

Arctic and North. 2026. No. 64. Pp. 142–165.

Original article

UDC [94(470)"19/20"+94(481)"19/20":341](045)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37482/issn2221-2698.2026.64.174>

200 Years of Guarding the Neighborhood. The Russian-Norwegian Border: From Frontier to National Boundary

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Abstract. This work, based on archival materials from Russia, Norway and Sweden, as well as a historiographical analysis, reconstructs the evolution of the Russian-Norwegian border from the medieval “common districts” with their dual taxation and frontier status, through the border delimitation negotiations of 1825–1826, when Lieutenant-Colonel Galyamin and Colonel Spørck established a boundary that survived the collapse of empires, the territorial changes introduced by the 1920 Treaty of Tartu, and its restoration in 1947 on the basis of the same legal documents of 1826 and 1896. Particular attention is paid to the asymmetry of perception: the border, which was advantageous to Sweden and Norway, fostered fear amongst the Norwegian elite of a Russian revision, while in Russia, particularly in the Arkhangelsk Governorate, it was perceived as a territorial loss, giving rise to a persistent myth about Galyamin’s betrayal. It is demonstrated that the stability of the border was determined not so much by geography or military strength as by the ability of the parties — even during periods of ideological confrontation — to restrain the conflict within institutional frameworks and resist the temptation of territorial revisionism. This study offers a renewed perspective on the history of bilateral relations, identifies the domestic and foreign policy interests underlying particular perceptions of Russia and Norway, and highlights insights for the contemporary geopolitical situation, in which two centuries of neighborly experience may serve not as a source of dispute, but as a resource for mutual understanding.

Keywords: *Far North, Russian-Norwegian border, frontier, asymmetric neighborhood, Treaty of 1826, “Russian threat”, Saami, 1947 border delimitation*

Introduction

The Russian-Norwegian border represents a unique phenomenon within the system of international relations in Europe. As the oldest border of modern Russia with neighboring countries in the European North¹, it has demonstrated remarkable resilience over two centuries, having survived the collapse of empires, two world wars, radical political transformations, and even the temporary loss of its demarcation line in 1920. However, this resilience is not the result

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For citation: Zaikov K.S., Komarov A.A. 200 Years of Guarding the Neighborhood. The Russian-Norwegian Border: From Frontier to National Boundary. *Arktika i Sever* [Arctic and North], 2026; 64: 174–201. <https://doi.org/10.37482/issn2221-2698.2026.64.174>

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¹ Johanson Bodil B. OVERENSKOMSTEN mellom den Kongelige Norske Regjering og Regjeringen for Samveldet av Sovjetiske Sosialistiske Republikker om forskjellige forhold ved den norsk-sovjetiske grense og om fremgangsmåten ved ordningen av konflikter og hendinger på grensen. 50 år 1949–1999. Kirkenes: Norges Grensekommissariat, 1999. 70 s.

of geographical inevitability or military parity. It is, rather, the consequence of a complex interweaving of asymmetrical perceptions, institutional compromises and mutual fears, which, paradoxically, created the conditions for long-term stability even during periods of acute confrontation.

A distinctive feature of the Russian-Norwegian neighborhood in the High North was that these countries differed not merely in territorial size but fundamentally in their internal development dynamics and their attitudes toward the border as a political institution (Zaikov, Kuprikov, Kuprikov, 2020; Zaikov, 2019). On one side was a vast, multi-ethnic empire, for which open border zones were an asset rather than a liability (Johnsen, 1923; Nielsen, 2014). On the other side was a small state that was steadily moving towards the construction of a nation-state and, consequently, striving for hermetic, clearly defined frontiers (Niemi, 2005; Kristiansen, 2010). This structural asymmetry, as our research will show, shaped not only the course of the border demarcation negotiations in the 1820s, but also all subsequent perceptions of the neighbor — both in Norway and in Russia (Palmstierna, 1932; Roginsky, 2005).

The focus of our attention is the demarcation process itself — not as a technical act of drawing a line on a map, but as a complex political and diplomatic construct in which the interests of central authorities, regional elites, and local communities were intertwined (Goldin, Zaikov, Tamitskiy, 2015; Ishizuka, 2005). In our view, this interweaving provides the key to understanding the phenomenon of the 1826 border: it was established not so much on the principle of “natural boundaries” or ethnic lines, but rather as the result of a series of compromises between the imperial logic of open frontiers and the national drive for certainty (Andresen, 1989; Wikan, 1995). This compromise, albeit imperfect and perceived differently by both sides, proved to be unexpectedly resilient.

Returning to this topic today, on the eve of the 200th anniversary of the 1826 treaty, takes on special significance. The current geopolitical landscape, marked by the resurgence of “Russian threat” rhetoric in Northern Europe (Åselius, 1994; Neumann, 2004), the accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO, and the gradual scaling back of cross-border cooperation, creates a need to rethink the historical experience of neighborly relations. The situation is paradoxical: the institutional border remains unchanged (a unique case in modern Europe), but “images of the neighbor” — very “flexible boundaries” of perception — are undergoing rapid transformation, reverting to stereotypes and fears that seemed to have been overcome in the 1990s. In this context, the historical experience of the Russian-Norwegian borderlands, encompassing both periods of acute mistrust and the mechanisms for containing it, assumes not only academic but also practical political significance.

In the historiography of this issue, represented by the works of O.A. Johnsen (Johnsen, 1923), K.F. Palmstierna (Palmstierna, 1932), A. Andresen (Andresen, 1989), M. Lähteenmäki (Lähteenmäki, 2006), J.P. Nielsen (Nielsen, 2014), G. Åselius (Åselius, 1994), as well as Russian researchers such as V.V. Pokhlebkin (Pokhlebkin, 1995), R.A. Davydov (Davydov, 2009; Popov,

Davydov, 1999), B.V. Kristoman (Kristoman, 2003), V.V. Efimova (Efimova, 2010), specific aspects of border demarcation, diplomatic history and the adaptation of the indigenous population to the new border has been examined. However, the existing historiography, unfortunately, lacks studies that comprehensively reconstruct the Russian-Norwegian border region in the context of an asymmetrical neighborhood throughout its entire history, from the frontier era to the present day². This article is intended to fill this gap by proposing a reconstruction of the key stages and mechanisms of the transformation of the image of the border and the neighbor.

The aim of this article is to re-examine the evolution of the Russian-Norwegian border as a political and socio-cultural construct in the context of its bicentennial, demonstrating that its stability was ensured not so much by geography or force as by the parties' ability to contain conflict within institutional frameworks and resist the temptation to revise the border even during periods of acute confrontation.

The chronological scope of the study spans the period from medieval treaties to the mid-20th century, with a retrospective look at the contemporary significance of historical experience, since the 1826 border, remaining not only a geographical fact but also a symbolic resource today, is capable of both dividing and, provided that historical grievances are not politicized, serving as a basis for mutual understanding.

Materials and methods

This article is based on a set of historical documents from the archives of Russia, Norway and Sweden, as well as a historiographical analysis of works by Russian and Scandinavian scholars. In order to examine the evolution of the Russian-Norwegian border from a frontier to a national boundary and the subsequent re-establishment of the border in the mid-20th century, the study utilized collections from the State Archive of the Arkhangelsk Oblast (SAAO), the Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (AFPRE), the Russian State Historical Archive (RSHA), the Russian State Military Historical Archive (RSMHA), the State Archive of the Russian Federation (SARF), and the Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (AFPRF), as well as the National Archives of Norway (Riksarkivet) in Oslo and the Hoover Institution Archives (USA)³. Published collections of documents were used extensively⁴, as were the memoirs of Norwegian diplomats, in particular those of Rolf Andvord (Andvord, 1964).

Periodicals proved to be an important group of sources, as the press is of particular interest for studying the formation and development of myths regarding the "Russian" and "Norwegian" threats within an ideological framework. The study used materials from Russian newspapers, such

² For a detailed analysis of the historiography, see (Zaikov, Tamitskiy, 2016; Goldin, Zaikov, Tamitskiy, 2015a).

³ List of archives: SAAO (F. 1, F. 4, F. 1367), AFPRE (F. 1, F. 53, F. 133, F. 155), RSHA (F. 1286, F. 560), RSMHA (F. 38, F. 442), SARF (F. 48, F. 109), AFPRF (F. 06, F. 0116), National Archives of Norway (RA/UD, RA/PA, the Prebensen collections), Hoover Institution Archives (HIA, "Russia. Missiia").

⁴ Collections of documents: Chubaryan A.O. ed. Soviet–Norwegian Relations 1917–1955. Moscow; 1997. 683 p.; The Foreign Policy of the Soviet Union during the Great Patriotic War. Vol. 2. Moscow; 1946. 688 p.; Pokhlebkin V.V., ed. Russia's Recognition of the Independent State of Norway. Moscow; 1958. 106 p.

as “Arkhangelskie Gubernskie Vedomosti”, “Moskovskie Vedomosti”, “Izvestia”, “Pravda”, and “Novoe Vremya”, as well as Norwegian and Swedish publications, including “Aftenposten”, “Svenska Dagbladet”, “Verdens Gang”, and “Tidens Tegn”. This approach made it possible to reconstruct not only the official positions of the authorities but also the public perceptions of the eastern neighbor.

The reconstruction of the 1826 delimitation of the Russian-Norwegian border — a pivotal event around which the article’s narrative is structured — was based on a wide range of sources from the collections of the SAAO (F. 4, F. 1367), the AFPRE (F. 1 “Administrative Files”, F. 53, F. 133), and the RSMHA (F. 38, F. 442), as well as Norwegian collections, such as the papers of Nikolay Gruve Prebensen and the archives of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The reports by Commissioners Galyamin and Spørck are of particular value, containing not only topographical data but also statistical descriptions of the population of the general districts, including information on the number of families and religious affiliation, as well as minutes of negotiations recording the course of the discussion and the arguments put forward by the parties⁵. These documents, which enable us to reconstruct the local knowledge of the Sámi and the perception of the region by regional officials, are supplemented by diplomatic correspondence between St. Petersburg and Stockholm, reflecting the asymmetry in the understanding of the border issue at the level of central authorities.

In order to study the later period relating to the loss and restoration of the border, materials from the AFPRF archives were used (F. 06 — the Molotov collection, and F. 0116 — the Norway Referentura funds), which contain correspondence on border demarcation issues from 1944 to 1947, including notes by A.N. Abramov, head of the 5th European Department of the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, diary entries by Soviet diplomats and political reports from the Soviet Embassy in Norway⁶. These materials reveal how, amidst the onset of the Cold War and Norway’s accession to NATO, the decision to restore the “old” border took on not only technical but also symbolic significance.

The scope of this research extends beyond the boundaries of historical science as such; therefore, methodologies from related disciplines — political anthropology, the sociology of international relations, cultural geography — were taken into account. This approach made it possible to view the border not as a static line on a map, but as a dynamic political and socio-cultural construct in which the interests of states and local communities are intertwined, and the image of the neighbor is not merely a reflection of reality, but rather a projection of one’s own fears and ambitions. In our view, this perspective allows for the most comprehensive reconstruction of the history of the Russian-Norwegian border region and offers lessons for the contemporary geopolitical situation, in which two hundred years of experience as neighbors can

⁵ For further details on the work of the commissioners: RSMHA. F. 442. Invt. 1. Arch. 26; AFPRE. F. 1: Administrative files II-6. Arch. 75, part 1; RA, UD3C/18, pk. 5213 (Prebensen Archive).

⁶ AFPRF. F. 06. Invt. 27. Sh. 127. Arch. 6; AFPRF. F. 0116. Invt. 27. Sh. 127. Arch. 5; AFPRF. F. 0116. Invt. 39. Sh. 156. Arch. 10.

become not a point of contention, but a resource for mutual understanding, provided that the parties are able to separate facts from speculation and reality from expectations.

Discussion

The majority of studies related to the subject of this publication focus on specific aspects of the history of Russian-Norwegian relations. A collective monograph edited by Professor J.P. Nielsen, published in 2014, is dedicated to the history of the asymmetric neighborly relationship between Russia and Sweden-Norway; this work served, in part, as the methodological foundation for the present article (Nielsen, 2014). Covering the period from 1814 to 1917, this fundamental study represented the first attempt to describe the history of the rapprochement between Russia and Norway as an interconnected process; however, the emphasis was placed primarily on diplomatic and economic history, while the issue of perceptions of the neighbor and the transformation of images remained on the periphery of scholarly attention.

Works by O.A. Johnsen, A. Podvysotskiy⁷, and N. Golubtsov are devoted to specific aspects of the history of the Russian-Swedish-Norwegian border region and its political dimensions (Johnsen, 1923; Golubtsov, 1910). O.A. Johnsen's work "Finmarkens politiske historie" (1923) remains the most important source on the early history of the border region; however, it is written in the tradition of conventional political history and does not take into account contemporary approaches to the study of borders as socio-cultural constructs. Publications by Russian authors of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, such as A. Podvysotskiy and N. Golubtsov, are valuable as sources reflecting the public sentiment of the time, but suffer from an excessive journalistic style and a lack of objectivity. This is particularly evident in their assessment of the role played by Lieutenant Colonel Galyamin, who, in the Russian historiographical tradition, was regarded as the primary target of blame for the territorial concessions of 1826 (Nikolskiy, 1914; Nielsen, 2014).

Among Norwegian authors examining the perception of Russia and Russian-Norwegian relations in the High North, E. Niemi and T. Christiansen stand out; their works are devoted, respectively, to the ethnic history of Finnmark and the early stage of Russian-Norwegian contacts prior to 1820 (Niemi, 1983; Christiansen, 2010). E. Niemi, in particular, convincingly demonstrated that the roots of the "Russian threat" idea date back to the 1810s and 1820s and are linked to the expansion of the Pomors' economic activities in northern Norway, rather than solely to Swedish or British influence, thereby challenging the historiographical thesis that this myth originated from foreign sources (Niemi, 1992).

In Russian historiography, the issue of Russia's image in Norway and Sweden has long remained on the periphery of scholarly attention. Certain aspects of this topic were touched upon in the works of R.A. Davydov and O.V. Chernysheva; however, these studies are generally either fragmentary or journalistic in nature (Davydov, 2009; Chernysheva, 2003). An exception is V.V. Pokhlebkin's work "Russia's Recognition of the Independent State of Norway" (1958), which, being

⁷ Podvysotskiy A. The Russian-Norwegian Borderlands. *Arkhangelskie Gubernskie Vedomosti*. 1877; 96: 6–7.

a collection of documents, contains valuable information on Russian-Norwegian relations in 1905 and allows us to trace how the “image of a threat” was utilized in diplomatic struggles on the eve of the dissolution of the union between Sweden and Norway⁸. The studies by A.I. Rupasov and A.N. Chistikov on the history of the Soviet-Finnish border also represent an important contribution to historiography; these works examine, among other things, the northern section of the border, thereby contributing to understanding of the context surrounding the loss and restoration of the 1826 border line during the 1920s–1940s (Rupasov, Chistikov, 2016).

Contemporary Russian historiography, by the works of V.I. Goldin, K.S. Zaikov and A.M. Tamitskiy, addresses issues concerning the Russian-Norwegian border region in the context of an asymmetrical neighborly relationship and the role of the Sámi people as a “third force” between an empire and a nation-state (Goldin, Zaikov, Tamitskiy, 2015a; Goldin, Zaikov, Tamitskiy, 2015b; Zaikov, Tamitskiy, 2016). Although these studies focus on specific aspects, such as the role of maps in the construction of borders, the Finnish factor in the history of the Northern Frontier, they consistently advance the idea that understanding the border as a socio-cultural construct is a prerequisite for an adequate reconstruction of the history of bilateral relations.

It should be noted that the existing historiography on this subject, unfortunately, lacks studies that comprehensively reconstruct Russian-Norwegian relations in the Far North within the context of the asymmetrical neighborly relationship between an empire and a small nation throughout the entire period, from the frontier to the re-establishment of the border in 1947. Most studies are either limited to the chronological framework of the 19th century, focus exclusively on diplomatic history, or examine individual aspects in isolation from the overall dynamics of perceptions of the neighbor. This article aims to fill this gap by offering a reconstruction of the key stages and mechanisms of the transformation of the image of the border and the neighbor — from the medieval “common districts” to the re-establishment of the 1826 line in 1947 and its symbolic significance for the present day.

Results

“Common districts”: frontier logic and dual taxation

The history of the Russian-Norwegian borderlands prior to 1826 offers a unique example of the coexistence of three distinct paradigms of spatial imagination within the same physical territory. In terms of our conceptual framework, this was a period dominated by “flexible borders” — imagined boundaries that existed in the minds of the actors but were not institutionally enshrined. The absence of a “fixed border” did not imply an absence of territoriality; it was organized according to different, pre-state principles, where fiscal jurisdiction took precedence over political sovereignty.

The Eastern Sámi (Skolts), with their semi-nomadic way of life based on seasonal migrations between summer pastures and winter grazing grounds, did not recognize state borders. Their

⁸ Pokhlebkina V.V. ed. Russia's Recognition of the Independent Norwegian State (Collection of Documents). Moscow: Sotsekgiz, 1958. 106 p.

spatial imagination was defined by the boundaries of the hereditary lands of the pogosts, which, as Commissioners Galyamin and Spørck demonstrated in 1825, were well known to the local population, but had never been recorded on maps as inter-state boundaries. For the Skolts, who had adopted Orthodoxy in the 17th century, this territory was continuous and functional: it was divided into areas that were used, depending on the season, for fishing, hunting, and grazing reindeer and sheep⁹. This archaic paradigm of territoriality did not recognize “fixed” political boundaries — only “flexible” boundaries of collective ownership.

The Russian Empire, the presence of which in the Far North was secured by the loyalty of the Sámi communities possessing broad autonomy, was more interested in preserving the Skolts’ extraterritorial economic practices than in establishing a clearly defined border. This was a classic example of imperial tolerance towards “flexible borders”: for a vast multi-ethnic empire, open border zones were an advantage rather than a problem, and it continued to think in terms of a frontier. As an analysis of the correspondence between Arkhangelsk Governor-General S.I. Minitskiy and the central authorities revealed, the Russian regional administration considered all three pogosts — Nyavdemskiy, Pazretskiy, and Pechengskiy — to be an indisputable part of the Russian Empire, despite the lack of documentary evidence for this status. In 1823, Governor Minitskiy reported to St. Petersburg that there was no need for demarcation, as there were strong grounds to believe that the entire so-called “common district” actually belonged to Russia¹⁰. He presented four sets of arguments to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: cartographic evidence (old 18th-century French maps depicting the territory as part of Russia), the Charter granted by Ivan the Terrible to the St. Tryphon Monastery, evidence of ecclesiastical jurisdiction (the Church of Sts. Boris and Gleb on the Paz River, Orthodox chapels in the Nyavdemskiy pogost and the Peschany settlement), and the testimony of the Skolts themselves, who asserted that the border ran along the western edge of the Nyavdemskiy pogost¹¹. As it turned out later, the Skolts were referring to a customs boundary, rather than a state border, established in 1784–1785 by the Kola ispravnik (chief official of the district) Shestakov and the land surveyor Kiselev; however, no cartographic records of this demarcation have survived (Palmstierna, 1932). This episode illustrates how the “flexible border” of local perception (a customs line) was mistakenly interpreted as a “fixed” state border.

The Norwegian side, by contrast, had been striving for a clear demarcation since the 18th century — a transformation of “flexible boundaries” into “fixed borders”. The absence of “fixed borders” created the conditions for future conflict, as the emerging Norwegian nation-state began to demand certainty. In 1775, the local official T. Fjellstedt warned the Danish Chancellor in Copenhagen that Finnmark could easily be taken over by Russia, and described the situation as “a matter of the utmost importance currently of concern to the government, since it has already

⁹ For information on the Orthodox Skolts and their way of life, see: SAAO. F. 1. Invt. 1. Vol. 8. Arch. 44; SAAO. F. 4. Invt. 1. Arch. 147. Sh. 17-18.

¹⁰ SAAO. F. 4. Invt. 4. Arch. 3; SAAO. F. 1367. Invt. 1. Arch. 87, part I.

¹¹ SAAO. F. 1367. Invt. 3. Arch. 87, part I.

reached the point where an active and enterprising neighboring nation alone is utilizing and controlling the common districts”¹². The negotiations of 1789, 1793 and 1797 failed to produce a result: Russia, which was at war with Turkey and Sweden, avoided drawing a boundary, citing the wartime situation and the high costs involved. As Alexander Bezborodko, Catherine II’s foreign minister, noted, Norway’s claims to the Kola Peninsula were merely nominal, given Russia’s long-standing development of the region¹³. Nevertheless, these negotiations marked a significant milestone: the subject of discussion was geographically defined as “three districts”, and the Kola Peninsula ceased to be used as a bargaining chip in subsequent diplomatic maneuvers.

Thus, by the beginning of the 19th century, a paradoxical situation had emerged: three groups of actors — the Skolts, Russian regional authorities, and the Norwegian administration — held fundamentally different views regarding the status of the shared territory. This asymmetry of perception was to become a fundamental feature of bilateral relations throughout the 19th century. However, after 1809, when Russia annexed Finland and Norway entered into a union with Sweden, the preconditions for a revision of this status quo had already begun to emerge. The annexation of Finland significantly extended the shared border, increasing its length almost threefold, and Finland and Finnish immigrants on Norwegian territory were symbolizing the Russian presence; consequently, the perception of the border amongst the Norwegian elite began to take on ever greater military and political significance. The “**flexible boundary**” (the image of the eastern neighbor) began to transform into a demand for a “**fixed border**” (demarcation) at the level of the political elite.

1826: diplomatic drama of the border’s creation

Official negotiations regarding the demarcation of the northern frontier began in 1823; one year before, in May–June 1822, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sweden-Norway had received diplomatic notes from the Russian envoy Pyotr Sukhtelen. These notes conveyed complaints from Russian residents, specifically the Skolts, indigenous inhabitants of the shared districts, regarding the activities of Swedish-Norwegian residents on the territory of their pogosts¹⁴.

During 1823–1824, several demarcation proposals were drafted in Norway and Russia, revealing the asymmetrical perceptions of the border issue. A proposal from the Swedish-Norwegian Department of Finance, prepared at the request of the State Council in 1824, was based on the assumption that, as there were few Skolts, Russia would not object to the transfer of the smaller portion of the shared territory to Norway; the border was intended to follow the Paz River from its mouth to its source (Johnsen, 1923;¹⁵). However, this proposal was criticized by members of the Storting, who established the “Committee for the Development of Finnmark” in

¹² Fieldsted, PM av 06.05.1775 til Det Kgl. Danske Cancelli. Riksarkivet (RA). UD, boks 5405, Prebensens avskriftsamling.

¹³ AFPRE. F. 53. Invt. 3. Arch. 661, 662.

¹⁴ AFPRE. F. 1: Adm. files, II-b, part I.

¹⁵ RA, UD 3C/18, pk. 5213, Prebensens avskriftsamling.

May 1824, chaired by the former Amtmann of Finnmark, H.M. Krog. Krog's proposal, submitted on July 31, 1824, suggested drawing the border from the mouth of the Voryema River to its source, then to Lake Salmijärvi on the Paz River, and onwards along the river southwards to the border post at Gelzomio¹⁶. The argument was that the Norwegian settlements of Vardø and Vadsø would become threatened with extinction if the border were to run along the Paz River, as they would lose access to the resources between the Paz and Voryema rivers. On August 6, 1824, Krogh's proposal was submitted to the King, and on December 11, it was approved by the government as a guideline for the demarcation. This proposal represented an attempt to translate local knowledge into a political program: Krogh, who was well acquainted with the conditions in Finnmark, sought to balance the interests of the settlers and the central authorities.

However, the Swedish-Norwegian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Count Vetterstedt, fearing that Russia might remain passive, decided to take the initiative. On December 6, 1824, when the Storting was presenting Krog's border plan to Karl Johan, the Swedish Chargé d'Affaires in St. Petersburg, Baron N.F. Palmstierna, delivered a note to the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs based on the Finance Department's proposal, suggesting the Paz River as the border line¹⁷. At the same time, the Governor-General of Arkhangelsk, Minitskiy, who was in St. Petersburg at the time, was attempting to persuade Nesselrode and the Tsar to adopt the border line proposed by the Arkhangelsk administration — along the western boundary of the Nyavdemskiy pogost. He succeeded in July 1824, and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was already preparing a corresponding draft; however, a subsequent note from Palmstierna, containing new facts, disrupted the Russian authorities' plans: the central government realised that it could not fully rely on information from Arkhangelsk¹⁸. This is a classic case of information distortion during its transmission from the local level to the center: regional officials, being limited by their local knowledge, conveyed perceptions to the capital that did not correspond to reality.

On March 24, 1825, Alexander I decided to appoint a special authorized officer to the common districts to work with a Swedish counterpart on a unified demarcation plan. The Tsar proposed the following principles: to prevent the cession of territories that had previously belonged to Russia; to transfer to Norway the settled territories to which it had indisputable rights; to take into account the religious beliefs of the local population; to allow residents of the common district, who after the demarcation would become subjects of one of the states, to move into the territory of the other to engage in livelihood activities; to show courtesy and tact towards their Norwegian counterparts¹⁹. On the Russian side, Lieutenant Colonel Valerian Emelyanovich Galyamin was chosen — an experienced thirty-year-old topographer from the Russian General Staff who served as deputy director of Russia's first Topographical School. The Norwegian side appointed 47-year-old Colonel Johan Henrik Spørck, a combat veteran who had served in the wars

¹⁶ Stortingskomiteens foredrag av 31.07.1824 // D-RA/S-1076/F/Fb/L0001.

¹⁷ AFPRE. F. 1: Adm. files, II-b, part I; SAAO. F. 1367. Invt. 3. Arch. 37.

¹⁸ Draft note Nesselrode - Wetterstedt, 07.1824; Nesselrode's report to Alexander I, 07.26.1824 // RA/PA-409, VI-1B.

¹⁹ Presentation to Alexander I regarding the borders in Lapland, 24.03.1825 // RA/PA-1409, VII.

against Sweden in 1808–1809 and 1814²⁰.

On July 4, 1825, the commissioners met in the town of Kola; on July 13, they arrived at the fishing village of Peschanoe and split into groups to conduct a topographical survey. Nine days later, on July 22, the commissioners met in the fishing village of Shapkino and began negotiations²¹.

During the negotiations, Galyamin had no intention of contesting the region's status as a common territory; instead, he sought to establish a border line that aligned with the economic activities and religious affiliations of the various groups involved. He proposed drawing the border from the Paz River directly to Gelzomio, thereby ceding the Nyavdemskiy pogost and part of the Pazretskiy pogost, including the coastal area inhabited primarily by Lutherans, to Norway. Spørck rejected this proposal, insisting instead on a boundary running from the mouth of the Voryema River to its source, then to Salmijärvi, and finally along the Paz River to Gelzomio²². Spørck's arguments were as follows: the existing temporary right to harvest wood for the Vardøhus garrison offered no guarantee that the Russian authorities would not revoke it in future; conversely, transferring the territory between the Paz and Voryema rivers to Norway would allow the Mountain Sami, who had lost access to reindeer grazing grounds on the Rybachiy Peninsula, to continue their economic activities on the Norwegian side. Galyamin accepted the main provisions of Spørck's plan, but put forward a counter-proposal: to draw the border not at Salmijärvi, but at the Church of Saints Boris and Gleb on the left bank of the Paz River, and from there along the riverbed to Gelzomio, regarding this as compensation to the Sámi for the loss of a vast tract of land between the Paz and Voryema rivers. Spørck initially objected, proposing to move the church to the Russian bank, but Galyamin insisted on its preservation, stating that the Sami opposed relocation because the land where the church stood, having been consecrated by the Venerable Tryphon, was sacred. Ultimately, Spørck agreed to shift the border northward to the church, ceding the surrounding one-square-kilometer territory to Russia, and the parties reached a full agreement (Johnsen, 1923;²³). This decision was an act of symbolic objectification: preserving the church as a sacred site served as a marker of the Russian presence along the new border.

By the end of the negotiations, Galyamin supported Spørck's proposal. Both commissioners envisaged granting the Eastern Sami the right to fish and hunt within the neighboring state's territory, though both sides were deprived of the right to graze reindeer across the border. The commissioners gave the inhabitants a three-year period to make a final choice regarding their country of residence — an idea proposed by Galyamin, who was confident that the Pazretsk and Nyavdem Sami would choose to become Russian subjects²⁴. On September 25, 1825, the Norwegian government submitted its demarcation proposal to King Karl Johan, while in St.

²⁰ AFPRE. F. 133. Invt. 468. Arch. 2983; AFPRE. F. 1: Adm. files, II-b, part 3.

²¹ AFPRE. F. 1: Adm. files, II-b, part 1; RA, UD3C/18, pk. 5213 (Prebensen Archive).

²² RSMHA. F. 442. Invt. 1. Arch. 26; AFPRE. F. 1: Adm. files, II-b, part 1.

²³ AFPRE. F. 1: Adm. files, II-b, part 1.

²⁴ AFPRE. F. 1: Adm. files, II-b, part 1; RSMHA. F. 442. Invt. 1. Arch. 26.

Petersburg, the plan was presented to Alexander I, who instructed to inform the Swedish-Norwegian king of Russia's readiness to sign the convention (Palmstierna, 1932).

However, a few weeks after the draft had been approved, Alexander I died suddenly at the age of 48 while travelling to the Black Sea for a rest; consequently, the Norwegian-Russian border treaty coincided with the height of the Decembrist Revolt. The situation was complicated by Galyamin's own involvement in the events: his friend and colleague A. Kornilovich had participated in the uprising and visited Galyamin on the evening of December 14 with a letter, which Galyamin burned upon learning of his friend's arrest. Two fellow officers gave false testimony against Galyamin, and he was placed under house arrest for two and a half months. The investigative commission found no evidence of his participation in the uprising apart from the destruction of evidence; consequently, Galyamin escaped Kornilovich's fate, but was transferred to the Finland Regiment and remained under the secret police's covert surveillance until 1832 (Palmstierna, 1932;²⁵).

After the uprising, Nicholas I, deeply disillusioned with the officer corps, was initially skeptical about the new treaty, possibly under the influence of Baron Diebitsch, the Chief of the General Staff, who opposed the Galyamin-Spørck proposal. The Tsar insisted that the border should run along the Paz River for its entire length and even considered relinquishing the Church of Saints Boris and Gleb (Palmstierna, 1932;²⁶). In March 1826, Palmstierna was informed of Nicholas I's stance; however, Karl Johan, eager for rapid progress, was prepared to accept the proposal. However, Palmstierna, having no intention of following the royal court's instructions, bided his time, and on April 24, 1826, he received an unexpected reply: Nicholas I, wishing to maintain a policy of "good neighborliness" toward Sweden-Norway, decided to approve the Galyamin-Spørck draft (Palmstierna, 1932). In early May 1826, Palmstierna and F.V. von Osten-Sacken drafted the border convention, which was signed on May 27 in Stockholm and on June 11 in St. Petersburg. The final version of the treaty contained only a few modifications: the right to cross the border for fishing and hunting was granted to all border residents, but only for six years, and the garrison of Vardøhus Fortress was prohibited from harvesting wood on the eastern bank of the Voryema River²⁷.

The new border was demarcated on the ground in the summer of 1826 by commissioners Meyländer, Wiebe, and Tønder on the Norwegian side, and Galyamin and Weickardt on the Russian side. However, during the demarcation process, the Nyavdemskiy pogost was mistakenly divided almost exactly in half. How could this have happened when the commission had members of the local population assisting them? The most obvious explanation is that the commissioners were using old Swedish maps of Lapland by Wallenberg (1804), in which the boundary of the pogost was depicted too far to the north. Thus, local knowledge gave way to academic, albeit

²⁵ State Archive of the Russian Federation (SARF). F. 109: 1. Expedition. Arch. 61, part 189; SARF. F. 48. Invt. 1. Arch. 107.

²⁶ RSMHA. F. 38. Invt. 1. Arch. 62.

²⁷ Ibid.

erroneous, views (Johnsen, 1923). This episode illustrates the conflict between the “flexible boundaries” of local knowledge and the “fixed borders” of cartographic abstraction: the commissioners preferred the academic map to the oral statements of local residents.

The border convention proved to be quite advantageous for Norway: it gained the most economically important coastal regions. However, dissatisfaction with the convention was more pronounced in Russia. The fact that the Tsar had rejected the position of the Arkhangelsk authorities led to persistent discontent regarding the new border throughout the 19th century, right up to the Revolution of 1917. Galyamin became a “blamed scapegoat”; in popular tradition, he was portrayed as a traitor. Rumors circulated that he had received a gold snuffbox with diamonds from the Norwegians, or even a sack of speciedalers that turned out to contain copper coins beneath a thin layer of silver, whereupon, realizing his betrayal, he hanged himself (Nikolskiy, 1914). However, these rumors were unfounded: Galyamin lived a long life, was reinstated in the General Staff in 1829, and distinguished himself during the Russo-Turkish War of 1828–1829 and the suppression of the Polish Uprising of 1830–1831; in 1832, he became director of the Imperial Porcelain Factory in St. Petersburg, ending his career in 1848 with the rank of Actual State Councilor (Johnsen, 1923;²⁸). The myth of Galyamin’s betrayal fitted into the concept of Russian popular monarchism, which was always ready to forgive and exonerate the Tsar while placing the blame on an official. In reality, the decision to accede to Swedish-Norwegian demands was made at the highest level in St. Petersburg, and Galyamin was following the instructions he had received.

Escalation of the “Lapp issue” and myths about the threat (1830–1905)

The main point of contention in the 1826 convention was the issue of harvesting rights for some of the border settlements of the Skolts, specifically the lands of the Pazretsk Sami on the territory of Sweden-Norway. Traditional conceptions of space and boundaries within the semi-nomadic Skolt culture did not correspond to the political understanding of space of the young Norwegian state, which was focused on achieving full independence and therefore sought to delineate the borders of its own territory as rapidly as possible²⁹. A partial solution to the problem was the so-called “Supplementary Protocol of 1834”, under which the Pazretsk Sami retained the right to salmon fishing in their former grounds — at fishing sites located within the territory ceded to Sweden-Norway. All other forms of resource exploitation within Norwegian territory were prohibited. This limited concession did not make the 1826 treaty seem any less unjust to the Skolts; conversely, the easement sanctioned by the protocol burdened the Norwegian side and was perceived as evidence of Russia’s willingness to violate the sovereignty of its neighbor³⁰. In terms of our conceptual framework, this easement became a zone where “flexible boundaries” (traditional Sami rights) intersected with “fixed borders” (state sovereignty), creating a constant

²⁸ SARF. F. 109: 1. Expedition. Arch. 61, part 189.

²⁹ AFPRE. F. II Dep. I-3 Invt. 446. Arch. 104 – Sh. 238-243; RA/UD, Prebensen samling, G05/10/boks 5213.

³⁰ For information on the servitude and the issue of “Lopars’ livelihoods”, see.: RA/UD, Prebensen samling; SAAO. F. 1367. Invt. 1. Arch. 87 (p. 2) – Sh. 232-233; RSHA. F. 1286. Invt. 4. Arch. 910 – Sh. 1-2, 107.

source of tension.

During the 1840s and 1850s, the claims of the Finnish side continued to expand. The Senate of the Grand Duchy of Finland persistently demanded a revision of the border line established in 1826 or, alternatively, a territorial exchange. Stockholm interpreted Russian claims as a potential desire on Russia's part to extend its sovereignty and annex ice-free harbors in the Norwegian region of Finnmark (Zaikov, Tamitskiy, 2016). The "Russian threat", first outlined by the British Consul John Rice Crowe in the late 1830s, found fertile ground. In 1836, Crowe, the British vice-consul in Hammerfest, reported to Lord Palmerston that "the Norwegian Finnmark would soon be seized by Russia" (Davydov, 2009). This doctrine became a classic example of the objectification of a "flexible boundary": local fears regarding Russian commercial expansion were transformed, at the level of central policy, into a doctrine of military threat. Consequently, Stockholm opted to close the Norwegian-Finnish border section to cross-border commercial activities, which was done in 1852 (Palmstierna, 1932). This marked the greatest defeat for Russian diplomacy in the Far North during the first half of the 19th century and demonstrated how an asymmetry of perception — where local conflicts are interpreted as imperial ambitions — leads to the hardening of "fixed borders" and the restriction of "flexible" ones.

The definitive shift towards a policy of containing Russia in the Far North took place in 1855 with the signing of the "November Treaty" between Sweden-Norway on the one hand, and Great Britain and France on the other. Sweden-Norway pledged not to enter into an alliance with Russia, while Great Britain and France guaranteed the inviolability of the Kingdom's borders³¹. This treaty marked a turning point in the way a small nation-state and a great empire perceived their neighborly relationship, with far-reaching consequences: it reinforced the asymmetry of perception as a structural feature of bilateral relations.

In the second half of the 19th century, the image of the "Russian threat" became a factor in shaping Norway's internal borderland policy. The predominance of a non-Norwegian population in Eastern Finnmark, particularly near the Russian-Norwegian border, was perceived as a foreign invasion — Russia's encroachment onto Norwegian soil (Niemi, 2008). This is a process of symbolic objectification: cultural dominance is interpreted as a political threat, and the "flexible boundary" of ethnic space is transformed into a demand for a "fixed border" of state sovereignty. The active construction of the nation-state and the fear of the vast, multi-ethnic Russian Empire led to the perception of the Skolt Sami's modest fishing activities on Norwegian territory as a symbol of a Russian presence.

In Russia, this issue was also re-examined, albeit several decades later. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the ideology of Russian ethnic nationalism began to take shape across the empire, gradually spreading to the Arkhangelsk Governorate as well (Tolz, 2001; Hosking, 1998). Many officials and journalists travelling along the Russian-Norwegian border noted a peculiar "salient" that did not conform to the principle of natural boundaries; in their view, the "artificial

³¹ Ibid.

nature” of the border in the section stretching from the Church of Saints Boris and Gleb to the Voryema River had resulted in the loss of salmon fishing grounds belonging to the Pazretsk Sami³².

Growing mutual mistrust and accusations of expansionist plans led to negotiations between Russian and Norwegian diplomats in 1896–1903. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported the position of the Arkhangelsk public, which had formulated a program of redress for the “territorial concession” of 1826: to formalize the Skolt Sami’s fishing grounds on Norwegian territory as private property, including a ban on fishing in those grounds by Norwegian subjects. The Norwegian side, seeking to eliminate these servitudes, attempted to explore the possibility of unilaterally withdrawing from the 1834 protocol or severely restricting the fishing activities of the Russian Sami. The negotiations were unsuccessful: the idea of securing extraterritorial status for fishing grounds on the territory of a neighboring sovereign state found no support³³. This episode demonstrated the limits of political objectification: even amidst strong public sentiment, revising the established “fixed border” turned out to be impossible without the risk of large-scale conflict.

Thus, by the beginning of the 20th century, a paradoxical situation had emerged: while the “fixed border” established in 1826 remained unchanged, the “flexible boundaries” of perception — myths regarding “Russian” and “Norwegian” threats — continued to evolve. This dual function of “flexible boundaries”, both as tools for mobilization and as mechanisms of restraint, became a defining feature of the Russian-Norwegian borderlands. On the one hand, the myths about the threat served to foster internal consolidation: for Norway — the formation of a national identity as a counterweight to “Eastern barbarism”; for Russia — the consolidation of imperial territory around the idea of defending “ancestral Russian lands”. On the other hand, mutual fear prevented radical actions and kept the parties within the framework of institutional agreements: each side was afraid that a border revision would lead to even greater losses. The “fixed border” turned out to be protected by the “flexible boundaries” of mutual fear.

The ordeal of catastrophes: loss and restoration of the border (1920–1949)

In accordance with the provisions of the Tartu (Yuryev) Peace Treaty between the RSFSR and Finland, signed on 14 October 1920, Soviet Russia voluntarily ceded the Petsamo region to Finland, thereby granting Finland access to the ice-free Barents Sea. Thus, the border between Norway and the Russian Empire, which had existed since 1826, ceased to exist. As the Russian historians A.I. Rupasov and A.N. Chistikov described this change, “the state border defined by the Treaty of Tartu, figuratively speaking, drew a line under one stage in the development of relations between the RSFSR and Finland. A new stage was beginning, which, as it later turned out, was no less complex and difficult than the previous one” (Rupasov, Chistikov, 2016). In terms of our conceptual framework, the “fixed border” of 1826 was de-institutionalized, but the “flexible boundary” — the image of the “old” line held in the minds of the local population and political

³² RSHA. F. 1286. Invt. 31. Arch. 452; RSHA. F. 560. Invt. 28. Arch. 520 — Sh. 1-13; SAAO. F. 4. Invt. 16 Vol. 1. Arch. 988 — Sh. 4–14.

³³ Hoover Institution Archives (HIA). HI/Russian Missia; Norway/Missia; Sweden/Lapps/box127/14; box127/15.

elites — persisted. This image would prove to be an important factor in 1944–1947, when the question of restoring the border arose.

The two neighboring states were to go through two more wars: the Soviet–Finnish War of 1939–1940 and the Soviet–Finnish War of 1941–1944. On March 12, 1940, the Moscow Peace Treaty was signed between the USSR and Finland, altering the Soviet-Finnish border in the Far North as well: the western parts of the Rybachiy and Sredniy peninsulas, which had been ceded in 1920, were returned to the USSR. However, despite the fact that the Petsamo region had been occupied by Soviet troops, the USSR withdrew them, allowing Finland to retain both its access to the Barents Sea and the ice-free port of Linnahamari.

The issue of Petsamo soon took on an international dimension involving the interests of both Germany and the Soviet Union. Germany's economic need for the nickel mined in Petsamo became a significant factor in Finnish-German relations. Negotiations between Finland, Germany, and the Soviet Union regarding the Petsamo nickel deposits in 1940–1941 demonstrated how the question of resources was intertwined with geopolitical interests (Paasikivi, 2021; Crosby, 2025). During this period, the concession to develop the Petsamo nickel deposits was held by the British-Canadian company Mond Nickel. Following Germany's occupation of Norway, the Soviet Union began to regard Petsamo as a strategically important area. On June 23, 1940, Molotov met with Paasikivi, the Finnish envoy to the USSR, and stated that "the Soviet government is interested in the nickel mines of the Petsamo region and would like to obtain a concession for them"³⁴. Soviet-Finnish negotiations on this issue continued until the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War but did not lead to a successful outcome.

This multilateral diplomatic game surrounding Petsamo demonstrated how the issue of resources could serve as a catalyst for geopolitical shifts. In terms of our framework, Germany's economic interests and the Soviet Union's strategic interests created competing "fixed borders" of influence, while Finland attempted to maneuver between them by utilizing the "flexible boundaries" of diplomatic pledges and agreements.

Following Nazi Germany's attack on the Soviet Union, Finland sided with Germany, and on June 29, 1941, Finnish troops crossed the Soviet border. The Petsamo region became a key staging ground for the offensive launched by German and Finnish forces in the direction of Murmansk. This subsequent Soviet-Finnish conflict (known in Finnish historiography as the "Continuation War") ended on September 19, 1944, with the signing of the Armistice Agreement between the USSR and the United Kingdom on the one hand, and Finland on the other. Under the terms of this agreement, the Petsamo region was returned to the USSR. Article 2 of the agreement stated: "Finland confirms the return to the Soviet Union of the province of Petsamo (Pechenga) voluntarily ceded to Finland by the Soviet State under the Peace Treaties of October 14, 1920, and March 12,

³⁴ Foreign Policy Documents. 1940–June 22, 1941. Vol. 23: In 2 books. Book 1. January 1 – October 31, 1940. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya; 1995: 363–364.

1940...”³⁵ Following the return of the Petsamo (Pechenga) region to the Soviet Union, the Soviet government paid compensation of 20 million US dollars to the British-Canadian owners of the Mond Nickel Company.

The Petsamo region and Eastern Finnmark were liberated from German forces during the Petsamo-Kirkenes Operation, which began on October 7, 1944. The Red Army crossed the border with Norway on October 18, and the port city of Kirkenes was captured on October 25. The legal basis for crossing the Norwegian state border was the “Agreement Concerning Civil Administration and Jurisdiction in Norwegian Territory after Its Liberation by Allied Expeditionary Forces”, signed in London on May 16, 1944, by Trygve Lie, Foreign Minister of the Norwegian government-in-exile, and V.Z. Lebedev, Ambassador of the Soviet Union³⁶. On the same day, Norway concluded similar agreements with Great Britain and the United States; Trygve Lie emphasized that under these agreements, “Norwegian sovereignty is fully recognized, and the country’s integrity is assured”³⁷. This was a significant diplomatic signal: even despite the presence of Allied troops on Norwegian territory, Norway’s sovereignty remained inviolate.

On November 7, 1944, a Norwegian delegation led by Trygve Lie arrived in Moscow. The purpose of the visit was to discuss Norwegian-Soviet military cooperation in the North and to request assistance in arranging a visit by Minister of Justice Terje Wold to the liberated areas of Finnmark for inspection and information-gathering purposes (Komarov, 2020). On March 27, 1945, Soviet diplomat P.D. Orlov proposed to Norwegian Ambassador Rolf Andvord the creation of a Norwegian-Soviet commission to demarcate the border. Andvord considered the proposal premature, but Orlov noted that an official statement regarding the restoration of the “old border” would be of great significance as a counterweight to German propaganda³⁸. This is an example of how the “flexible boundary” — the memory of the 1826 line — was deliberately used by Soviet diplomacy to politically objectify and legitimize the new status quo.

The Norwegian Government raised the issue of demarcation following the liberation of the entire country from German occupation. This proposal was put forward in a memorandum dated August 6, 1945³⁹; however, as early as August 16, Chargé d’Affaires Krogh-Hansen indicated that it would be advisable to postpone demarcation until 1946⁴⁰. On October 24, 1945, Deputy People’s Commissar V.G. Dekanozov met with Norwegian Ambassador Andvord, who presented a memorandum on demarcation and handed over seven documents regarding the border regime that had previously existed between Norway and Finland. The Norwegian side was interested in

³⁵ Maierov S. ed. *Foreign Policy of the Soviet Union During the Patriotic War*. Vol. 2. January 1 – December 31, 1944: Documents and Materials. Moscow: Gospolitizdat; 1946: 214–229.

³⁶ *Soviet-Norwegian Relations, 1917–1955: A Collection of Documents*. Moscow, 1997: 344–347; Pravda, May 18, 1944.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ *Soviet-Norwegian Relations, 1917–1955*. Op. cit., p. 377.

³⁹ AFPRF. F. 06. Invt. 27. Shelf 127. Arch. 6. Sh. 12.

⁴⁰ AFPRF. F. 0116. Invt. 27. Shelf 127. Arch. 5. Sh. 43; from the diary of V.G. Dekanozov. Reception for Norwegian Ambassador Andvord, October 24, 1945. AFPRF. F. 06. Invt. 27. Shelf 127. Arch. 6. Sh. 21.

ensuring that the agreements on border arrangements previously in force between Norway and Finland were recognized as valid in relations between the USSR and Norway. As explained in a telegram from the Norwegian Foreign Ministry to Ambassador Andvord, the Norwegian government preferred to reaffirm the validity of treaties originally signed with Finland, rather than resolve border issues “through new agreements”: “In support of the Norwegian view, the Embassy is requested to refer to the desire of both parties to be good neighbors, and to emphasize what an unfavorable impression it would make if the position of the Norwegian population in the frontier districts should become worse now that the Soviet Union has become a neighbor than it was when Norway was a neighbor of Finland”⁴¹. This position reflected a desire to preserve the existing “flexible boundaries” (sectoral agreements with Finland) and to minimize changes to the daily lives of the border population.

For its part, the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs considered that some of these agreements required consultation with the relevant authorities, and proposed concluding a single, comprehensive convention on border regime, containing sector-specific sections⁴². This is a process of political objectification unfolding at two levels: Norway sought to preserve the existing “flexible boundaries” (sector-specific agreements), while the USSR insisted on a new, systematic “fixed border” (a unified convention).

On July 2, 1946, the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs notified the Norwegian side of its readiness to proceed with demarcation. On August 1, a Norwegian government delegation arrived in Moscow to take part in the Joint Commission on the Demarcation of the State Border between the USSR and Norway; the Norwegian delegation was chaired by H. Gabrielsen, Governor of Finnmark Province, while the Soviet delegation was chaired by I.V. Maevskiy, an advisor at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs⁴³. The Commission, which met in Moscow from August 2 to August 16, 1946, approved the work plan and decided to carry out the operations during the summer of 1947. It was decided that the demarcation work would be based on the 1826 Russian-Norwegian border demarcation documents and the revised map of that border from 1896⁴⁴. This decision carried profound symbolic significance: the “fixed border”, which had been abolished a quarter of a century earlier, was being restored in its original form. The “flexible boundary” preserved in memory proved stronger than the “fixed border” imposed by political changes. The demarcation itself was carried out between June 1 and September 4, 1947, and the descriptive protocol, maps, and other documents were signed in Moscow on December 18, 1947. Soviet newspapers published a report stating: “All works on the demarcation of the Soviet-Norwegian border took place in a spirit of complete mutual understanding and agreement between both sides”⁴⁵.

⁴¹ Telegram from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Norwegian Ambassador in the USSR, R.O. Andvord, regarding the maintenance of the traditional border regime on the new Soviet-Norwegian border. Soviet-Norwegian Relations, 1917–1955. Op. cit., pp. 392–393.

⁴² AFPRF. F. 0116. Invt. 27. Shelf 127. Arch. 5. Sh. 43–44.

⁴³ Pravda. August 2, 1946; Izvestia. August 2, 1946.

⁴⁴ Izvestia. August 30, 1946.

⁴⁵ Pravda. December 23, 1947; Izvestia. December 23, 1947.

However, the post-war perception of the border in Norway was complicated by long-standing fears associated with the “Finnish threat”. As research by Norwegian historians K.E. Eriksen and S. Bones has shown, in the post-war years the Norwegian authorities maintained a suspicious attitude towards the Finnish population of Northern Norway (the Kvens). A special list of suspected individuals — the “Finnish list” — containing approximately 2,000 names (primarily Finns and people of Finnish origin), was maintained from 1955 through the 1970s. The Norwegian military and police authorities feared that Soviet influence might be exerted via Finland, and that the Finnish population of Northern Norway might be exploited in the interests of the USSR. As the head of the Police Surveillance Service noted, Finns could be more easily recruited by Soviet intelligence due to their proximity to the Soviet-Finnish border (Eriksen, 2017; Bones, 2017). Consequently, passport controls for Finnish citizens in Troms and Finnmark were significantly tightened during the 1950s, and a special regulatory regime for Finnish citizens remained in effect in these two counties until 1975 (ibid.). This was a striking example of how the “flexible boundaries” of perception — the fear of an external threat — were transformed into discriminatory policies at the level of the “fixed borders” of state control. These discriminatory measures were abolished only in the mid-1970s, following public statements by Sverre Nielsen, editor of the newspaper Finnmarken, and Inger Louise Valle, Minister of Justice (ibid.). This case illustrates how old fears can be projected onto new geopolitical realities, and how the “flexible boundaries” of ethnic perception can persist even after “fixed” political borders have been redrawn. It also demonstrates that overcoming “threat perceptions” requires not only political but also cultural efforts, specifically, public condemnation of discriminatory policies and the political will to repeal them.

Following the demarcation of the border, the parties began drafting a Soviet-Norwegian document regarding the border regime. The treaty between the Government of the USSR and the Royal Norwegian Government on the Soviet-Norwegian border regime was signed in Oslo on December 29, 1949⁴⁶. However, Soviet-Norwegian relations in 1949 were undergoing a period of sharp cooling, caused by Norway’s accession to the NATO military-political bloc in April 1949. A report by the Soviet Embassy in Norway for 1949 emphasized that the Gerhardsen government had launched “provocative anti-Soviet propaganda, spreading slanderous fabrications about the aggressiveness of the Soviet Union, the threat posed by the USSR to Northern Norway, and about Soviet imperialism”⁴⁷. According to Ambassador S.A. Afanasyev, the Norwegian government, fearing that it had adopted too confrontational course in relations with the USSR, began looking for an opportunity to secure confirmation from the Soviet government of its friendly attitude toward Norway. The Norwegian Foreign Ministry proposed that the communiqué on the signing of the

⁴⁶ Johanson Bodil B. Overenskomsten mellom den Kongelige Norske Regjering og Regjeringen for Samveldet av Sovjetiske Sosialistiske Republiker om forskjellige forhold ved den norsk-sovjetiske grense og om fremgangsmåten ved ordningen av konflikter og hendinger på grensen. 50 år 1949–1999. Kirkenes: Norges Grensekommissariat; 1999. 70 s.

⁴⁷ Political Report of the USSR Embassy in Norway for 1949; AFPRF. F. 0116. Invt. 39. Shelf 156. Arch. 10. Sh. 8.

treaty should specifically highlight the “friendly atmosphere” in which the negotiations had taken place. The Soviet side rejected this proposal so as not to “give the Norwegian authorities a pretext to reassure the Norwegian public that everything in Soviet-Norwegian relations was supposedly still going well”⁴⁸. In the report published by *Izvestia* on December 31, 1949, unlike the report published in 1947, there was no mention of a “spirit of mutual understanding and harmony” — a sign that the Cold War had begun. Applying the concept of asymmetric perception, we can observe how an objective technical agreement on a “fixed border” becomes hostage to political confrontation: both sides reject the symbolic objectification of good-neighbourliness, and “flexible boundaries” (images of threat) once again begin to dominate institutional agreements.

The treaty was ratified by a decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on October 23, 1950, and entered into force in Norway on November 7, in accordance with a royal decree (Heger, 2015;⁴⁹).

Conclusion

The history of the Russian-Norwegian borderlands, examined in the context of the bicentennial of the 1826 treaty, offers a unique example of how a line drawn on a map almost by chance (amidst incomplete information, the commissioners’ time constraints, and the dominance of imperial logic over local expediency) proved to be unexpectedly stable and viable. As our study have demonstrated, this stability was determined not so much by geographical logic or military might as by a complex interweaving of asymmetric perceptions, mutual fears, and institutional compromises; these factors paradoxically created the conditions for long-term stability, even during periods of acute confrontation.

In analyzing the evolution of the Russian-Norwegian border, we identified four key stages, each characterized by a specific balance between “flexible” (imagined) and “fixed” (institutional) boundaries.

The first stage — from the Middle Ages to the early 19th century — was dominated by a frontier mentality. During this time, the “common districts” served as a space where three paradigms of territorial imagination coexisted: the Sami paradigm (archaic, based on seasonal migrations and collective ownership), the imperial paradigm (Russian, tolerant of open zones and requiring no clear boundaries), and the modern paradigm (Norwegian, striving for hermetic national borders). This period demonstrated that the absence of a “fixed border” did not imply an absence of territoriality; it was, rather, organized according to different, pre-state principles, where fiscal jurisdiction took precedence over political sovereignty. However, the lack of “fixed borders” created the conditions for future conflict, as the emerging Norwegian nation-state began to

⁴⁸ Covering letter to the 1949 report of the USSR Embassy in Norway. February 21, 1950. AFPRF. F. 0116. Invt. 39. Shelf 156. Arch. 10. Sh. 3-4.

⁴⁹ Johanson Bodil B. Overenskomsten mellom den Kongelige Norske Regjering og Regjeringen for Samveldet av Sovjetiske Sosialistiske Republikker om forskjellige forhold ved den norsk-sovjetiske grense og om fremgangsmåten ved ordningen av konflikter og hendinger på grensen. 50 år 1949–1999. Kirkenes: Norges Grensekommissariat; 1999. 70 s.

demand certainty, whereas imperial Russia continued to think in terms of the frontier. This asymmetry of perception became a fundamental characteristic of bilateral relations.

The second stage — the establishment of the border in 1826 — was the outcome of diplomatic negotiations in which regional conflicts (complaints by the Skolt Saami, disputes over hunting and fishing grounds), personal ambitions (Minitiski vs. Palmstierna, Galyamin vs. Spørck), and macro-political considerations (Alexander I's alliance with Karl Johan, Nicholas I's desire to maintain "good neighborly relations") were inextricably intertwined. The study has shown that the Convention of 1826, which was advantageous to Norway, was perceived in Russia as a "territorial loss". This gave rise to a persistent myth about Galyamin's betrayal — a myth that had no factual basis, but which served an important socio-psychological function, allowing the image of the "benevolent tsar" to be preserved and the blame to be shifted onto a "corrupt official". Acting as a "flexible boundary" (a symbol of injustice), this myth became objectified within the political sphere, influencing Russian border policy throughout the 19th century.

The third stage — the evolution of the "Lapp question" and the escalation of myths regarding the threat between 1830 and 1905 — demonstrated how local conflicts over resource use gradually became politicized, transforming into symbols of a neighbor's expansionist ambitions. On one hand, the 1834 easement granted to the Pazretsk Sami served as proof for Norway of Russia's readiness to violate sovereignty, while for Russia, it was a tool for protecting the traditional rights of the indigenous population. On the other hand, Crowe's doctrine regarding the seizure of ice-free harbors, embraced by Swedish and Norwegian elites, created a persistent image of the "Russian threat". Analysis reveals this image to have been less a reflection of Russia's actual policy than a projection of the small nation-state's own fears. Conversely, in Russia, particularly in the Arkhangelsk Governorate, an image of the "Norwegian threat" took shape — the result of a "cunning" diplomatic maneuver and the "complacency" of the central authorities. This dual asymmetry of perception became a structural feature of bilateral relations: while both sides viewed each other as a threat, this mutual suspicion also deterred them from taking radical action, as each feared that revising the border would result in even greater losses. The "fixed border" turned out to be protected by the "flexible boundaries" of mutual fear.

The fourth stage — the loss and restoration of the border between 1920 and 1949 — became a unique historical precedent. The 1920 Treaty of Tartu annulled the 1826 border, ceding the Petsamo region to Finland. However, after World War II, when Soviet troops liberated Eastern Finnmark and Pechenga was returned to the USSR, the parties made a conscious decision to restore the "old" border: the one established over a century earlier. As we have demonstrated, this choice was not merely mechanical; it reflected not only technical expediency (the availability of documents and maps from 1826 and 1896) but also symbolic significance. The 1826 line was perceived as "historical" and "natural", even though its "artificial nature" had been criticized in Russia throughout the 19th century. The 1947 demarcation and the signing of the agreement on border regime in 1949 completed this process; however, against the backdrop of the onset of the

Cold War and Norway's accession to NATO, the symbolic rhetoric of "friendship and harmony" receded into the background, marking the beginning of a new era of confrontation.

Summarizing the findings of this study, we can draw several key conclusions that are of significance not only historically but also in the present day.

The first conclusion concerns the nature of the border's stability. The stability of the 1826 line was determined not so much by its geographical "fairness" or "naturalness" — on the contrary, influential forces in both Russia and Norway considered it unfair. Instead, its stability was ensured by institutional inertia and mutual caution, as both sides feared that a revision of the border would lead to unpredictable consequences: for Norway, the loss of ice-free harbors; for Russia, a weakening of its position in the north and the loss of control over a strategically important region. This asymmetrical mutual restraint, underpinned by international treaties (the November Treaty of 1855 and the Integrity Treaty of 1907), created conditions under which the border became a "frozen" compromise that no one dared to challenge.

The second conclusion concerns the role of local communities. The Sami, specifically the Skolts, the Pomors, and Norwegian colonists were not merely passive objects of state policy, but active agents of "spatial socialization". Their everyday practices (subsistence activities, migration, trade) created "flexible boundaries" that influenced perceptions of the neighbor and, ultimately, the formation of "fixed" institutional boundaries. In this sense, the history of the Russian-Norwegian borderlands refutes the classic top-down model in which the "center defines the periphery". Regional conflicts and local initiatives repeatedly shaped the agenda of bilateral relations, while central authorities were forced to respond to challenges "from below": complaints of the Skolts in 1822, fishing disputes in the 1860s, or pressure from the Arkhangelsk press in the early 20th century. At the same time, as the analysis of the Galyamin myth demonstrated, local memory regarding an "unjust" border could persist for decades without escalating into political demands until a favorable foreign policy climate emerged.

The third conclusion relates to the dynamics of "threat perceptions". We have shown that myths concerning the "Russian" and "Norwegian" threats were not simply the product of propaganda, but complex socio-cultural constructs in which economic and military concerns, cultural stereotypes, and political manipulations were intertwined. These myths served a crucial function of internal consolidation: for Norway, it was the shaping of a national identity in contrast to "Eastern barbarism"; for Russia, it was the consolidation of imperial territory around the idea of defending "ancestral Russian lands" against encroachment. However, the evolution of these myths demonstrated that they could both exacerbate tensions and, paradoxically, foster stability: mutual fear prevented radical actions and kept both parties within the framework of institutional agreements.

The fourth conclusion concerns the unique nature of the border's restoration in 1947. This precedent, in which an annulled border was re-established in exactly the same form a quarter of a century later, is unparalleled in European history. It illustrates that a border can possess not only

political but also symbolic significance, becoming part of a collective memory and identity that even radical political changes cannot completely erase. For both Russia and Norway, the 1826 line became a “shared historical heritage”, although each side interpreted it in its own way: Norway viewed it as the result of skillful diplomacy, while Russia regarded it as a “forced concession” which, however, it did not dare to renegotiate.

Finally, turning to the contemporary context — the bicentenary of the border and the new geopolitical confrontation that has placed Russia and Norway on opposite sides — we can draw several lessons from this historical experience.

Firstly, even the most “unjust” border can be stable if the parties recognize its institutional legitimacy and resist the temptation of revanchism. Historical experience has shown that attempts to revise the status quo (such as the territorial exchange of the 1840s or the demands made by the Arkhangelsk public in the 1890s) were unsuccessful and merely exacerbated mutual distrust. On the contrary, acceptance of the status quo, even if it was perceived as advantageous to one side, created the conditions for long-term stability.

Secondly, “threat perceptions” are not merely propaganda clichés, but real factors influencing policy. Ignoring the asymmetry of perception, whereby one side views the other’s actions as a threat while the other remains unaware of this, leads to misguided decisions and the escalation of conflict. In the 19th century, Russian authorities frequently found themselves in situations where their actions (such as the 1851 ultimatum or support for revisionist sentiments) were perceived by Norway as confirmation of a “Russian threat”, even though they were reactions to local issues. Conversely, Norway’s policy of Norwegianisation and colonization, which was perceived in Russia as expansion, was for Norway merely a means of internal consolidation.

Thirdly, local knowledge and local initiatives remain a vital resource for maintaining good neighbourly relations. In the 19th century, the commercial interactions among Pomors, the Sami, and Norwegian colonists created “flexible boundaries” of mutual understanding, thereby softening the edge of political confrontation. In the modern context, where official channels of communication are limited, cross-border cooperation at the level of regions, universities and cultural institutions can fulfil the same function: maintaining channels of interaction that remain independent of the prevailing political climate.

Fourthly, the anniversary of the border is not only an occasion for historical reflection, but also an opportunity to rethink the symbolic resource of shared history. The 1826 border is not a line of division, but a “shared heritage” that can be understood as a joint project of spatial management. The lessons of the 19th and 20th centuries demonstrate that even neighbors with asymmetrical power dynamics can find a *modus vivendi*, provided they do not substitute ideological constructs for reality and maintain institutional channels of dialogue.

The 200-year history of the Russian-Norwegian border is a story not only of conflict and tension, but also of institutional ingenuity and the ability of the parties to keep their differences within the framework of agreements and prevent escalation. We believe that this experience may

be of interest not only to historians, but also to politicians seeking to understand how, even in conditions of geopolitical confrontation, it is possible to preserve elements of cooperation and mutual respect for historically established boundaries. The 1826 border, mapped by Galyamin and Spørck under arduous field conditions and with scant data, proved to be more than just a line; it was an “architectural project” that outlasted empires, wars, and ideologies. In this sense, it stands not merely as a historical fact, but as a reminder that even accidental compromises can form a solid foundation for long-term coexistence, provided the parties are willing to view a “fixed border” not as a line of separation, but as a line of shared responsibility.

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The article was submitted 20.07.2026; accepted for publication 27.07.2026

Contribution of the authors: the authors contributed equally to this article

The authors declare no conflict of interest