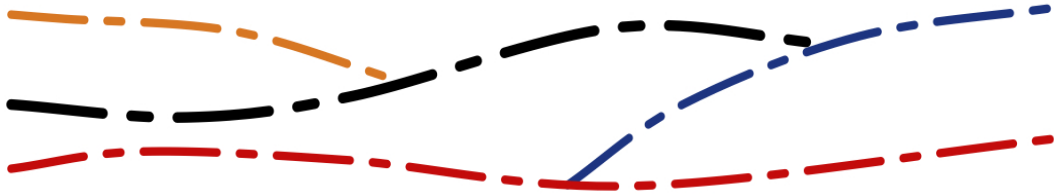


# EUBORDERSCAPES



## Working Paper 8

### City-twinning as Local Foreign Policy: The Case of Kirkenes-Nickel

**Pertti Joenniemi (Karelian Institute, University of Eastern Finland)**

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**Abstract**

Twin cities at international borders unsettle the ordinary by emphasizing the virtue of similarity, of being alike. They do not rest on separation but aspire instead for an identity by embracing sameness and through repetition and emulation. However, such twins are not void of difference and lines of separation. In the case of Kirkenes and Nickel, a city-pair located at the Norwegian-Russian border, we find a denial and a radical attenuation of the divisive and difference-producing impact of national borders. However this cooperative engagement unavoidably problematizes the nature and functions of the border. If there is a sufficient degree of similarity present across the border for Kirkenes and Nickel to be able to construct themselves as twins, is there then anything left of the divisive impact of the Norwegian-Russian border? Have borders in fact lost their standing as a valid and meaningful category of analysis to be substituted by those of frontier, margin or network, i.e. departures that no longer evoke images of two sides detached from each other?

The twinning between Kirkenes and Nickel allows for an exploring of these broader issues, also because Norway and Russia have invited Kirkenes and Nickel to contribute to the conduct of their foreign policies. Local concerns are fused with state-related interests thereby undermining the traditional prerogative of the states and contributing to a decentralization of foreign affairs. At large, the proliferation of twinning to cover a considerable amount of cities testifies to that cities have acquired considerable liberty in choosing their distinct mode of constitution. They are not confined to their traditional modes of being and acting. The twinning between Kirkenes and Nickel offers one option of exploring the consequences of such a manner of constitution, although the consequences may turn out to be somewhat different from many other cases owing to the top-down nature of the initiative and the active involvement of the states of Norway and Russia.

**Introduction**

City-twinning is endowed with some quite puzzling features. Entities such as cities generally come into being through moves of differentiation and by expressing what they are not. Twin cities do the opposite: they unsettle the ordinary by emphasizing the virtue of similarity, of being alike. They do not rest on separation but aspire instead for an identity by embracing sameness and through repetition and emulation. With difference being minimized to the extreme, their relationship is bound to appear as rather harmonious and cordial. However, twins are not altogether similar to each other; they are not void of difference and lines of separation as they exist as a pair. Moreover, there are moves of differentiation and border-drawing present in the sense that twins deviate from the ordinary due to their far-reaching similitude.

The exceptional and in a sense quite defiant mode of constitution underlying city-twinning becomes even more challenging once it involves cities engaged in twinning across a shared border as it does in the case of Kirkenes and Nickel, a city-pair located at the Norwegian-Russian border in the North. In entailing a denial and a radical downgrading of the divisive and difference-producing impact of national borders, their engagement in twinning unavoidably problematizes the nature and functions of the border. If there is a sufficient

degree of similarity present across the border for Kirkenes and Nickel to be able to construct themselves as twins, is there then anything left of the divisive impact of the Norwegian-Russian border? Have borders in fact lost their standing as a valid and meaningful category of analysis to be substituted by those of frontier, margin or network, i.e. departures that no longer evoke images of two sides detached from each other?

The bonding between Kirkenes and Nickel thus invites for a probing of quite profound and far-reaching questions and it does this in particular as their twinning did not emerge in the standard bottom-up type of fashion. It was instead launched by the Norwegian and Russian foreign ministers with Kirkenes and Nickel being requested to contribute through twinning to cross-border cooperation and the unfolding of shared Norwegian-Russian space.

The initiative appears to testify to some rather significant changes in the way the two states see themselves, define their border and exercise power in their borderlands. The relationship between identity, sovereignty, territoriality and borders has in both cases, for the part of Norway and Russia, been traditionally quite tight. Border-drawing has stood out as a crucial move not only in singling them out as independent states but also in presenting them as entities opposite to each other. In fact, the encouragement of city-twinning as one aspect of a broader Norwegian-Russian scheme of cross-border cooperation conflicts sharply with the traditional and Hobbesian technologies of sovereign power. The twinning between Kirkenes and Nickel allows for an exploring of these broader issues also as Norway and Russia have invited Kirkenes and Nickel to contribute to the conduct of their foreign policies. Local concerns are fused with state-related interests thereby undermining the traditional prerogative of the states and contributing to a decentralization of foreign affairs.

At large, the proliferation of twinning to cover a considerable amount of cities testifies to that cities have acquired considerable liberty in choosing their distinct mode of constitution. They are not confined to their traditional modes of being and acting. The twinning between Kirkenes and Nickel offers one option of exploring the consequences of such a manner of constitution, although the consequences may turn out to be somewhat different from many other cases owing to the top-down nature of the initiative and the active involvement of the states of Norway and Russia.

### **Twinning as Defiance**

A rather extensive literature on the location, nature as well as meaning of borders points to that borders do not have a fixed meaning. Rather to the contrary, they are quite variable in essence and allow for considerable variance through fluidity, porousness and permeability also as to the entities at play in the sphere of international relations (cf. Parker, 2009, 18). City-twinning is obviously part of this variance and efforts of capitalizing on the flexibility of borders. Those engaged in twinning blur the borderline between the domestic and foreign by extending their claims pertaining to likeness to the sphere of the foreign. In fact, twinning has gradually turned into a wide-spread phenomenon in various parts of Europe testifying to a change in the nature of borders and constitution of political space. The previous pattern of 'friendship', 'sister' and 'partner' cities that was particularly pronounced during the years of the Cold War was primarily premised on idealistic and symbolic togetherness. It rested

predominantly on discourses pertaining to peace and security rather than themes related to economic and other kinds of functional cooperation. The efforts of derailing the Cold War order boiled down to moves of substituting the enmity present in the relations between states with friendly contacts among various sub-state actors. Divisions were traded for commonality and togetherness in the sense of friendly relations was extended beyond the lines of division, i.e. the policies pursued in the name of friendship were trans-local in character and premised on the hope that future could be different from the past.

Friendship and other related labels are still applied in various parts of the world, albeit it also appears that twinning has gained additional ground after the years of the Cold War. Apparently, with borders having lost much of their binary nature, twinning has gained in credibility. It no longer stands out as something overly provocative and inconceivable taking into account the general constitution of political space and the drawing of crucial borderlines.

The asserted commonality part of twinning challenges from the very start the norm that everything international should be handled by the state as opposed to cities and other sub-state units. Twin-cities have refused to remain – and did so already during the years of the Cold War – within the domain of the domestic and their bonding and reaching out in order to establish contacts abroad in the name of friendship therefore contained considerable elements of defiance if not mutiny (cf. Joenniemi, 1998; Wagner, 1998). The usual terms employed to describe this kind of change has on occasions been that of paradiplomacy (cf. Soldatos, 1990), but also concepts such as ‘multilayered diplomacy’ and ‘substate diplomacy’ have been employed. However, the terms could also be that of antidiplomacy taking into account the defiant nature of twinning as the underlying aim of twinning and the related endeavours was to oppose and deviate from the normality of the Cold War era rather than to contribute as local actors to the diplomacy and aims pursued by the states.

Yet, the value of such an idealist and merely symbolic togetherness part of the pairing of cities has declined after the Cold War and the anti-structural aspirations part of the policies of that period have basically vanished. This does not mean, though, that the reaching out and interaction between cities would have declined. In fact, the opposite is true as the weight of cities has grown and their engagement in international cooperation increased. The bonding is there, although the channels created through the use of friendship as to a key constitutive argument have been employed in new and more ambitious ways. Rather than aspiring for friendship, the underlying logic has more recently rested on interest-based endeavours and the usage of contacts established as a resource both in a material as well as an identity-related sense.

Out of a large number of European cities being in various ways linked to each other, some fifty cities exist as city-pairs cooperating across a shared border (Schultz, 2002: 3). In general, twinning is seen by the local actors as an adequate and preferable response to numerous practical challenges that they face in their day-to-day life. The municipalities engaged in twinning depart from that various border-related resources can be utilized more effectively with cooperation extended beyond state borders, although the efficiency and scale of twinning varies considerably across Europe (Ploszaj, 2012; Schultz, 2005). The emphasis on

issues such as improving infrastructure, generating investments, reacting to environmental concerns or focusing on branding no longer relates to efforts of protest and opposition but points rather to the dominance of post-political thinking (cf. Swyngedouw, 2009). Whereas the coalescing part of the Cold War era in the name of friendship was explicitly opposition and political as to the underlying aspirations, twinning is much more premised on riding along and taking stock of the increased permeability of national borders. It may stand for a revolt as to the mode of constituting identities, but at the same time it figures as something quite conciliatory in terms of its concrete and practical aims.

### **The Requirement of Bottom-Up Engagement**

Twinning primarily exists as relations between specific city-pairs but it has also taken institutional forms with the Council of Local Authorities and Regions in Europe and the City Twins Association (CTA) as examples. Altogether 14 cities have joined the CTA, including four pairs located in Northern Europe: Valka-Valga (Latvia–Estonia), Imatra-Svetogorsk (Finland-Russia), Narva-Ivangorod (Estonia-Russia) and Tornio-Haparanda (Finland-Sweden). Russia has gained experience in twinning due to the engagement of Ivangorod and Svetogorsk whereas Norway has no previous experience of Norwegian cities partaking in twin-city bonding.

The pairs that decided to engage in twinning during the 1980's or 1990's did so through initiatives taken by the cities themselves and without any significant state-related involvement. Notably, they differ as to their success and impact with Tornio-Haparanda standing out as a success story. These two cities supplement each other to a considerable degree with border allowing the city-pair to turn into a rather tight transborder agglomeration able to utilize the effects of the economy of scale. In addition to numerous projects of cooperation and a joint city center, they have created firm structures of cooperation. Valka-Valga as well as Imatra-Svetogorsk have taken major steps in the same direction whereas the city-pair Narva-Ivangorod has encountered some initial difficulties in implementing various schemes of twinning, although the record of the Estonian-Russian city-pair has to some extent improved over the recent years (Joenniemi & Sergunin, 2012).

It appears against this background that the initiative pertaining to Kirkenes and Nickel, taken in 2008, breaks in some respects with the general pattern. It does so because the initiative did not just surface through a dialogue between the cities themselves and through the cities exercising their increased freedom of constitution. In fact, the Norwegian and Russian foreign ministries were actively involved in pushing for such an outcome. The ministries did this as part and parcel of efforts to contribute to cross-border cooperation and regionalization between the two countries. Instead of trying to stay with rigid borders and centralized policies as has traditionally been the aim of state actors, Norway and Russia now seem to aspire for a downgrading of the divisive impact of borders and blur the distinction between the domestic and the international. Their aspiration implies, in one of its aspects, that also the relationship between two quite small but adjacent cities located in the North on their respective sides of the Norwegian-Russian border, changes significantly.

The active and encouraging role of the ministers has also been reflected in the decision taken in 2010 to establish a visa-free zone for residents living in the vicinity of the border between the Sør-Varanger commune (with Kirkenes as its core) and the Russian towns of Nickel, Zapolyarny, Petchenga and Korzunovo. Notably, the local actors have not just been offered the option of participating in something that is bound to materialize irrespective of their contribution. As observed by Marco Antonsich (2010, 262), processes of institutionalization part of a cross-border region cannot take place from above. It is necessary, he asserts, for these processes to be connected with the interests, practices and images held by ordinary people and efforts of decentralization are hence called for. Local actors have to be involved through forms such as twinning, i.e. top-down initiatives have to resonate with bottom-up kind of endeavours. This implies in the case of Kirkenes and Nickel that they are not expected to engage in twinning merely to pursue their own interests but also to contribute to broader foreign policy goals.

### **A Top-Down Initiative**

There are thus good reasons to interrogate the unfolding of city-twinning in the case of Kirkenes-Nickel, i.e. a city-pair that signed a friendship agreement in 1973 and decided to engage in twinning in 2008. The position of the two towns as an integral part of broader plans for cooperation and cross-border regionalization between Norway and Russia provides them potentially with a considerable dose of agency in an international context. They are freed, it seems, from a variety of constraints customarily part of the quite state-centered and hierarchic ways of conducting foreign policy and encouraged to engage in twinning as a form of local foreign policy.

It is conceivable, though, that the two cities are less than enthusiastic about the option of contributing as local actors to cross-border cooperation thereby also impacting the unfolding of Norwegian-Russian relations at large. The switching over from depicting themselves as 'friends' to 'twins', i.e. riding on far-reaching similarity as the key constitutive argument, stands indeed out as a formidable step as friendship entails a close relationship between two distinct entities whereas twinning is premised on unity and being alike. It testifies to a profound change in the way they articulate and position themselves not only vis-à-vis each other but also in regard to a wider environment. Riding along would imply that Kirkenes and Nickel both accept that their previous 'soft' idealist and politically loaded endeavours of friendship is provided with and traded for new, more extensive and quite instrumental contents. They might also be unaccustomed to combining the domestic with the foreign, operating abroad and pursuing external policies alongside states in a post-political manner.

The invitation of the foreign ministers undoubtedly adds new aspects to twinning as a policy and practice. Rather than staying aloof and aspiring to circumvent and defy the policies conducted by the states as was in general the aim of the policies of friendship during the Cold War, they are now invited to engage in bonding in a manner that resonate positively with the general foreign policies of their respective states. The sphere of foreign affairs is extended in order to make room for the engagement of local actors. In addition to pursuing interests of their own, the two adjacent cities are requested to take into account, share, represent and take active part in the implementation of the broader national interests. The top-down aspects of the relationship between Kirkenes and Nickel thus offer the option to

explore twinning as a form of parallel diplomacy or paradiplomacy (Soldatos, 1990; Pluijm and Malissen, 2007) and probe the way it works in the relationship between Norway and Russia. Also the term of post-diplomacy could be applied in the sense that the relations part of twinning are no longer about 'high politics' with security as a key concern but relate to far more mundane affairs therefore also allowing a more equal and complementary relationship to unfold between central and local actors.

### **The Initial Step**

Twinning landed on the agendas of the various actors part of the Kirkenes-Nickel constellation in a quite promising manner. The Norwegian and Russian foreign ministers tabled a proposal on which they both agreed and the two cities responded by pledging to engage in twinning as expected by their foreign policy leaderships. In sum, the preconditions for the conduct of successful post-diplomacy seem to be there.

The process was formally set in motion through a letter sent in March 2008 by the Norwegian Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre to the mayor in Sør-Varanger Linda Beate Randal. Støre proposed that the mayors in Sør-Varanger and Petchenga Rayon jointly develop a scheme on twinning between Kirkenes and Nickel. Crucially, Støre informed Randal that he had been engaged in talks with his Russian counterpart on the establishment of an economic-industrial zone transcending the Norwegian-Russian border in the North, and that Russia is basically in agreement with the proposal. In order for the parties to be able to initiate the so-called Pomor zone, originally developed and proposed by Norway in 2006, city-twinning could stand out as a starting point. In other words, the idea of twinning between Kirkenes and Nickel emerged in a top-down manner and it was linked in Støre's letter to broader pattern part of the Norwegian-Russian relationship. Competences were down-scaled and the two cities were then expected to spearhead the implementation of the plan and perform as a testing-ground for the conduct of new and more cooperative relations. They would be integrated into a broader and explicitly political pattern of trans-border cooperation between Norway and Russia.

In responding to the initiative, Sør-Varanger and Petchenga announced their preparedness to apply the competences handed over and provide what was expected of them in terms of city-twinning. They were then invited to take part in a ministerial meeting between Johan Gahr Støre and Sergei Lavrov in Kirkenes in June 2008 and pledged, by signing a joint document, to develop their existing cooperation in order for it to turn into a twin-city project premised on cooperation in the fields of trade and commerce, social questions, civil society interaction, environmental security and tourism. The term 'twins; was also used in the Russian version of the document (although in other contexts also concepts such as 'fraternal' or 'brotherly' cities have been employed). The two municipalities underlined that they can utilize the good relations already created on the basis of their friendship agreement from the year 1973. They also announced a preparedness to contribute to the creation of a visa-free zone for the inhabitants of Sør-Varanger and Nickel (Figenschou, 2011, 28).

Taken together, much pointed to that the way forward would be one of steady progress. Norway and Russia seemed to be on their way of establishing a rather close relationship of

cooperation in the North and Kirkenes and Nickel took steps to position themselves within that constellation in order not only to utilize the opening but also to spearhead the development pointing to changes in the center-periphery relationship but also the emergence of a shared borderland. The initiative was clearly Norwegian in origin, but also Russia seemed to be onboard and willing to experiment in the sense of not just allowing but even encouraging Petchenga and Nickel as an administrative entity part of Petchenga to engage themselves in post-diplomacy and policies transforming the meaning of the Norwegian-Russian border through engagement in city-twinning.

Yet it appears that only modest progress has taken place. A number of seminars were organized in 2009 to provide twinning with concrete substance (Haugseth, 2013) and action plans have been developed testifying to that venues have been created and there is a dialogue. However, the dialogue has not amounted to improved cooperation in sectors such as industry, logistics, trade and commerce as requested by the foreign ministers. Kirkenes and Nickel have not been willing or able to deliver on their promise of deepening their relationship in a post-political fashion and through various forms of functional cooperation. Although some smaller steps have been taken, it appears in general that Kirkenes and Nickel have missed the option of spearheading cross-border integration. Their relationship has by and large been a positive one with the exception of the critique launched in Kirkenes as to Nickel's way of handling environmental issues (Nilsen, 2013). The critique and protests – shared also to a degree by the leadership of Kirkenes – concerning the polluting impact of the emissions generated by the smelter located in Nickel testifies to that the cross-border relationship has not, or at least not yet, become altogether post-political in nature.

As concluded by Anne Figenschou in her study on the initial years of twinning between Kirkenes and Nickel, the togetherness between the cities remains thin and their cooperation has not significantly increased. For example, their joint web portal has not been updated and provided with additional information on twinning since the initial events in 2008. The level of awareness about Kirkenes and Nickel as twin has remained low among the locals (Figenschou, 2011, 93) and there are supporters as well as skeptics among those who know about the bonding (Mikhailova, 2013b). The low level of awareness and scant interest in promoting and branding themselves as twins might point to that Kirkenes and Nickel do not fully identify themselves as twins. Friendship seems to have work well during the years of the Cold War in expressing the closeness of the two cities and might continue to do so as it does not contain the claim that they are fully alike as does twinning. The problematic aspect of twinning thus consists of containing too far-reaching claims pertaining to similarity therefore also obstructing rather than contributing to the emergence of close and concrete cooperation between Kirkenes and Nickel. What worked during the Cold War period as an expression of deviance and protest does not seem to contribute to the aims of close local cooperation across the border set by the Norwegian and Russian states.

In any case, the cities do not seem to have joined forces in order to conduct local foreign policies. They have not utilized the options opened up by the top-down initiatives to obtain various advantages, strengthen their economic and functional cooperation for this to yield a shared borderland (Figenschou, 2011, 14, 16). Kirkenes and Nickel are as such increasingly in contact with each other and the border has lost much of its divisive impact, but the cross-border projects between the cities pertain mainly to 'soft' cooperation between libraries,



kindergardens, schools, cultural entities and sport clubs and it has not been extended to any major degree also to cover 'hard' areas such as those of industry and commerce (Sergunin and Joenniemi, 2013, 253). Thus, Kirkenes and Nickel still remain cities in the vicinity of a joint border instead of existing as a rather unified agglomeration with the border as a connective factor.

Actually, they seem to continue along the lines of their previous policy of friendship rather than exploiting the options offered by twinning. Encouragement from above has not been accompanied, it seems, by the bottom-up type of activities required for the cities to be able to gain a position of vanguards in the advancing of Norwegian-Russian cross-border cooperation. Some positive signs may be noted, though. City-twinning was defined as a success in the form of cross-border cooperation at a Norwegian-Russian stakeholder seminar held in Nickel in November 2013. It was noted that the visa-free traveling had significantly added to traveling, contacts and business in the region. It was emphasized among others by the Governor of Murmansk Oblast, Marina Kovtun, that the emphasis in the contacts should be transferred from culture, sports and other similar matters to business and other more instrumental issue areas. "To have a border to another country is a huge advantage", she stated (Pettersen, 2013).

### **Signs of Increased Familiarity**

Yet, and despite the more recent positive signs, there exists an absence of results or at least some paucity to be accounted for. The lack of intensive and concrete cooperation begs the question what prevents twinning from materializing and yielding tangible results.

Obviously, the encounter between Kirkenes and Nickel consists of meeting the other as different from oneself – despite of the term 'twins' foregrounding the existence of a far-reaching similitude. Their difference can impact the outcome either by contributing to an intensification of the relationship or by problematizing the encounter. Differences may create curiosity, fascination and nostalgia thereby prompting cross-border interaction but they can be seen as being too outstanding and hence bring about aversion, resentment and avoidance. Both options are in general there as noted by Bas Spierings and Martin van der Velde (2008 and 2013) in their studies on cross-border interaction in the case of the Rhine-Waal Euroregion at the Dutch-German border, and also James Scott (2013) arrived at similar conclusions in his study on benign difference as the preconditions of cross-border interaction at the Finnish-Russian border.

Overall, the three scholars argue that differences can be conducive to feelings of familiarity or unfamiliarity. They conclude that the prevalence of positive (un)familiarity, i.e. unfamiliarity cleansed of its negative and threatening aspects tends to amount to moves of inclusion. It hence also contributes to the formation of porous borders whereas forms of unfamiliarity felt to be uncomfortable invite for exclusion and preservation of divisive borders.

These findings then raise questions about the impact of an emphasis on likeness rather than the difference embedded in familiarity. It could well be argued that the likeness integrally part of twinning is even more conducive to cooperation and interaction than familiarity as

the existence of difference has been downplayed to the extreme in the context of twinning. However, it is also conceivable that it is precisely the difference encountered in others and not similarity which makes it interesting to cooperate and reach beyond borders. The results of Spiering and Van der Velde as well as Scott testify to this. Surely, the similarity and likeness integrally part of twinning contributes to a reduction of the negative and does away with the threatening aspects of difference, although likeness can also be experienced as something quite negative in cleansing all the differences and borderlines allowing an entity to know where it starts and where it ends and what it is and what it is not. Along these lines, twinning is problematic as it is about doing away with difference in amounting to an encounter between entities basically similar to each other. One entity is merged or swallowed by another with both parties giving up their previous, difference-based identities. The overall outcome may thus boil down to a loss of identity in general as there is no longer any difference left in the relationship allowing identity to be defined through border-drawing in relation to the significant other and in terms of who one is not. The consequent lack of a constitutive outside may amount to profound anxiety as collective identities are always premised on difference, mostly in the form of otherness (cf. Abizadeh, 2005).

Thus, engagement in twinning understood as a particular form of familiarity rather than something embedded in non-bordered similitude can be conducive to positive outcome. It can function as a rather unconventional strategy related to the construction of identities. In fact, the label worked rather well in the Cold War context in standing for deviance and opposition on a symbolic and discursive level. The deviance in regard to the customary ways of constructing identities provided the difference that allowed city-twinning to emerge without causing any fear or anxiety concerning the loss of identities.

However, the circumstances have significantly changed since the demise of the Cold War and the firm divisions provided by that era. The oppositional positions have vanished and twinning figures instead as one form of the networking of cities and their efforts of contributing to cross-border cooperation and international integration. It does not primarily stand for a statement vis-à-vis the exterior but pertains first and foremost to the bonding between two entities assumedly alike and aspiring to engage in concrete and far-reaching cooperation.

It appears that the consequences of this change are discernible also in the unfolding of the relations between Kirkenes and Nickel. The switch from relations based on the previous concept of friendship to that of twinning – and with the latter one being induced from above by the states – is felt to be rather problematic. It goes too far in undermining the difference still part of friendship as a departure and eliminates in conceptual and symbolic terms the option of meeting the adjacent city as different, although different in an interesting and positive way.

Notably, the societal relations and cooperation among citizens across the Norwegian-Russian border do not seem to be similarly hampered by the switch from friendship to twinning. Difference has not been traded for similarity and feelings of being alike. Instead, difference prevails as the dominant notion with both familiarity and unfamiliarity, i.e. friendly as well as less friendly forms of difference present in the relationships between the inhabitants of Kirkenes and Nickel. The past of the region contains considerable elements of familiarity that

can be drawn upon in grounding a cooperative relationship. Modern bordering, part of extending state-formation into the north, took place at a relatively late juncture and was presided by a 'common land' epoch. The interaction that took place during that period paid scant attention to state-related borders and efforts of bordering (cf. Viken, Granås and Nyseth, 2008). In particular, a Sámi population moved flexibly across borders and also Finnish-speakers were strongly present in the region straddling various borders. The borders of the region emerged gradually during the Swedish-Norwegian Union (1826-1905) and were finally drawn in 1826, although the demarcation and delimitation proceeded quite slowly with borders actually preserving their nature of frontiers up to the beginning of the twentieth century (Niemi, 2005).

However, the period of openness was then followed by one of closure premised on notions of threatening unfamiliarity and otherness, and this took place above all because of the Russian Revolution in 1917. With Finland gaining independence the same year, most of the Norwegian-Russian border became a Finnish-Norwegian border-line up to 1944. This implied that Nickel (Nikkeli) and the surrounding area of Pechenga (Petsamo) were part of Finland up to the end of WWII with the border turning again into a Norwegian-Soviet/Russian one. The various historical turns implied that the Sør-Varanger region remained for long quite multicultural containing Norwegian, Kven (Finnish-speakers), Sámi as well as Russian elements. The interaction was locally premised for a large part on familiarity and feelings of togetherness whereas the policies pursued by the Norwegian state rested on "Norwegianization", i.e. the introduction of threatening unfamiliarity as a key constitutive narrative (Rogova, 2008, 11; Viken, Granås and Nyseth, 2008, 27).

The Second World War implied that the position of security – or rather insecurity – as a formative argument was further strengthened. There was much resistance against the German occupation particularly in northern Norway with the Norwegian partisans cooperating to some extent with the Soviet forces (Niemi, 2005). Towards the end of the war the Red Army liberated north-eastern areas of Norway, including Kirkenes, from German occupation. Although the fighting amounted to an almost full dismantling of the dwellings in the region and caused profound destruction, the image of the Soviet forces has remained rather positive as indicated among other things by that a statue devoted to Soviet soldiers still stands on a hill-top in Kirkenes.

However, the outbreak of the Cold War and Norway joining NATO implied that threatening unfamiliarity and exclusion rather than familiarity and inclusion became dominant. A garrison-mentality prevailed both on the Norwegian and the Soviet sides amounting to the presence various military installations and the emergence of structures part of the quite polarized East-West conflict. The hegemony of the quite securitized national discourse implied that the border remained almost entirely closed and it was for a long comprehended as “a symbolic end of the world for people living on the two sides of it” as pointed out by Anastasia Rogova (2009, 33).

Yet, the notions of familiarity did not vanish completely as indicated by the sporadic contacts that took place across the border even during the Cold War. They occurred for example in the form of port visits by Russian fishing vessels and some tourism. A more significant step was taken in 1973 with Petchenga Rayon and Sør-Varanger municipality signing a friendship agreement. The step stood out as a symbolic gesture signaling political dissatisfaction with the mood and policies pursued during the Cold War, although it also amounted to some irregular contacts across the border (Brednikova and Voronkov, 1999). The two municipalities have for example celebrated the end of occupation and commemorated jointly the liberation of Finnmark (Figenshou, 2011, 23). However, their agreement on friendship has also been conducive to some interaction and cooperation across the border. The ground was actually laid for the contacts to grow significantly with the opening of the Norwegian-Russian border in 1991. The notion of friendship has been extended to include a number of joint projects between libraries, kindergartens, schools and sport clubs.

In general, an increasing amount of space has opened up for the (re-)application of notions premised on familiarity since the end of the Cold War and the border has in consequence gained in flexibility allowing for various transactions to unfold. Increased room has also been provided for stories depicting the Norwegian and Russian borderlands as multicultural and loosely bordered. Some of the previously rather dominant and divisive tales have been rewritten as also evidenced by the proliferation of the term Pomor, i.e. a term referring to ancient coastal trade and feelings of togetherness between Russians merchants and the rest of the local population (Niemi, 1992). Even the Norwegian and Russian military have exploited the connotations of familiarity embedded in the term by naming their joint exercise in 2013 as Pomor.

Overall, the legacy of conflicts and profound unfamiliarity seems to have to lost in standing whereas narratives pointing to a common past with familiarity as a key departure have increased in weight. The application of these narratives imply that the future is provided with features of a recreated past, and projected as one less framed by interstate relations and strict moves of bordering.

### **From Kirkenes to ‘Kirik’**

Actually, much points to the emergence of a shared borderland, although this change seems to have taken place largely without Kirkenes and Nickel contributing to such a development through their policies of twinning. Particularly Kirkenes has turned into a major meeting-point for Russian-Norwegian contacts since the 1990’s on a variety of levels and in different

forms. The multicultural character of the town has become even more pronounced than previously as there is in addition to a Norwegian majority, a Sámi population and a considerable amount of Finnish-speakers also an increasing number of Russians and Russian-speakers in the town and its vicinity. The latter group amounts to more than ten per cent of the town's population (Rogova 2008: 29). Kirkenes has in general developed from a town on the border to a vibrant border-town as noted by Arvid Viken and Torill Nyseth (2008, 56), or to state it differently from a town premised on unfamiliarity to one characterized by familiarity.

It appears that also many of the Russians living in the Murmansk region nowadays view the Norwegian-Russian border as a shared borderland. As claimed by Anne Figenschou (2011, 19), the presence of Russian sailors, students, teachers and employees is seen as a natural part of the urban landscape in Kirkenes. The monthly Russian market with Russian vendors selling their products, signposts in Russian and the presence of various other elements pertaining to Russia and Russian culture give Kirkenes a Russian touch. The previous stranger-image of the Russians has been dismantled, she asserts. Crucially, the border has turned far less divisive not just politically and in administrative terms, but also culturally and identity-wise. Anastasia Rogova (2009: 31) claims that a borderland has emerged “which is neither Russia, nor Norway to the full extent”.

It appears that Russians visiting Kirkenes do not seem to have the feeling of being abroad. There is a considerable dose of commonality present as also indicated by Kirkenes being named ‘Kirsanovka’ or ‘Kirik’ with connotations of a small local and nearby entity/village in the language used in the Murmansk region. A further sign of a decline in the unfamiliarity felt to the threatening as well as increased feelings of familiarity consists of that the region is occasionally called ‘little Murmansk’ (Figenschou, 2011, 10). In other words, Kirkenes is experienced as quite small, somewhat insignificant but related and not located abroad in any categorical terms. It is instead comprehended as being in-between with the familiar kind of difference part of the town implying that it attracts a fair amount of interest and curiosity. Notably, visits have become quite frequent for reasons of shopping and two shopping malls have been built in Kirkenes since the year 2000 with visiting Russians seen as an essential part of the customers. The town is also of interest as it offers an airport for flights abroad. In addition to the considerable number of Russians arriving from the Murmansk region for shopping there are also sailors visiting the town. The latter group is there because Russian fishing vessels frequently visit the port of Kirkenes to unload their catch or in order to be repaired (with some 30–50 ships at port any time) (Rogova, 2008: 15).

One aspect of twinning consists of relations in the sphere of labour as there is a considerable shortage of skilled labour in Sørvaranger and Finnmark. This issue has become somewhat acute with the re-opening of the iron mine in 2008 in the vicinity of Kirkenes. Efforts have in general been taken to improve the flow of labour in the Barents region between Norway and Russia for example by providing training for jobs in the offshore sector and by changing experiences in the promotion of an inclusive labour market. Kirkenes and Nickel have for their part pledged to contribute to the creation of a common labour market in the action plan part of their twinning and approved in March 2011 and plan to establish a joint employment center (Figenschou, 2011, 31, 44, 91). Yet, the results have remained modest

and the emerging commonality as outlined of official level has not been extended also to include a joint labour market (Sergunin and Joenniemi, 2013, 254).

At large, various forms of contacts and cooperation across the border have turned rather significant for the economy of Kirkenes as well as Sør-Varanger in general. This is the case despite of that Kirkenes predominantly remains a mining town. The changes in the city's exterior are actually quite significant and impact the image of the town as also indicated by the appearance of slogans such as "the northern capital of the Barents region" or "bridgehead towards the East" (Viken and Nyseth, 2008, 29).

### **Nickel: End of Closure**

Nickel has been less than Kirkenes touched by the changes in the external environment. The local economy has been based on heavy industry and that is still the case despite some relative decline in the amount of industrial production. The town has clearly not opened up and changed as rapidly and profoundly as has Kirkenes.

Yet also Nickel is far less closed and defined by a closed border than used to be the case and also the constitutive discourses of relevance for the part of Nickel show at least some signs of de-securitization. This is most clearly evidenced by that the town no longer has the official status – as it predominantly had prior to 2008 – of a closed border zone despite of that it still hosts some smaller military entities. The town has less than previously the character of a garrison town owing to the demise of the Cold War but also because various more recent efforts of re-securitization with Russia defining some of its areas in the vicinity of borders as restrictive security zones have not stood the test of time. They were implemented between the years 2006-2008 but have since lost significantly in impact. The constitutive logic impacting Nickel has in the end been post-political, i.e. economic in character rather than based on security as a key argument. Thus also various restrictions valid up to 2008 as to foreigners visiting Nickel or making a stop-over on their way to the city of Murmansk have been abolished (Figenschou, 2011, 37). The establishment of a visa-free regime in the Sør-Varanger and Petchenga region testifies further to changes in the underlying logic with the constitutive impact of security in decline, albeit the nature of Nickel as an industrial site has remained largely unchanged due to the centrality of the Norilsk Nickel plant. The city actually has, owing to the smelter required in the production of nickel, the reputation of a rather polluted mining town.

It also appears that in comparison to Kirkenes, Nickel has been less able to utilize and take advantage of the changing and more porous nature of the border. Actually, the town seems to have declined rather than increased in importance due to a variety of factors such as reduced support from the central government, cuts in the number of military personnel as well as declining production at the Norilsk Nickel plant. The diminished standing is well reflected in that the number of inhabitants (around 12.500 in 2012) has dropped by a third since the days of the Cold War (Foss and Henningsen, 2011).

However, in addition to adding to the number of inhabitants visiting the Norwegian side, the new and more flexible border-regime has added significantly to the number of Norwegians visiting Nickel (Haugseth, 2013). Nickel has changed and opened up towards the exterior

instead of remaining “a city squeezed between extreme peripherality and a closed border” as stated by a person interviewed by Haugseth (2013). The appearance of signposts in Nickel with texts such as “Welcome to Petchenga” or “Here Russia begins” clearly testify to increased openness. New shops with Norwegian and Russian flags in the window have been opened. Arguably, it is the familiarity of Nickel rather than its previous unfamiliarity that attracts visitors with unfamiliarity being gradually stripped of its previously connotations of threat and danger.

Much of the interaction has unfolded on the basis of initiatives taken by individual people, but also the city-administration of Nickel has contributed to the increase in interaction. The administration has several years organized an annual Norwegian-Russian event focusing on cross-border cooperation. In general, the city-administration in Nickel seems to favour twinning and has, in order to be able to improve the record, produced an unofficial assessment of the achievements, obstacles as well as failures in the conduct of twinning (Figenschou 2011, 87-89). It is noted, on the positive side, that there is increased interest among the inhabitants in participating in various activities. Moreover, it appears that mutual confidence as well as understanding vis-à-vis the Norwegian neighbours has grown. The list of problems foregrounds, in turn, the insufficiency of Russian legislation as it does not offer the clarity needed by the local actors interested in twinning. A lack of coordination between different authorities and various levels of decision-making as well as insufficient funding are also brought up as issues to be tackled. Anne Figeschou (2011, 86) views the assessment as a positive sign as it testifies in her mind to that Nickel is seriously interested in advancing twinning. However, she also makes the observation that Kirkenes and Nickel have not been able to produce a joint assessment and finds it telling that Kirkenes has not been interested in preparing a similar document.

### **Signs of a Standstill**

It seems more generally that the bottom-up contributions to the development of the Norwegian-Russian relations have remained modest. The option of engaging in paradiplomacy through city-twinning has not been utilized to any major degree and the cities have for example not engaged in image-building and promoting themselves as a quite particular city-pair. Overall, Kirkenes and Nickel have not been very interested in or able to break with their previous tradition of getting together under the umbrella of friendship cities and move over to the construction of a relationship premised on far-reaching similitude and therefore also extensive cooperation. The move from anti-diplomacy to paradiplomacy has not progressed and amounted to close cooperation to the extent hoped for by the Norwegian and Russian foreign ministers.

However, a balanced judgment also has to cover and take into account the top-down input into the constellation and the contributions of Norway as well as Russia to the emergence of a cooperative cross-border relationship and the construction of an integrated borderland. In fact, their record appears to be somewhat mixed. A major step forward as to efforts of reducing the divisive impact of the border clearly consists of the establishment of a visa-free zone. An agreement on a visa facilitation regime between Norway and Russia was reached in November 2010 and it entered into force in May 2012. Those who live within the 30 km

border area on the Norwegian and Russian sides in the vicinity of Kirkenes and Nickel are eligible for a three-year identity card allowing the holders to cross the border without a visa and stay on the other side up to 15 days each time. In consequence, the border-traffic has increased significantly with more than 250000 crossings in 2012 and the figure will probably be higher in 2013.

The visa-free arrangement stands out as an important move and contribution, although further top-down contributions are required in order for Kirkenes and Nickel to be able to break with their domestic being and reach out into the sphere of the foreign without this conflicting with the rules and regulations applied in general in the conduct of foreign relations. The two cities have to be provided with a mandate as well as various resources in order for a broadening and de-centralization of foreign policy to become reality.

As to funding, some financial resources have been at the disposal of Kirkenes and Nickel through the Barents secretariat and some means have also been available for Nickel from the Murmansk Oblast (Figenschau, 2011, 30). Russia accepts in general a supporting of local actors in the context of cross-border cooperation and has therefore co-financed various EU-related projects. As noted by Ekaterina Mikhailova (2013a, 73), Russia does not just use administrative power but employs also financial incentives to promote its interests in the sphere of cross-border integration. In general, the question of funds does not seem to have been an obstacle to twinning between Kirkenes and Nickel. Some financial means have been available and the needs of the two cities have in any case been modest as they have so far stayed aloof from planning and launching major cooperative projects.

The question of mandate appears to have been a more serious issue particularly for the part of Nickel. Twinning has in Russia stood out as one aspect in a rather heated debate regarding the treaty-making powers of the federal center, regions and municipalities. Despite Moscow's resistance since early 1990s, quite a number of Russian border-related municipalities have concluded agreements with their international partners (Alexeev, 2000). In the end a compromise between the center and local actors emerged and it was decided that such agreements should not have a status of full-fledged international treaties (which is considered as a federal center's prerogative). Moreover, they should be prepared with the assistance of the Russian Foreign Ministry. The power of the local actors to engage in treaty-making is thus limited in principle, although they have in reality been able to establish cooperative relations across national borders and strengthen their international standing. It hence appears against this background that also Nickel has been provided with a sufficient, albeit not fully crystallized mandate to engage in twinning.

A more serious impediment to the conduct of cooperative policies in the High North seems to consist of that the cooperative endeavours have frequently been undermined by the application of a rather competitive logic. Russia has, on the one hand, provided space for Norway to participate in the exploration of the Shtokman gas and oil field but the attitudes have on the other hand been rather defensive in character. The location of the infrastructure on land related to the utilization of fields out at sea, including also the issue which ports would be used have stood out as contested in nature. In particular the leadership of Murmansk region has applied a zero-sum approach (Figenschou, 2011, 36) and it has also



been reserved concerning a planned transport project regarding a 40-kilometre railroad from Nickel to Kirkenes. Such a connection would be needed in switching part of a broader flow of goods coming from the Far East and Russia's High North to Europe and North America via Murmansk to Kirkenes to be transported to various European destinations. The project has made little progress owing to competitive interests and disputes pertaining to where investments should go (Sergunin and Joenniemi, 2013, 253). The issues at stake point in general to that twinning as a form of paradiplomacy does not only call for harmony as to the approaches applied between the concerned states and local actors such as Kirkenes and Nickel. Also the consent and support of the regional authorities is required. In particular the input of the latter and Murmansk in particular seem to have developed into a problem hampering progress in cross-border cooperation and the establishment of a shared border region, and hence also twinning between Kirkenes and Nickel.

As to the Norwegian-Russian relations in general, the agreement reached between Norway and Russia in 2010 on the delimitation of the Barents Sea stands out as major step forward. It contributed further to a decline in securitization and opened up for the usage of various new arguments to underpin friendly and increasingly cooperative relations, although at the same time also the arguments pertaining to security and call for an up-keeping of divisive borders have retained some of their importance. Various environmental challenges as well as different economic options – with the latter related above all to the extraction of oil and gas but also new shipping lines such as those of the Northern Sea Route (Northeast Passage) – have gained such an important standing that the incentives for cooperation have turned quite considerable in the context of the Norwegian-Russian relationship.

Overall, the constitutive discourses impacting the unfolding of the political landscape relate increasingly to various joint projects and in particular those dealing with cooperation in the fields of oil, gas and shipping. The more future-oriented narratives pertain to the growing importance of the northern areas for the national economies of the two countries. In the case of Norway the northern areas have turned into a strategic priority in the sphere of the country's foreign policy as evidenced for example by the Government's High North Strategy of 2006 and the updated document on New Building Blocks in the North published in 2009). A similar development has also been discernible in Russia with the Arctic region's significance being emphasized in the Government's Strategy for the Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation issued in 2008 (Medvedev, 2008). A follow-up version published in 2013 (Putin, 2013) is even more clear on this point.

Yet, also some stagnation has been present in the sphere of Norwegian-Russian cooperation. Success has not always been as quick and thorough as initially expected as some plans have failed and others have been postponed. One of the disappointments consist of the Shtokman gas and oil field. With the decline in the world market prizes of oil and gas, the project has become less urgent and somewhat less attractive. In consequence, Norwegian Statoil has given up its share in the field and Russian companies have put their plans of development on ice. The various backlashes in cooperation at large have then impacted many of the specific Norwegian and Russian plans. Among other things, the building of a metallurgy plant on the coast of Petchenga Bay and the construction of a plant for the production of liquid gas have not materialized.

However, the northern areas still remain quite dynamics among other reasons because of the impact of climate changes and the opening up of the North-eastern Sea Route connecting Europe and Asia. In particular Kirkenes but to some extent also Nickel have retained their standing as part of areas that clearly grow in importance as significant parts of national development as well as international cooperation. Yet the postponement and lack of progress as to the use of the Shtokman field stand out as a backlash as it has also become less urgent to implement the Pomor plan and therefore also less incentives to plug local actors such as Kirkenes and Nickel into that constellation and encourage them to spearhead local forms of cooperation through city-twinning. There appears, in general, to be less need for the conduct of paradiplomacy with bottom-up type of contributions complementing initiatives and cooperative endeavours between the states of Norway and Russia as the prime drivers of cooperation.

### **Conclusions**

Unfriendliness as a form of othering has clearly lost much of its previous standing between Kirkenes and Nickel. It does not impact the unfolding of their relations and the nature of the border as forcefully as it used to do, and it has been largely pushed aside by other departures depicting the border as something to be transgressed and turning it into a far more unifying element between the two northern cities as well as Norway and Russia at large. As such, this corresponds with the general trends in post-Cold War Europe. Also Norway and Russia have, along with very many other states, abandoned much of their previous nature as Hobbesian territorial states and turned increasingly into Lockean competition states. Already the Norwegian-Russian coining of the Pomor plan testifies to this.

What appears to be exceptional, though, consists of twinning. In the context of the Pomor plan Norway and Russia have drawn upon a concept – by inviting and encouraging Kirkenes and Nickel to engage in city-twinning – that is bound to alter the nature of the Norwegian-Russian border. It would, if extensively implemented, introduce a significant amount of likeness into the relationship between the two cities. It would also turn their border vis-à-vis the exterior into a constitutive one as the difference crucial for their being would reside their being Norwegian and Russian on special terms, i.e. cities at the border and unified by the border rather than border cities. The difference would undoubtedly be of a benign nature, but twinning as a constitutive category is nonetheless on its way of altering the border-related delineation of Norway as well as Russia. The two countries are no longer separated as sharply from each other as they used to be with the previous either/or nature of the border in decline owing to that cities located at the border have the liberty of defining themselves in a more flexible manner and may even use twinning and the considerable dose of similarity embedded in that concept as their point of departure. The outer edges defining what is Norwegian and what is Russian get blurred allowing for new combinations to emerge. The liminal nature of twinning implies that previous delineations based on being either Norwegian or Russia increasingly compete with the option of being both Norwegian and Russia and – if the outer borders outlining twinning turn decisive – a twin city may even appear as a third, i.e. something separate that is neither Norwegian nor Russian.

Already the visa-free arrangement represents a step in this direction. It does so in singling out the two adjacent towns as belonging to a category of their own by abolishing the restrictions placed upon the inhabitants of Kirkenes and Nickel to engage in visits across the border while normal rules and regulations still apply at their external borders. Crucially, being able to skip visas implies that they form an internally undifferentiated entity with difference delineated by their external border. The arrangement allows Kirkenes and Nickel, in eliminating internal distinction between the two cities, to be simultaneously Norwegian as well as Russian, but it also furnishes them with the option of figuring as a third, being neither Norwegian nor Russia and residing in a distinct category of their own. This option emerges if they prefer to articulate their similarity as something entirely different from the exterior and play their internal similitude sharply against the difference part of the exterior. Particularly the latter option informs that twinning is a quite demanding endeavour also for the two cities themselves. It could well be thought that the step from their previous policies of friendship to that of twinning is a rather short and easy one to take. However, this is not the case as the policies of friendship are in a number of regards quite different from those of twinning with the latter concept allowing for far more radical choices as to identities as well as the unfolding of political space more generally.

The policies of friendship were there during the Cold War in order for cities to express a deviant opinion. Cities came together as locals and non-securitized actors mainly in order to demonstrate on the level of symbols that there existed alternatives to the rather antagonistic and securitized policies pursued by states such as Norway and the Soviet Union. Through their conduct of antidiplomacy they aspired to show the way out of polarized, strictly bordered and dangerous situation created by the states.

The present day twinning is obviously something different in nature. Whereas friendship as a concept allows for the preservation of the difference between the parties involved, twinning foregrounds similarity and stands out as something rather drastic in undermining notions of difference, challenging various moves of bordering and riding along different integrative and cooperative endeavours. Twinning has ordinarily been confined to relations between the cities and has not been launched as part and parcel of broader schemes integral to some broader international aspirations. However, Kirkenes and Nickel deviate from this pattern as the initiative has in their case been taken by actors part of the states of Norway and Russia. Moreover, there is nothing oppositional about twinning as it has been initiated as an integral part of a broader cooperative endeavour thereby also inviting for the previous antidiplomacy to be traded for paradiplomacy as a local part of a multilayered foreign policy.

It is hence not surprising to find that city-twinning has in the case of Kirkenes and Nickel had a difficult start. In fact, the policies pursued appear to be more in line with those of friendship than twinning. As such, there seems to be a considerable dose of familiarity present between Kirkenes and Nickel. The parties remain far from similar but their difference is no longer viewed as amounting to threatening unfamiliarity. Instead, it connects rather than isolates with difference being conducive to curiosity and interest in exploring the not-fully-familiar entity located across the border. Thus, the change in approaches and perceptions of difference allows for a significant increase in transborder interaction with this then blurring previous constellations by internationalizing the domestic

and domesticating the international. Yet, it is difference rather than similarity which is conducive to the growth in interaction and contacts discernible also in the relations between Kirkenes and Nickel.

The increase in familiarity has even brought about some degree of commonality and has been conducive to the emergence of shared mental space as indicated for example by the usage of images such as the one of 'little Murmansk' on the Russian side of the border. The familiarity present in their relationship testifies to that the character of the Norwegian-Russian border has changed significantly by turning from a barrier to a frontier. This is as such positive but hardly to the credit of the local administrations and their efforts of twinning as they seem to have allowed such a development to unfold rather than actively contributed to it. In addition, twinning between Kirkenes and Nickel has been hampered by the presence of a competitive logic. For example disputes concerning the question where investments should go have militated against a pooling of resources. Whereas Finnmark and Kirkenes on the Norwegian side seem to have a constructive and cooperative relationship largely void of friction, the same is not equally true for the part of Nickel and the Murmansk Oblast. The paralysis detectable in the case of Nickel seems to have originated largely with the rather competitive policies pursued by Murmansk. The presence of competitive aspirations is nothing surprising as such, and these may well be expected to be present to some extent also in the future impacting all relevant levels: that of states, regions as well as the cities themselves. What is important to note is that the emergence of competition and various other difficulties related cooperation and cross-border contacts nonetheless inform that the Norwegian-Russian border is significantly changing in essence.

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