here, in this territory, I haven't noticed them (Interview 1).

- This has happened at the central level (Interview 2).

- No big changes have happened. I am very much involved in the inter-regional cooperation, we have several Barents projects implemented annually. I travel to Russia twice a month, on an average. They are Vardø-Arkhangelsk-Pechenga. Sometimes I go to Moscow and St. Petersburg. I can't say that the events where I take part have become somewhat different. Of course, I feel that something happens around me in the world. I also realize that sanctions are in effect. But I don't see that it would cause obstacles in my work, my projects. I am very much engaged in Pomor cooperation. We have the Pomor Academy, and the Pomor Society in Vardø, that has tight relations with the Pomor Association in Arkhangelsk and I have a lot of friends in this system. My understanding is that this is cultural and historical cooperation, not political. We don't do politics. But I can say that the events happening in the world, sanctions and so on, do not affect regional cooperation. In conclusion, I must say that the ongoing political events have not impacted me on either the Norwegian, or the Russian side (Interview 14).

The Norwegian informants emphasize that the attitude to Russia has deteriorated from people living in the south of the country and having no direct contacts:

- Yes, indeed. But this has affected more people in the south. They have become more skeptical about Russia. But here we don't discuss these issues, we think it is big politics. While we have people-to-people relations (Interview 10).

People living in the north demonstrate a desire to keep away from big politics issues:

- I have not seen anything like that, no such talks, it is more at the Russian level, people of different strata discuss it between themselves. As a rule, they discuss it well, there are subtleties that people can see, and they are not supporters of the state. But on the part of Norway I can't see anything, maybe because I don't talk to them a lot. I can't see any such problems because of the Crimea annexation. We ourselves suffer more from that. A new territory has joined us, loss-making and so on. And when it will pay back, is not known yet. And as to the political component, I think we are not big enough to see it so. We are common small people who do their small business. This doesn't reach us so brightly. Maybe, in future there will be something (Interview 16).

The Russian informants emphasize that despite the critical attitude of the Norwegian mass media to the Russian politics related to the Crimea, it has not impacted personal contacts:

- No, not personally. But because I am a translator and translate news, one sees such words there as “the Crimea aggression”. But it is at the news level. At the level of contacts there has been no problems (Interview 6).

- I must say that from everybody I talk to, I have never encountered any aggression. But, also, when the problems with Ukraine began, I heard comments – maybe this information is given by the Norwegian TV (and maybe it is true, we don’t know). But many Norwegians have had a negative impression of Russia after this conflict has emerged, and many have a negative image of Putin. After Ukraine it is more and more. Although it is not formulated in an aggressive manner, but it is stated. (Gives an example of her neighbor who asked: - Did you watch the TV yesterday? - No, I had no time. - They talked about Putin – And what did they say? - No, I will not tell, don’t want to upset you. I was curious and I tried to find out what exactly they were saying in the show, but she never told, not to hurt my patriotic feelings (Interview 2).

Some informants focus attention on the fact that it was the political crisis that has intensified people-to-people contacts, in particular, establishment of the cross-border club Dialog (Olsen, 2014C, E):

- Yes, and the biggest – establishment of the cross-border club Dialog. It emerged right in the middle of that political crisis. Mass media and people from the south of Norway, from Oslo, from the central regions were interested in it. They are much more interested in politics than we are here. We think: what does it matter if I agree or not. We don’t know the whole picture, the whole story. So, we don’t get too deeply into it. We know one thing: we are neighbors. But those who live in the central part, do not have this experience of neighborhood, and for them it is pure politics, and they know everything only from mass media. Of course, there is nothing good about what has happened. But it was not decided by the people in Nikel or Zapoliarny, but by someone much higher. To me, the establishment of the cross-border club Dialog is the most important event. It has a totally different dimension from all the sanctions and anti-sanctions (Interview 15).

However, the sanction policy has affected the business. On the Russian side it is, in particular, the ban on Norwegian seafood. The business activity of Norwegian companies oriented at the Russian market has decreased (Sandø, 2014; Olsen, 2014L):

- No, I don’t feel anything like that. Business, that is what has seriously suffered from the sanctions and anti-sanctions. Norwegian companies that used to do business in Russia. But that is in Murmansk. They had to close down. They had worked for 20 years, and then suddenly that thing happened. Also one can notice that Russians no longer buy as much as they used to. The rouble value has dropped but there may have been other reasons, rather than political ones. The rouble has dropped so low

that Russians have not been seen in Norwegian shops for a long time. You can notice it at once – almost no Russian cars at the shops parking lots whereas there used to be plenty (Interview 15).

- For example, the ship-repairing factory Kimek had to reduce the personnel because they have less orders for economic reasons. They have suffered from the economic sanctions of the West and Russian anti-sanctions. That is, we here observe the consequences of the sanction policies. Of course, it affects the life of the border residents, who, eventually, have lost their jobs (Interview 7).

- The locals are surprised by the sanction blockade, when politicians have interfered into the spheres where people wanted more cooperation, for example, fish industry. The local business representatives talk a lot about it here, and they talk directly to Oslo. The global politics affects the local relations (Interview 2).

The sanction policies have also caused suspension of cooperation projects:

- School No. 3 is in cooperation with Pasvik School. Pasvik come to visit us several times a year. Every year we sent one child to study free of charge. But because of the crisis in Ukraine, this year Pasvik School, even not they but the Norwegian authorities refused. This has happened for the first time in twenty-five years of our cooperation. It is very sad (Interview 2).

- The political events have stopped the process. Fortunately, our project already had funding, and it did not undermine publishing of the books. The money had already been transferred to us, and we paid it for publishing of the books, as planned. So our plans did not fail. But we suggested that all the projects should be continued. The Finnish side actively supported. We wanted to publish such books about Lovozero, other locations of the Kola Peninsula, in foreign languages, to bring any European tourists. But everything has stopped. The European Union has stopped funding of all the projects. Not just these ones, but all. This is absolutely political, because economically it is beneficial for everyone. Because, thanks to the project, as they said themselves, we have included Murmansk Region into the European system of tourism. What was well-developed in the Nordic countries but not here, and we somehow showed that it was possible (Interview 10).

To the question whether the events in Ukraine and the Crimea have caused division in the Norwegian society, a Norwegian informant gave the following assessment:

- I must say, that we who live here in the north must understand better what has happened in the Crimea, than those who live in the south of Norway. Because Russia is a part of our everyday life. I have a feeling that we must maintain relations with Russia, try to understand the reasons for escalation after annexation of the Crimea.

But here very hot discussions also take place, this is testing of the international cooperation. I think that here we should focus more not on the reasons for what has happened but on the live connection with Russia that is here. The opinions have divided on this, too. Obviously, it is the policy of the USA, Germany, the European Union that we follow. They are all super-national structures, not national. If we look at the development of the society in Sør-Varanger, we have here representatives of the real politics who are very prominent. And, surprisingly, why can't we find a practical bridge across the Norwegian-Russian border here? The regional Barents politics must be international politics here. This is not an easy question here in Norway. But at the Russian border, where a lot of migrants from Ukraine live and have relatives there, it is an especially delicate question (Interview 4).

The events of 2014 and the drop of rouble exchange rate have influenced the number of issued visas and border crossings:

- Yes, a dramatic decrease last year. By the outcomes of 2014. Usually, we issued 6-7 thousand visas per year. When the local cross-border permits (Grenseboerbevis) were introduced in 2012, the number of issued visas rose to eight and a half thousand. Because the permits are taken into account in visa statistics. Strictly speaking, they are not visas. But they look like visas, they are stuck into the passport and taken into account in the visa statistics. Further, in 2013 about 7 thousand visas were issued. It was such a first wave, when the Norwegian border residents received the permits. And then 2014 came, chilling off the relations because of the Ukrainian crisis, the sanctions imposed, and across the whole Europe, not only in Norway, we observed a decreasing trend in the number of issued Russian visas. And our number of visas dropped by a quarter – we issued somewhat over five thousand visas last year. But this year, I think, we will reach six thousand plus. People have started traveling again. Obviously, they recovered their senses, realized that everything is not that scary, and the hysteria about Russia is groundless, to a large extent. But now we are talking about tourist visas. Talking about business visas, we are also observing a certain growth, which means representative of the business environment continued traveling. And now we can expect it to grow more. Maybe it will not reach the former annual average figures, but it will be notably better. I can tell this based on the outcomes of almost seven months of work. But the flow of Russians traveling to Norway has also decreased. But the reasons are purely economical. The rouble has dropped to the major European currencies, and it became rather expensive for our people in Murmansk Region, who used to travel fairly regularly to Kirkenes for shopping and to see the sights and just to have a ride. Since 2009 when the number of border crossing amounted to 100 thousand, there was a steady growth and by the end of 2013 it was 330 thousand. In 2014 ca. 350-370 thousand were expected. But it was not even 300 thousand. And this year the situation is beginning to normalize, gradually (Interview 1).

The Consul of the Consulate General of the Kingdom of Norway in Murmansk described the concerns over the changes in the political situation, as follows:

- No, no changes have happened. At the beginning people were a little bit afraid that everything will collapse, everything will change. Some newspapers wrote that the border will be closed. People were afraid that we would stop issuing visas. Mostly, those were Russians. But now everybody understood that everything remains the same. (Bazanova, 2015B)

Talking about people-to-people relations, they are, basically, the same, even though there is a growth of skepticism:

- No, we don't feel it here. Maybe they have become more cautious. For example, on May, 17 I had a Russian flag on my shoulders, I was walking with it in the square. People avoided me, moved away, one can see they were cautious. One cannot tell I am from Russia looking at my clothes. But I had a Russian flag, and that (caution) was felt. And when we walked along the town streets, some people standing by the road looked away from us. Some greeted us well (Interview 8).

- In spring one (Norwegian) approached me and said that Putin would come and conquer us. I said: excellent! I will buy a house in Nikel and will not have to do the customs (Interview 13).

And this is how a Norwegian informant describes the impact of world events on the life in the borderland:

- For a border resident, it is, of course, Ukraine and the conflict between Russia and the West. Using the old language, between Russia and NATO, the US. Because this has brought about chilling in the relations between Russian and Norway, some cooperation projects are now frozen. But if we take our life, as that of the border residents, it has not been impacted much. The border resident permits is still effective, like it was before. The flow of Russians to Kirkenes has slowed down, but that is associated with the rouble drop. It is a specific example. But life as a whole, except for these economic factors, has not changed, practically. It brings me to the conclusion that we must communicate with each others even more and maintain our contacts in the best possible way. And, maybe, work more on it, put more effort and energy into it. Because the factors of influence on the situation in the world are outside Pechenga and Sør-Varanger (Interview 7).

One can notice in the informants' responses a desire to take big politics outside the discussed issues, and focus more on business and personal relations:

- I mostly interact with polite people, so to speak. And they cover political differences with culture. The most important is, in my opinion, to be mutually polite. How to put it in a more accurate way, not to get engaged where one shouldn't. Why?

It can damage the result. There we have a theatrical performance. We have been working on the piece for three months. And suddenly in the middle of that work we will begin discussing who annexed whom? And how the (former) Ukrainians voted. Correctly or not. It is even stipulated in the contract. Or, I acted in a film. No political disputes. The contracts specifically stipulate: no harassment, for any reasons: sexual or otherwise. I interact with cultural institutions more. And at the very initial stage of communication everything is specified.

Someone may say something, casually, because it is there anyway. But it is never focused on, never developed. How are we supposed to work together if we start arguing?

**- So, you who live both in Nikel and Kirkenes, have not noticed any changes in relations since 2014?**

- No, absolutely not (Interview 17).

Thus, the majority of the informants state that the political changes associated with the Crimea annexation and the war in the Ukrainian South-East have had a certain impact on the Russian-Norwegian border area.

First of all, the sanction policies have had a negative impact on the Norwegian business. Due to the drop of the rouble, the number of Russian clients in the shops of Kirkenes has considerably decreased (Olsen, 2014G; Olsen, 2015A; Olsen, 2017).

The number of issued Russian visas has decreased. The number of border crossings has decreased considerably. Some projects that have research, educational, or humanitarian purpose, rather than political, have been suspended.

Skeptical attitude to the neighboring country has increased. This is true on the both sides of the border.

At the same time, all informants state that their personal attitude to Russians or Norwegians remains the same. The border residents prefer to stay away from the big political problems, focusing on personal or business relations.

The Norwegian informants admit that discussion about Russia and Ukrainian events has intensified in the society. And, although it is more related to the southern areas of the country, those that are far away from the border, but also not everything is ideal in the borderland as it

used to be thought of. This is shown from both the informants' responses and publications in the Sør-Varanger Avis newspaper. For a first time, the mayor of Sør-Varanger commune Cecilie Hansen told about growing anti-Russian opinions in her interview to the newspaper:

- I'm afraid that this situation can lead to a stronger hatred towards Russians and it is terribly sad if a larger scale conflict will destroy relations between good friends who are used to communicate. (Olsen, 2014 I)<sup>20</sup>

Further, the mayor stresses that even in the complicated political situation one should distinguish between the Government's actions and lives of individual people:

- We need to think about the way we talk about the conflict, and we need to talk about it in a proper way. Many people with Russian background in Sør-Varanger have family in Ukraine, and for them it is of course very, very hard. The actions are caused by the Russian authorities, not individuals - and it is entirely wrong to address this with hatred or condemnation of individuals according to their nationality (Olsen, 2014 I).<sup>21</sup>

It is worth mentioning that the Russian informants appreciated such approach in the neighboring commune:

- Again, here we have the same connection between the neighbors. For example, let us take the current situation. To put it in a moderate way, the tension in the world. But we can see what the border commune is doing. They do not identify our country's leaders with the people. And the connections that used to exist, do not break between us, specifically. As a Russian resident I can see that, and I feel certain pride even for the only fact that Norwegians look at me as a person of the common society, not as some beast who, let's exaggerate, has invaded Ukraine. I did not invade, personally, I didn't. And I was not asked. I am glad that the Norwegians who live nearby understand it. And they continue to look at me as a human, just the same way as they used to treat me before (Interview 3).

-But I would like to give credit to Sør-Varanger commune. You ought to know that when we celebrated the 9<sup>th</sup> of May here in Russia, the Norwegian Government said

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<sup>20</sup> - Jeg er redd denne situasjonen kan føre til et sterkere russerhat, og det er forferdelig trist om en konflikt i verdensbildet skal ødelegge relasjoner mellom gode venner som er vant til å omgås (Olsen, 2014I).

<sup>21</sup> - Vi må tenke over måten vi snakker om konflikten på, og vi må snakke om den på en ordentlig måte. Mange med russisk bakgrunn i Sør-Varanger har familie i Ukraina, og for dem er dette selvsagt veldig, veldig tungt. Det er myndighetene i Russland som står bak handlingene, ikke enkeltpersoner - og det blir helt feil å møte dette med hat eller personfordømmelse utifra nasjon (Olsen, 2014I).

they would not go to Moscow. But Sør-Varanger said they would come to Nikel. They are great guys, in that sense. Then on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May, I was just at the Norwegian language course and all of our group (3 Russians, 1 Georgian, 4 Congolese and 7-8 Philipinos, and our teacher of Norwegian) went to a meeting here on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May, near the soldier's monument. And everyone was standing there, listening, applauding. Children gave a performance, the Norwegian orchestra played both Russian and Norwegian tunes. And my husband was there. And we thought how great it was that it had not impacted common people (Interview 2).

The reaction to the mayor's statement confirms the division in the society on attitude to Russia and Russians:

The reaction appears to go in two opposing directions. One group does not believe any negative attitude towards the Russians in the Sør-Varanger even exists. The other main attitude is that it is time to wake up. . Mayor's party fellow , Kurt Wikan, wrote in the debate on Facebook in the aftermath of the newspaper article that there are quite a lot who speaks negatively about Russians and that there is a growing hatred towards Russians in Sør-Varanger. He convinced such remarks can be heard when people are out shopping or having fun, he mentioned that the media had just focused on this stuff after the executive committee meeting.

Wikan pointed out a number of examples which he had heard over the last few weeks: "Those damned Russians! What the hell are they doing here! They drive like idiots! They can do shopping at home"  
- I defend the Russians all the time and often hear: "Yes, you are so Russian friendly, move there if they are so good (Olsen, 2014K).<sup>22</sup>

Liza Stepanova, an interpreter and adviser on international issues of Sør-Varanger commune, who has lived in Norway for 20 years, supports the mayor:

- To my mind, it means that we must admit that we are different and have different views, we must able to admit that there are negative attitudes, but also be aware of how we react to negative remarks. Are we laughing along , or are we contributing to putting a limit as to how ugly we can talk about each other? Moreover, - what is our

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<sup>22</sup> Reaksjonene ser ut til å gå i to hovedretninger. En leir mener det overhodet ikke finnes negative holdninger til russere i Sør-Varanger. En annen hovedholdning er at det er på tide å få opp øynene. Ordførerens partifelle, Kurt Wikan, skrev i debatten i etterkant av avisartikkelen på facebook at det er ganske mange som ytrer seg negativt om russerne og at det er et voksende russerhat i Sør-Varanger. Han mener det høres «på byen», og viste til at det nettopp er fokusert på det i media etter et formannskapsmøte.

Wikan viste til en rekke eksempler han har hørt de siste ukene: "De jævla russerne! Ka faen gjør dem her! De kjøre som idiotia! De kan handle hjemme".

- Jeg forsvarer russerne hele tiden og får høre: "Ja, du er jo så russervennlig, flytt dit om dem er så bra (Olsen, 2014K).

goal? Is it a nice facade? Individuals are not perfect and families are not either. No one is perfect, nor are the Norwegian-Russian relations here in the north. Having such a neighbour, Kirkenes doesn't even have to try to seem like a sunshine little cosy place (Olsen, 2014 K).<sup>23</sup>

In connection with the emerged discussion on attitude to Russians, the newspaper Sør-Varanger Avis made a survey "Is it good that Russians come to Kirkenes?" (Olsen, 2014 K). 204 people took part in the survey. 150 respondents replied "Yes, welcome!" 48 replied "No, stay at home." 6 had no concern about it.<sup>24</sup>

The attitude of Russian informants to Norway has not changed. The fact that the attitude to Norwegian guests has not deteriorated is confirmed by a report by Birgitte Olsen from Nikel "Big politics is big politics, but people are people" (Olsen, 2015G).

To the question whether they have noticed a change in attitude to themselves, a Norwegian informant replied:

- No, there are no problems emerging (Interview 19).

At the same time, one should admit that people's attitude to Norway who only reply upon central Russian channels has chilled off. The reports about the Norwegian Child Welfare Services (Barnevern) have played especially significant role (Irina Bergseth fled from Norway to Russia, 2011).

The informants confirm:

- Russians who travel to Norway have not changed their attitude to it. Maybe they have a different attitude to the Crimea, but they have not changed their attitude to Norway. But those who haven't been. Of course, now the relations have become

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<sup>23</sup> - I det mener jeg det ligger at vi må vedgå at vi er forskjellige og har forskjellige synspunkter, vi må kunne innrømme at det finnes negative holdninger, men også være bevisste på hvordan vi reagerer på negative bemerkninger. Flirer vi med, eller er vi med på å sette en grense for hvor stygt vi kan snakke om hverandre? Dessuten - hva er målet vårt? Er det en fin fasade? Enkeltmennesker er ikke perfekte og familier er det ikke. Ingen er perfekte, heller ikke de norsk-russiske relasjonene her i nord. Og med den naboen Kirkenes har nytter det ikke å være en rosenrød fasadeby (Olsen, 2014 K).

<sup>24</sup> <http://sva.no/index.php?page=tjenester&sub=galluper&do=vis&GallupID=23> (No longer is active).

tenser, because NATO is a structure hostile to Russia. And that Norway is a NATO member and why should one go there and why give all this information about Norway. And such people also have appeared now. They used to be before, but it was not stressed so much that Norway is a potential adversary. And now if someone watches TV, it is understandable. Plus, the issue of Barnevern. I believe that our people were initially charged with such attitude to the West. It is simply now that they are using such internal mindset and pumping it up. But mistrust and distaste to the West has always existed in Russia. They are just playing this card, stress this issue (Interview 12).

In this respect a specific example is noteworthy to show how fears and prejudice had an impact on implementation of a cooperation project.

In 2014-2015 a joint Norwegian-Russian project “Walking Great Strides” was under implementation. The project was a part of an agreement between the Murmansk Region Government and the Governor of Finnmark. Our region was selected as pilot because of its near-border location and a large experience of cooperation. The project was targeted at monitoring of various services responsible for children and youth issues for the purpose of coordination of their work for children’s rights protection. The Russian party was not supposed to share their monitoring (according to the Norwegian system) results with the Norwegian partners, but they were supposed to use them at their own discretion to improve the work quality in this sphere.

But the parents in Nikel scared by the publications in the press opposed to the project implementation. This was the first incident in the cooperation history when the public protested against a joint project. In the course of discussion at the public council (the author was invited) most unbelievable opinions were spoken. For example, that the project was aimed at selling Russian children abroad. A representative of the parents, Inna Shevyakova, said: “I don’t take my children to Norway, I am afraid that a child may slip on the street, and people will run to me and take the child away. And I will not be able to do anything. I believe such cooperation is no good to us.” As a result, the working group of the public council made a unanimous decision to suspend participation in the project. (Нужно ли нам шагать «Семимильными шагами»? Do we need to walk "great strides?", 2014)

To the question concerning the attitude of the people of Nikel to Norwegians who come for shopping, a Russian informant replied:

- I think, negatively. They see a negative side in them buying everything. But we have never called them nice names. Any news related to Norwegians, for example, in the social media. People sometimes express negative attitude (Interview 8).

Thus, we can conclude that the political events have had a certain impact on the attitude of Russian and Norwegian people to each other. Here we can see the influence of the national mass media who speculate on old prejudices and historical mistrust. But it is also important to see the local mass media free from such speculations. What is more, the local mass media often refrain from the conflict-based big politics, but rather prefer to focus on the cooperation and dialog at the local level. However, discussions of “sensitive” issues reflecting the current state of the border community have come to their pages, as well.

#### **4.2.7 Sources of information used by respondents and the degree of confidence in them.**

##### **Does daily life in the borderland on the perception and evaluation of information?**

In this chapter we will look at the sources of information used by respondents and how much confidence they have in them. We were also interested in finding out how the neighboring country is presented in the national media and whether living in the borderland affects the perception of information. Let us revert to the interviews:

**- What sources do you use to get information about the events in the world?**

- All sources. Newspapers of course, mass media, talking to coworkers and from simply reflecting and comparing as they taught me in school.

**- Are these Russian mass media or foreign too?**

- Different ones, mainly domestic, but when I travel abroad I read their papers too. But I don't like spending time on the Internet.

**- If we take our central TV networks, don't you have a dissonance between how Norway is presented and what you personally know about life there?**

- There is no dissonance as I hear almost nothing about Norway on our TV networks. I just have informants from Norway, who live there with me and who call me and come here so I know about life in Norway from the people who live there. In that sense, mass media have no influence on my understanding of what's going on in Norway. I don't really go there that often. I visit once a year and see with my own eyes and talk with Norwegian biologists.

**- What about stories involving Barnevern?**

- You mean incidents with children? No, I never tried to make any profound analysis of this. I'd like to believe that there is no politics there that there are just some policies adopted by the Norwegians. But even in that case one must follow the law. Truth should be established in quiet, not at some loud talk shows.

**- Does being a neighbor of Finland and Norway have an impact on your perception of political events in the world?**

- Not at all. My attitude to these events is determined by the sheer understanding of their true meaning. Primarily for Russia, understanding of history. No Norwegian would be able to tell me our history anew. Therefore, there's no impact at all (Interview 10).

**- What sources do you use to get information about what's going on in the world?**

- I am used to working with information. I've been doing it since 1989. I became an editor on 1 June 1989. Therefore, I am fully aware of what's going on here at the border. Besides, I've been working as a journalist since 1976. Here we have a very small community with their eyes and ears wide open. I am simply obliged to analyze everything as for 27 years I wrote an editorial in the newspaper three times a week. My job required me to express my opinion three times a week about what was going on here in our small Sør-Varanger municipality and around it. Now it is very easy to get information about the world on the Internet. I also have some international experience – I lived in Latin America for a year and that got me interested in global events. Maybe this is the reason I became a journalist instead of a bioengineer as I originally planned. You can watch all channels and follow newspaper publications. However, you should always ask yourself about what you're listening to, reading or watching. Even if you are not a journalist, you need to think of what you get as a source of information. It is important to check whether it is true. This mindset is characteristic of my job – requirement to analyze. Therefore, part of my job is to be in the know. I must watch multiple channels on different sides to make my own opinion.

**- How is modern Russia presented on central Norwegian television?**

- Actually, there is little information. There was more in the very beginning of the conflict in Ukraine. There were reports about Ukraine and Crimea. Then they tried to show both sides of the conflict and figure out what Russia was doing. But now there is very little about this. We hear very little about this situation, we hear a lot more about the Islamic State (Interview 7).

**- What sources do you use to get information about events in the world?**

- I am ashamed, but I don't get any information. I save my nerves and my soul.

**- But you do get to hear things?**

- Yes, you can hear the radio (the radio was in the room throughout the interview). Here it is music radio but in the bedroom, it's news only. My husband loves listening to the news and he tells me all the important news.

**- Do you ever watch Russian TV?**

- No. Sometimes in Nikel, but it's only movies. I get really upset when I hear bad news, so I don't watch any TV (Interview 2).

**- What sources of information do you use?**

- It is both the Internet, TV and radio.

**- Are these Norwegian sources?**

- A little of everything, but mainly these are Norwegian sources. I look through commentary on the CNN about global things. There is an ongoing war with ISIS, on terror, there is of course Ukraine and Russia. A lot of militarism.

**- Did it use to be different?**

- In any case it was not as noticeably tense. I think it was happening earlier too to a certain extent, but this was not commented upon by the media. Therefore, there's that feeling that now there's more of this. At least from the Russian side it looks like this: "Don't mess with us – we are a great power".

**- Do you think your opinion about events in the world is different from that of people living in the south of Norway? Is it influenced by the proximity of Russia?**

- Yes, I think it is. And my opinion is different. Because southerners form their opinion solely from what get from the media and not through contacts with neighbors. We know that some people in Nikel are disappointed and upset because of the situation and there are some who support all Putin's decisions. We know Russians, we know their culture. Those who live in Oslo don't know the mentality and culture of Russians.

**- Don't you ever have a dissonance between what you see about Russia on Norwegian TV and what you know from your personal experience?**

- But I am Norwegian. I think, that the Norwegian media are presenting rather balanced information. Russians, for example may disagree with this. But I don't have an impression that this is propaganda of sorts. They have reports about everyday life, about what's going on at the border. I was really shocked and

frustrated when I saw a talk show about Barnevern on Russian TV. I had only one thought – are people really that stupid to believe all of that, it was true brainwashing (Interview 15).

**- Now it makes sense to move on to the mass media.**

- Freedom of the press is quite an ephemeral notion to me. Because any media outlet, even private, exists thanks to someone's money. In any case those who own the media call the tune. I am not saying they are all dishonest. However, there is always a bias it has been, and it will always be there. Only when humans begin to live on thin air, will one be able to see an independent media outlet. And when they are in armor and callous so that nothing concerns them, then they will present all events in an objective way. And even then, objectivity is dependent on the subject.

**- What sources of information do you use?**

- Internet and personal conversations

**- Can you give an example of channels?**

- They are different, regular ones. I am not into social media and I only do them to keep track of people. Other than that I mainly use regular sources like Yandex and Mail.

**- How do you choose the sources?**

- I try to read both the positions I like and what I don't like. Because being an editor-in-chief I must know the attitudes of different sides. Therefore, I also read things I disagree with.

**- Do you read materials about Norway?**

- Yes, of course.

**- How is Norway presented in the Russia media?**

- I think it is quite reserved. A NATO country, a country that joined the sanctions. Therefore, the entire vector of reporting is directed this way. I haven't encountered any verbal attacks on Norwegians. There is cautiousness there. I haven't encountered any rage. Cautiousness, yes (Interview 3).

**- Your attitude to the reporting on Crimea and Ukraine in the media?**

- It's a sort of dumbing-down. Situation with Crimea and Ukraine showed that the population in the West is not more intellectual at all. They also believe everything they are served on TV screens. We are more independent in our thinking in that sense. Perestroika taught us not to believe everything we're told. And they still have it going. They live in this sealed world. What they are spoon-fed, they carry inside themselves.

**- But they say that the TV tells the truth.**

- It's an illusion that can hardly be knocked out of them. They don't want to think.

**- But there are people in Russia that watch TV day and night.**

- Yes, and in Norway an absolute majority watches TV continuously. And they believe not what they say "on TV", rather what the "TV says".

**- Is the reason for their trust is that Norwegian media are believed to be free and independent?**

- No, of course, the Norwegians also have critical attitude to their own state and the officialdom but somehow there is a complete unanimity in this issue, the issue of Crimea.

**- Have you seen any exceptions from this rule?**

- If we take my colleagues, I honestly don't know what's in their head. I admit that they may agree with us, but they will still write about the aggression. I'll repeat: they didn't have the inoculation we had in the 1990s. They are used to believing everything.

If we take Ukraine, we do have unofficial channels to get precise and true information. Refugees come, and these are completely independent people. They don't need bedtime stories. And of course, we are far more informed people (Interview 6).

**- How do you get information about the world? What sources?**

- Well, from some accidental pieces. Like viral advertising. There are whole media offices working on how to present the information to the people in the right way so that they pay attention. Information is a product. And what do you do if it does not sell. Most of my work is about studying art, different schools. Art history. Bigger focus on contemporary. And that presumes the use of the Internet. And on the Internet, there are always "hooks" that you grab, whether you like it or not. And thus, you get various information.

**- So, your political information is not regulated in any way. You read what comes your way.**

- Yes, read and forget.

**- So, tell me to what extent the information you read corresponds to the truth?**

- Well, information is just another product. And depending how attractively it is packaged, “the plebs lap it up” as one comedian put it. The more absurd, the more interesting. Like the Loch Ness monster.

**- Do you watch TV at all?**

- No, no ... It’s been a long time since I did. The Internet is sufficient. Maybe sometimes I watch central TV stations just to see the changes in the way information is presented. They have professionals working for them. That’s interesting for me even professionally. When I do something for Norwegians I watch their channels.

**- Have you ever had a chance to compare how central channels in Russia and Norway cover the same events?**

- Now, I am more focused on the technical side - the sound, light, dynamics. I am not so much interested in the contents, rather in the way it is presented by anchors. Sometimes, I don’t even understand what they are talking about. But the picture dynamics is far different from that of ten years ago.

**- But for most of the population TV remains the main source of information, both in Russia and in Norway.**

- Yes, sure. My mom watches all the time.

**- Occasionally Norwegian central channels report on things that are of little importance for the local people. Can there be a real dissonance between what they are “peddled” by TV and what they experience in real life?**

- Well, central channels usually talk about things that you cannot get other information about. Very often this information is the only source for border residents and thus the only correct one. They have no time to understand whether it is right or wrong. They have nothing to compare with. This is normal for your brain. Professionals prepare the right material.

**- Can it drive a wedge between the people? We know that Ukrainian and Russian relatives have a falling out over this. Can something similar happen here?**

- Yes, it can quite easily. Here’s an example from my own family. We had an American lady to do stuff with kids. She’s in Saint Petersburg with her husband, he is a diplomat. She does some art projects with schoolkids, nothing special. Emily. Speaks perfect Russian. Very sociable. She’s been living in Russia for a long time. A nice young woman.

I've only seen Americans maybe about ten times in my life and maybe talked to two or three at the most. I have very little experience of being with them. So, I present the information which has been drummed to my head since childhood to Emily. Like we proposed the disarmament program and have fully disarmed ourselves. And the Americans didn't do it to the end, bastards! Emily says: "Imagine, Roma, we were told the same that we, Americans, disarmed ourselves. And the USSR, bastards, didn't!" (Interview 17).

**- What sources of information do you use?**

- Different ones as this is part of my work: RT, Norwegian national TV channels, studying Russian sources has become part of my professional literature but poor knowledge of the language prevents me from doing that. Also, international newspapers – British, German, American.

**- Can you compare how the same events are covered by British, German and American newspapers and RT?**

Then I need to refer to issues they discuss. It'll be easier if I take Norwegian papers. Here we see things in their complexity. But if we take Aftenposten, there you have only Putin's Russia. I'd like to see this in a more comprehensive way. The main idea must be that we border on Russia and it obliges us to cooperate. As for the EU or Germany, there are certain expectations of international cooperation. Otherwise, consequences are unavoidable. It is clear from the Russian foreign policy position that they have a different view of these things: this has to do with the realities of big politics, where there is cold war, Soviet border, NATO expansion in Europe, how NATO positions itself with regard to new Europe. There is a complicated discussion on the Russian side from which it is possible to understand why they made such a choice. But the means they used are unclear (Interview 4).

**- What sources of information do you use?**

- Different ones. I look at different sources and then make my own opinion. Because opinions of different sources may be completely contradictory. This is the Internet and feedback from people. If you take specific countries, then opinions are divided 50/50. One half believes that Russia is an aggressor. The other half on the contrary is against the war and asks to stop Ukraine's assault on the eastern part. The society is cleft in two.

**- Do you read news about Norway in the Russian media?**

- Yes, in different sources.

**- How is Norway currently presented in the Russian media?**

- As a country whose salmon was banned (from Russia). Very few events get coverage. Usually it is a problem with our fishing vessels or when a child is removed from a family. There are no other Norway related topics in the Russian media. The slant is negative.

**- Don't you have a dissonance between what Russian media say about Norway and your personal experience in this country?**

- No, authorities in Norway are quite strict and everybody is very law-abiding. You can't get away from responsibility, unlike in Russia. This difference is palpable. In Norway they won't turn a blind eye towards things they turn a blind eye towards in Russia. This is definitive (Interview 8).

**- What channels do you watch?**

- News channels on TV and I also watch news on the Internet.

**- Are they primarily Norwegian?**

- Yes

**- How do they present Russia?**

- Not positive.

**- What's your perception of Russia?**

- I have a positive perception.

**- Isn't there a conflict between your personal perceptions of Russia and the way it is presented on Norwegian TV?**

- Yes, exactly. But this is big politics. This is what USA and EU are saying (Interview 19).

**- Where do you get information?**

- Mainly on the Internet. Primarily on SMI.ru. Before that it was Lenta.ru and Gazeta.ru. But after their staff was changed they stopped being interesting for me. Sometimes I listen to Echo Moskvyy (Echo of Moscow), it's interesting to hear interviews. Dozhd (Rain) is a subscription service, and access is not that easy. Sometimes I visit Segodnya.ua to watch news from the Ukrainian side.

**- How is Norway presented in the Russian media?**

- I rarely watch TV. But as far as I understand the general narrative is that Norway is an exemplary, showcase part of Europe. But at the same time some things are taking place there. A child may be removed from the family at any time and for any

reason in cultural, civilized Norway. This also includes throwing the sexual minority issue into the picture. Even though that Norway is a developed country they show that is spiritually or culturally inferior. And that is when Kiselyov himself loved coming to the Norwegian North in Finnmark. Now he's denied access. So, the politics and the propaganda are like that - Europe may have a high standard of living but there is nothing for Russians to do there. As far as I understand this is how it is presented. There are advantages but there are major disadvantages.

**- Have you had a dissonance between your personal experience in Norway and they way it is shown in the Russian media?**

- Our media give a very general picture of everything. And when you see details you can always find some inconsistencies. But they would not be able to be 100% consistent and that is not needed as their audience is not in the borderland. They don't need to know the details, they will only confuse. Another thing is that their criticism is politically motivated. In other words, we have difficulties in business and differences in cultures and mentalities, but this is neglected. And the focus is made on problems with children. At the same time, Russia has big problems with children, orphanages are almost like prisons. And here it is important for whatever reason how children are treated in Norway. This cannot be viewed as something serious or useful. You can watch it for fun but it is clear that this report is not of that high quality or importance. Anything politically motivated has no value because they just want something from you. They want you to change your opinion not for your benefit but for the benefit of some politician.

**- Does the border with Norway have any impact on the opinion of Russian residents?**

- I don't think so. Because domestic media have a dominant role and there are not that many contacts. If they smile and say "hei" to Norwegians, it does not mean that there is communication. And there is no impact on their opinion. More so, even Russians who live in Kirkenes, very often take pro-Putin's views.

**- What do you think is the prevailing point of view regarding the events in Ukraine on the Norwegian and Russian sides?**

- The prevailing point of view on the Norwegian side is that Putin is to blame for everything – both the Crimea occupation and destabilization in Eastern Ukraine with a possible goal of making it part of Russia.

From the Russian point of view, it's all NATO's fault. They used the Maidan in their interest in order advance farther towards Russia. It is a part of West's operation against Russia. Therefore, it is important not to give in and pursue Russian interests, including keeping the naval base in Crimea as well protecting the Russians living in Ukraine. Because their culture is suppressed, and new Ukrainian authorities are very hostile to Russians and repressions are likely. And only Russia can protect the Russians living in Ukraine. And they are right. Many Russians who

were skeptical of Putin started to respect him after his strong stance in the Ukrainian issue. Thus, positions are exactly opposite (Interview 12).

**- What sources of information do you use?**

- I watch TV, NRK

**- Do you watch Russian TV?**

- No. We used to have the Russian channel RT. Our current subscription package does not include it. We used to be able to watch many Russian, Belorussian, Baltic, Bulgarian and other channels in Vardø. I don't know, maybe they went bankrupt or somebody else bought the rights. Now we have a digital package. But I'd be happy to watch RT because it's a Russian channel that competes with the CNN and other channels in English. I know that it is a state channel and official information from the Russian state but I think it's a good channel. This is very critical journalism, especially when they interview those who are critical of America in the USA and UK. It's interesting to hear. I like this because nobody has complete truth. I like listening to different points of view.

**- Do you believe everything they say on TV?**

- No, this is not religion, after all. People express different opinions. Belief is a religious category. And here you must create your own picture.

**- Can personal contacts with Russians influence how the information is perceived?**

- Yes, sure.

**- Can there be a dissonance then?**

- Yes, sure, there can. A person must be disposed to listening to the other side, to other side's views rather than begin arguing of who possesses the truth. This is silly. Therefore, it never makes sense to argue over politics when you're drinking. Then it's easier to get the dissonance (Interview 9).

**- What sources of information do you use?**

- I read everything. The Russian Sputnik in Norwegian. Also, Al Jazeera, news from the Arab world in English, so I know what's happening in the south. Norwegian newspapers are just propaganda – it's impossible to read them. Recently I read, why the US and EU are mad at Putin. Because he did in Syria what they were supposed to have done several years ago. It is the Americans who financed and trained organizations like the Taliban.

**- Do you think being a neighbor of Russia has influenced your perception of events?**

- Yes. I have a much larger range of thinking and views. Those who haven't been to Russia cannot call themselves an expert. And we travel to Russia and see it every day and often discuss politics with Russians. Here many don't like Putin. But I don't say anything, I don't want to argue over politics.

**- How is Russia presented in the Norwegian media?**

- Nothing good, only terrible things. Somebody was drunk driving, somebody killed somebody, mass murders in Saint Petersburg. All of the USA is filled with mass murders but whenever something happens in Russia it immediately becomes news. It's only negative.

**- Has it been always like that? Or have there been better days?**

- It was better before the Ukrainian crisis. Yes, there was coverage of folk music, food and other similar things. Then suddenly it's only bad stuff (Interview 13).

The Internet, TV, radio, newspapers and personal communication remain the main sources of information for the residents of borderland.

The majority of informants are critical of the media sources. Many of them use both domestic and foreign sources. There is interest in alternative points of view. The majority have an analytical approach and strive to establish one's own point of view based on different and often conflicting opinions.

Some informants have little interest in big politics. Others on the contrary treat it professionally.

It is interesting how border residents characterize the information about the neighboring country presented by their domestic channels. Norwegians believe that there is little diversity in information about Russia – it is mainly negative, focusing on crime. Russians note that the way Norway is presented is not aggressive, rather careful. Although one-sided approach is dominant here as well. Often Norway appears in the Russian news in relation to negative events such as removal of children from Russian or mixed families living in Norway. However, Russian informants believe this information is politically biased.

Informants agree that people without personal experience and living far from the border may establish a negative and unfriendly perception of the neighbor because of the way it is presented in the media. Especially given that political events are presented in totally different light in the central Russian and Norwegian channels.

In our opinion, Russian respondents are more critical. The reason for this is the mistrust towards state-controlled media since the USSR. There is an opinion that any mass media is not independent and there is always someone behind the information. Norwegian informants have more confidence in their national media than their Russian neighbors. One Russian informant has more confidence in Norwegian media, than in the national ones. In turn, one Norwegian informant calls national media American propaganda.

In our opinion, living in the borderland provides a possibility to verify the information in the media independently using one's contacts and thus it has an impact on the assessments, making them more balanced and realistic.

Therefore, referring to the work of J. Bryant and S. Thompson "Fundamentals of Media Effects", one can state that "impact of political mass media messages depends on a number of properties of a concrete representative of the audience and the way he or she processes media information" (2004: 344). The majority of our informants are "not just most politically informed but also strive to get new information. Thanks to their own ability to prioritize media information, they are less likely to be affected by the printed and broadcasting media" (Bryant and Thompson 2004: 344).

#### **4.2.8 How can relations develop in the borderland, given the political situation in the world? Can the border community influence on the political situation?**

In this chapter we will look at how the residents of the Russian-Norwegian borderland see the future in the current political environment and whether they think they can influence the negative political situation.

Let us revert to the interviews:

- **What is the likely development of relations here in the borderland given the current trends in global politics?**

- I think, that if our top politicians are smart enough there will be no ban on normal communication. And if there is no ban on the federal level, then everything will be fine. We will continue talking with each other as we did before.

**- What could positive development of events, if the political pendulum swings the opposite way, mean for the situation here?**

- I think this could mean prosperity for this place. With the help of each other in the best-case scenario. We are just obliged to help each other. We could have much better development. However, this is not only because of the political environment. Short-sightedness of mid-level politicians in the ministries and agencies is also at play (cites the example of destroyed Kola Superdeep Borehole and unrealized tourist routes in the Rybachy Peninsula) (Interview 3).

**- Do you think something could be done to improve the relations in the borderland?**

- I see that it has become more difficult for me to do what I have been doing for the past 5-6 years. It is imperative the established cooperation be supported. Attitude to the cooperation establishes a platform which must be used to distribute information about positive sides of cooperation, which creates a chain reaction. So that it does not stop, whatever happens. What can I do as an employee of a university? I must have an internationalization strategy and I must develop cooperation. But we did not just talk, we made it and we created it. Also, children need to be raised and shown the life in the borderland.

More people need to be involved in projects. We need to interact via concrete long-term projects. The funding mechanism must be more flexible. Projects need to be promoted in mass media. It is especially important to promote projects on the municipal level, in education (Interview 4).

**- How can the situation develop with us in the borderland given what's going on in the world?**

- This will have zero impact, even Russia is in a state of war. Only if the border is closed due to circumstances.

**- And what kind of changes for the better may there be?**

- So, what can change? Only if they open a 24/7 border crossing station, increase its capacity and simplify the border crossing even further (Interview 8).

**- Can we, those living in the borderland, influence the situation in the world?**

- Yes. We are convinced that one should differentiate between big politics and people living close by (Interview 19).

**- How can the relations develop in the borderland given the confrontation in the world?**

- On the everyday level, we just need to talk to each other. We should not be afraid of travelling to the other side, that's it. I believe, that any high relations whether in trade, or economics are based on completely normal human relations. We need normal human relations and then build more floors on top of that — floors like trade, politics, education, culture and various exchanges. It is worse if things go the other way. It is wrong when somebody from the top tells when to become friends and when to end our friendship. But I think it is okay. Let those who were friends remain friends (Interview 10).

**- Do people here in Sør-Varanger have any aspiration to challenge the modern political situation?**

- Yes, as far as I understand from the debates in the society. For example, business and cultural representatives say that we must continue cooperating as much as we can. Some criticize the Norwegian government for their support of NATO, for their aspiration to be the best student in class in respect of sanctions, etc. However, companies like Barel, Kimek, Henriksen shipping and others have repeatedly raised this issue with the Norwegian authorities. People are not at all interested in ruining the relations here at the border. We are not sitting here and blessing our government, quite the contrary. We sincerely hope that the cooperation will be continued, we would not want it to stop.

**- What do we need to do then?**

- We need to express protest, send signals that we disagree. And continue to cooperate even closer. This is in our power! (Interview 7)

**- Do you think the continuing differences between Russia and the US may have a negative impact on the relations in the borderland?**

- Yes, of course, I think.

**- Can people here put something up against this process?**

- You mean meetings and cooperation? But it is only between us. I do not think this will have any influence. There will be no protest rallies. However, what's good about our border zone — even many Norwegians say let politicians deal with each other and I see you and you see me and of course we will never be enemies with you. I had a very nice welcome even in the kindergarten even though this was when the Ukrainian crisis was already underway and everybody said they liked Russia. And they said good words about Nikel and Zapolyarniy. I did not get a single negative feedback. I don't know, maybe they were just being polite. And one lady said she'd been going to Nikel for 25 years and she knew many people in Zapolyarniy. And

whatever happens in politics is their business. Is it conceivable that we can go to war with each other if come visit each other and are friends as families? (Interview 2)

**- Are border residents capable of somehow improving relations at the border?**

- I think our relations here are quite good and if they become worse this happens for reasons beyond our control such as the rouble exchange rate or sanctions. We here cannot decide anything, this is decided elsewhere. But of course, you can always do something to be better neighbors and to know each other better. I think, there should be more things like the Dialogue Club, meetings across the border and new people. Then reasons for fear and prejudice will fade away (Interview 15).

**- Can the people who want cooperation improve the situation?**

- We need to unite and stop the conflict. Start everything over again. But the conflict is not only in Ukraine, they are happening throughout the world. We need to develop closer cooperation and engage more people living in the borderland. This is hard to accomplish. And the political situation may be very challenging. It is difficult to discuss political issues in Norway and so is it in Russia. And when politicians have different positions there may be a conflict. We, small people, cannot do much in a situation like this even though many are interested in the cooperation and maintaining peace. One needs to put a lot of effort into setting oneself up against the situation. Especially given the fact that the relations between Russia and the US are so complicated (Interview 5).

**- What do you think of the phrase I often hear from Norwegians «It is good to have two ideas in one head», that is to support EU sanctions on the one hand and to continue cooperating with Russia on the other hand?**

- I am positive to this.

**- How is that possible?**

- We must do it, otherwise the world will stop developing. If you have just one idea, then the only way is to close the border exactly like it used to be. I do not think that Norway suffered much from the sanctions. Fish is needed everywhere in the world. People eat fish outside Russia, too. They just found another market. Or a detour via Belarus. So, the politicians are happy — they imposed sanctions. And Russians are happy — they get Norwegian salmon packaged in Belarus. This is a parody. I think everything will straighten itself out over time. They did it all the time before (Interview 9).

**- How will the situation develop in the borderland in your opinion?**

- Joint cultural life will develop faster. It all started with culture and libraries back in the day, didn't it? They started discussing who Esenin was and who Munch was. Culture will always be ahead. Political cooperation will be behind it. If the

possibilities for crossing the border don't get worse, and I think they should not, communication is only going to get better.

- Problem is that not all people have the right disposition in relations with their neighbors in the borderland. And this problem needs and can be solved. It must be solved.

Yes, it is enough to be educated. I said it hundreds of times. And produce using the experience around you if it is part of your responsibilities and use some human factors to facilitate if not love but at least some good attitude to the people. So that there is no attitude like this (which I have to admit of having myself): «So they come here in big numbers buying up petrol and Coca-Cola, bastards! And I am in a hurry». We need to understand that people come here to save some money. So that they have more money for their children. We go there as well. If you explain everything, you get an completely different attitude to simple things (Interview 17).

**- What future do you see for the borderland in the light of processes that are taking place?**

- Some say that Putin will close the border. I hope it will never happen. This would be a tragedy. Then we will sit on the other side and cry if we cannot get to Russia. Throughout the summer central Norwegian newspapers, especially VG, wrote that Russia might invade East Finnmark. We just say: «Are they going to invade us again?» Yes, like during the cold war we were told that the aim would be the ice-free harbor, now they say it's oil. The EU and Russia got united to invade Norway. It would be more logical if the US and EU got united. Brutal and dangerous Russia are around. And they say in Oslo: «Russians will come now and invade us». And we say: «They invade us and that is good because we know them». Then I would not have to do the customs at the border.

**- What we as residents of borderland can do to counter negative processes?**

- In Norway we need to remove our government, because they sold the entire Norway. They are only interested in money. They sold Hurtigruten, they will soon sell the railway and nature. Everything is up for sale. It's not the people who is in charge, it's the money. I say that if some aliens come from other planets we will unite. We need a common enemy.

**- Do you think anything can be done to improve relations in the borderland?**

- I think, we are doing quite well, we organized the Dialogue Club. We get to know and meet people and invite them to visit (Interview 13).

**- What is your best and worst-case development scenario for the borderland?**

- I'd prefer a medium scenario — everything remains as it was. What happened in the 1970s, 80s, 90s, 2000s will stay. People will travel across the border a little, buy a little, meet a little but everyone will have their separate lives — in the Pechenga

district and in Sør-Varanger. The worst-case scenario is if they close everything on our side. We've been through that before — border zone and ban on entry for foreigners. Complete alienation is the worst case, with the exception of a nuclear war, of course. The best case is in the dream category because I don't know how to implement it. These are projects based on the best resources and properties of Norwegian and Russian cultures. Who will find a way to combine these two cultures to create something new and competitive globally? (Interview 12)

This is what the Russian Consul General in Kirkenes Mikhail Noskov told the Pechenga newspaper answering the question if the differences between Russia and Europe/USA could have an impact on Russian-Norwegian relations in the borderland:

- They can have an impact, but it will be limited. What is more important is that a person being in a certain information space begins to think and to doubt. But I am more optimistic than pessimistic in that respect. I'll try to substantiate this. During the Cold War there was the Iron Curtain and bloc confrontation. Nevertheless, relations in the North did develop. Remember that the agreement between the municipalities was signed in the early 70s and there were wonderful examples of cultural and sports cooperation already then.

Now there is not just one opinion which has no alternative. Earlier you needed to go somewhere in person to see and to find out — there were no telephones, let alone the Internet. Now it is impossible to close off a society. Current technologies make it possible for the people to cross borders, read different opinions, get together in interest groups and make their own conclusions. And this is what both Russian and Norwegian do, by the way. Therefore I don't think that there are conditions now that would erect a new wall between us.

If people just live by their own wits and try to delve deeper into what they are told rather than take it for granted this will make it possible to maintain the atmosphere of good neighborhood and established ties. They are quite strong now and are capable of withstanding a serious test. Figuratively speaking, they are like a strong rope— they can stretch without breaking (Bazanov, 2015A).

Answering the same question Norway's consul in Murmansk Gøril Johansen told the Pechenga newspaper this:

- Norway takes the same stance on this issue as the European Union. But Norway also made it very clear where we are going to continue cooperating with Russia: this is education, research, environment, emergencies, regional relations, culture, fisheries and people-to-people cooperation, Barents cooperation. This year we gave even more grants. So, I think everybody can see how this is possible. We see even more delegations. I would say nothing changed it even has become stronger.

**- You have highlighted Norway's priorities for cooperation in the North. But what if priority list at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is different from the Norwegian one?**

- We all have seen how far they match each other. For example, King of Norway came to Kirkenes during the celebrations of the 70th anniversary of the freeing of Finnmark. Russia was represented by Sergey Lavrov and Marina Kovtun who expressed their appreciation for the way Norway celebrated this event. They said they had been deeply touched by how Norway expressed its gratitude to the Russian soldiers. The feelings in Kirkenes were very strong. And Marina Kovtun often says that Lavrov and Putin support cooperation in the North.

**- What do you think of the role of border municipalities in this?**

- Their role is very important as they are on the frontline. They must be active, promote cooperation and show their residents that they support cooperation.

**- In other words, they can become a sort of peacemakers?**

- Yes. For example, when we speak in Oslo about cooperation of Sør-Varanger we underscore its great importance for us. They are highly respected and what they do is often appreciated. In a way they partly implement our policy. The Barents Cooperation continues (Bazanova, 2015B).

Thus, even though there is some concern about worsening relations on the government level, the majority of border residents are quite optimistic about the future. They consider the closing of the border a worst-case scenario and they are very negative to such development. Among threats Russian informants name possible introduction of a border zone and pressure on the cooperation from federal authorities. The favorable scenario includes simplified border crossing, development of cultural cooperation and economic prosperity, based on combining each other's best capabilities. The majority of informants believe that there will be no dramatic changes, and everything will continue as it is.

Even though informants agree that border residents have little or no impact on global processes, they cite strengthened cooperation as a counterbalance to negative trends. This cooperation needs to take place in long-term projects with the involvement of many people. Among other mechanisms of promoting cooperation and good neighborhood are media coverage of positive experience, involvement of children and youth and increasing overall cultural level of residents.

Norwegian informants say that one of the measures is to express disagreement with the government and reelect it if they don't listen. This is not seen in Russian informants' answers. Many believe that it is the normal human relations that can maintain peace and stability at the border because people are least interested in interrupting historic ties.

It is noted that the role of border municipalities as locomotives of cooperation increases as bilateral relations on the government level deteriorate.

## Conclusions

Currently, the relations between Russia and the West are having a tough time, which some analysts call the new Cold War. Judging by the news we get the situation is getting worse. Bilateral relations between Russia and Norway are part of the overall agenda of relations between Russia, USA and the European Union. However, unlike the US and the majority of European countries, Russia and Norway share a border which is customarily called the oldest and the most peaceful of European borders. Russian-Norwegian borderland is a unique place where two civilizations and two cultures meet. It is here that bilateral relations and geopolitics acquire human dimension. There is a transition from abstract notions of big politics to concrete human interests of carriers of a certain culture and values. It is the conditions of cultural polyphony that are conducive to maintaining dialogue.

In years since the border opened, significant changes have taken place which are transforming the border converting it from an absolute barrier to a connection factor and a meeting point. This is also reflected in the mentality of border residents.

There are signs of mutual cultural interpenetration and that becomes a decisive factor in the perception of political events by residents of borderland. But it is not so much the fact of the border being open that is at play rather it is the intensification of human contacts and internal beliefs of subjects of border relations. Globalization with its modern communication devices, accessibility of information and relative simplicity of border crossing facilitates the process of formation of cultural identity of a transborder person.

Judging by the absolute majority of informants' answers, border residents are people whose mentality is different from that of the residents of hinterland being more open and perceptive towards a «strange» culture. «True» border residents are those with an internal disposition towards contacts and transborder activity and an interest in what is happening on the other side and this makes them stand out from all those living by the border.

There is a large number of «formal» border residents who never crossed the border and are uninterested in talking with representatives of the neighboring state. Many of them are subjected to the influence of cold war stereotypes such as mutual distrust and suspicion which have lately been making a comeback under the influence of mass media.

It is obvious that quite often Russian and Norwegian media take completely opposing views in their political coverage. At the same time, they are similar in the way of presenting the neighboring country from just one side with focus on the negative. According to informants, the attitude to the neighbor in a certain part of Russians and Norwegians has become worse under the influence of central media. At the same time, local media are for more focused on dialogue and good neighborhood. In a situation like this it is important to have a selective and critical approach to the information that is presented, and this can be seen in true border residents. They strive to get alternative information and understand another point of view.

Thus, Russian-Norwegian borderland and its residents are a resource with a high potential for peacemaking and bringing the two countries' positions closer.

Border residents admit that it is not within their power to change the general political trend in the world. They believe it is the prerogative of high politicians. They note certain threats to the established relationships in the borderland caused by global processes, with the worst of these threats being the closure of the border. In addition, some of them believe that human relations may also be put to test. However, they strongly believe in cooperation as the only possible way of countering negative trends.

Here the civil society and the people themselves can play an important role by taking active steps to rapprochement based on universal human values contrary to the actions of their national politicians. A good example of that is the Dialogue border club established in April 2014 which is mentioned by several informants. The main objective of the club is to expand the network of human contacts and increase the knowledge of each other's culture and traditions via joint activities.

“Dialogue is an eternal process which began millennia ago. No, with its help one cannot solve global problems once and for all and establish world's peace. But it is a prerequisite for coexistence of civilizations, cultures, peoples and countries, the West and the East. Its concrete achievements are not always evident or visible. The main success is the mere fact of communication, its endlessness, for which there is not and cannot be any alternative” (Malashenko, 2017).

Local authorities interested in developing their areas must also take steps to encourage cooperation and establish new arenas for dialogue. This can be best achieved by new projects of intermunicipal cooperation and the support of grassroots initiatives.

It should be recognized that we are different, and our approaches and values largely vary but this cannot be a cause for enmity. Rather, it should give rise to mutual interest and be the source of new ideas and projects. At that, peace and good neighborhood remain the main goal of our efforts: “Peace is largely dependent on hearts longing for peace. All those who take pleasure in peace welcome every opportunity to keep it. They either try not to notice what prevents peace or remove and bear with a lot as long as the peace - being the greatest good - is kept and saved. (Erasmus von Rotterdam (cited in Hakamura 2013:12)).

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## Appendix 1

Interview questions to the research project "How residents in the Norwegian-Russian border area perceive the changing political situation in the world"

1. How long have you lived in the Norwegian-Russian border area?
2. Regarding your experience as a border resident, have you participated in cooperation projects or in other joint cultural activities?
3. Who is a border resident in your opinion?
4. Would you say that the residents of the Russian-Norwegian border area share a certain common identity? In that case, can you say something about this identity?
5. You have the feeling that you live in a special area?
6. Have you noticed any changes in your life as a Russian-Norwegian border resident the last few years. And in that case, can you say something about these changes?
7. What do you think is the main reason for these changes?
8. Do you find that large political events affect your life in the border zone. And in that case, can you say something about in what way?
9. Do you think that the neighborhood with Russia\Norway has an impact on your perception of the events in the world? In that case, how?
10. Where do you get information about events in the world?
11. Do you have a different impression of life in Russia\Norway and Russians\Norwegians than it is presented in the Norwegian\Russian media. And in that case, what are the main differences?
12. What do you think is the reason for the current situation in the world?
13. And in the Ukraine crisis?
13. How can relations develop in the borderland, given the political situation in the world?
14. Can the border community influence on the political situation?
15. Who would you advise me to interview on this subject?

## **Appendix 2**

### List of informants

Interview 1 – male, 46 years old, diplomat, Russian

Interview 2 – female, 49 years old, teacher, Russian

Interview 3- male, 59 years old, chief editor of the newspaper, Russian

Interview 4 – male, 42 years old, scientist, Norwegian

Interview 5- male, 53 years old, unemployment, Norwegian

Interview 6 – male, 35 years old, translator, freelancer, Russian

Interview 7 – female, 59 years old, chief editor of the newspaper, Norwegian

Interview 8 – male, 35 years old, lawyer, Russian

Interview 9 – male 70 years old, pensioner, Norwegian

Interview 10 – male, 55 years old, scientist, Russian

Interview 11 – female, about 40 years old, diplomat, Norwegian

Interview 12 – male, 36 years old, freelancer, Russian

Interview 13 – female, about 55 years old, guide, Norwegian

Interview 14 – male, about 50 years old, politician, lawyer, Norwegian

Interview 15 – female, 34 years old, municipality employee, volunteer, Norwegian

Interview 16 - male, 43 years old, sports coach, local politician, Russian

Interview 17 – male, freelancer, 34 years old, Russian

Interview 18 – female, 55 years old, employee of the local administration, Russian

Interview 19 – male, 55 years old, volunteer, Norwegian