

Kaliningrad should reacquire its previous name, Königsberg

1. We should not live in the city named after Kalinin

In 1946 the city was named after M.I.Kalinin. The war ended, Königsberg became a Soviet city, and an old name could not be kept. Around the same time, the 'All-Union Elder' died. There was a good reason to honor Kalinin.

Who was actually Kalinin? Time puts a lot, if not everything, to its place. The sugary image of 'Grandfather Kalinin' withered away. Until his death Kalinin stayed at the top of the Soviet government faithfully serving Stalin. He signed hundreds of the verdicts on innocent people having known that they were innocent. Kalinin is a murderer. He shares responsibility for the repressions.

Kalinin's wife, Ekaterina Ivanovna, spent many years in GULAG. She was the guarantee of Kalinin's loyalty to Stalin. Kalinin had never done anything to save her. He betrayed his closest person – his wife. He was a traitor and, possibly, a very unhappy man.

60 years have passed. It is possible to understand a murderer and betrayer. It is possible to forgive, too. One should perhaps. In any case, we can not live in a city named after Kalinin. The name of the city must be changed.

2. The name of the city must be changed

If the city of Kaliningrad had had an old Russian name, it could have been returned in the beginning of the 1990s – as Kalinin became Tver, Leningrad – Saint-Petersburg, and Kirov – Vyatka. But the city had 700 years of German history and a German name. So, actually there are three options for changing the city's name. First, attaching another meaning to the name Kaliningrad; second, giving the city an absolutely new name; third, giving back an old name, Königsberg.

3. Kaliningrad is not 'kalina'

There was once a "compromise" suggestion in the local newspapers to leave the name Kaliningrad but to agree that the etymology of the word stems from 'kalina'¹ and not from Kalinin. This option is unacceptable. To consider the meaning of the name in that way means to jeer at the millions of victims of the repressions, the repressions Kalinin was directly took part in. The name of the city is not a joke; it is a serious decision, a civic choice.

4. It is wrong to give a totally new name to the city

There were several proposals for renaming the city. A new name would be the third one in the city's history. According to these proposals, neither Königsberg nor Kaliningrad are acceptable as names; so, one should invent something new. The options of Pribaltiysk, Kantograd (Kantgrad) and even Putingrad were put on the table.

A number of reasons for and against each of the options could be considered. My point is that inventing a brand new name would be unacceptable to begin with. A new name would imply the denial of the history of the region. While an act of renaming in 1946 is understandable under circumstances of those days, right after the war was over, an analogous act cannot be justified at the present time. Nothing worthy can begin from the clean sheet. *'Ivan, rodstva ne pomnyashiy'* (a person who does not remember his or her

¹ Kalina (rus) - guelder-rose.

roots) is glad to destroy everything, and then... But if we remember and revere our history, that option will not be acceptable for us.

I am convinced that the city must get its old name, Königsberg, back. The negative arguments have been already described. Here are the positive ones.

5. What we are all proud of is Königsberg

Many of things we are proud of in Kaliningrad stem in fact from Königsberg. The parks and the city's greenery, the fortresses and the Museum of Amber, the Cathedral and churches, Kant and Albertina, the Southern train station and the building of the Palace of Sailors' Culture, the areas of Kutuzova, Krasnaya, Telmana streets, the Zoo, the port and the sea channel. There are of course some objects of the Soviet times we are proud of, too. Those are mostly the monuments reminding of the Second World War.

6. Königsberg is a part of our history and cultural heritage

Königsberg became a part of our history and cultural heritage. Culture and history which we estimate as 'ours' represent complex concepts. It can clearly be seen on the example of architecture. One cannot say: I am Russian; gold domes, wooden houses – that is mine, but the rest is not. That is not so easy. A person living in Kaliningrad during the whole life or the major part of life absorbs other architecture, too: red bricks, peaked roofs, stone pavements, tiled roofs and granite plinths. We accept this architecture as 'ours'. The situation is similar with some cultural and linguistic symbols. We are proud of and consider Immanuel Kant to be 'our man', although he was German. Saint Petersburg is lovingly called 'Piter' by its inhabitants. Kaliningrad is called "König" by its younger inhabitants.

7. Giving back the old name to the city will not lead to the re-germanization or separatism

One of the most serious obstacles on the way back to the original name is the fear of a possible re-germanization and separatism. This fear is not justified. The inhabitants of the city and the region approve of the fact that this land is Russian. We also know that mainland Russia is keen on keeping the region as an essential part of Russia – and we agree with it wholeheartedly. Arguments about the danger of separatism and re-germanization do not reflect reality. Public opinion polls are giving numbers of five to six per cent approving the separation from Russia, and 95 per cent strictly opposing it. Both Kaliningraders and all Russians cannot imagine Kaliningrad apart of Russia. Giving the city back its old name, Königsberg, will not lead to its re-germanization. Social and cultural ties with the mainland are strong and vital economic interests keep the region as close to Russia as ever.

8. The name Königsberg is an advantage

Opponents of the renaming of the city point out that the change of the name would require a lot of financing. Indeed, changing the name implies substantial costs. This is a valid argument for a city like Kaliningrad. However, we also need to consider the potential benefits of the renaming. This action would hugely improve the city's image. It will serve as the symbol of the movement of Kaliningrad/Königsberg in the direction of a more open and 'normal' European city, a step closer to becoming the part of Europe. Königsberg means both improvements of the image and of the investment climate.

Even if the renaming of the city would not cause any speedy effect, the costs should not be viewed as an obstacle. There are some issues where the short-term financial implications should be set aside a long-term vision of the city's future.

This is a matter of conscience, too. There are few families which were not affected by the mass repressions on 1920s-1950s. In my family, the great-grandfather 'disappeared' in 1938, in your family it happened to someone else. Their blood cannot be washed off Michail Ivanovich Kalinin.

9. Königsberg is both Russian and European city

Kaliningrad combines Russian and European patterns in its spirit. The Russians are currently living in the region surrounded by the European Union. The economic and cultural future of the city is in fact the future of a Russian city in Europe. Politically and economically, Königsberg is a Russian city. It will serve as a connecting chain of Russia and the European Union if both sides will have enough wisdom to arrange it.

10. Renaming causes obligations

So, Kaliningrad must be renamed. It must reacquire the old name of Königsberg.

This step will apply some obligations on the residents of the city and its municipal authorities. We shall try to correspond to the name. First, one must know the history of the native region. Second, the historical buildings, areas and monuments must be better taken care of. Third, the city must be developed with respect to the past and with responsibility towards the future. The current chaotic construction in nurseries' backyards should give place to a thoughtful complex city development with respect to the historical appearance of the city and its green look.

11. The region must should be renamed but not necessarily the same way as the city

The Kaliningrad region must be renamed due to the same reasons as the city. An answer to the question about the new name of the region can vary. In contrast to Königsberg/Kaliningrad, the region never existed before as such. It had represented only a third part of East Prussia. So, in contrast to the city, a new name is perfectly acceptable for the region. It can be the Königsberg (Kenigsbergkaya) Oblast or the Baltic (Baltiyskaya) Oblast of the Russian Federation. It can also be Sambia, or the Sambiyskaya Oblast, a nice and neutral name with neither German nor Soviet connotations. One way or another, the name is not as important as the necessity of the renaming the region.

12. The decision must be made by the common city's will

The decision on the renaming of the city must be taken through the city referendum, preceded by the public discussion. The issue concerns all residents of the city. Likewise, the decision on the renaming of the region must be taken on a regional referendum.