Polish and Russian cross-border cooperation is governed by lawful agreements. The most important are the Treaty on Neighbourly Relations and Cooperation between the Republic of Poland and the Russian Federation of 22 May 1992, the memorandum between the Republic of Poland and the Russian Federation on cooperation of north-eastern Polish voivodeships with the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation of 22 May 1992, as well as the agreement between the Government of the Republic of Poland and the Government of the Russian Federation on cross-border cooperation of 2 October 1992. Its growing role may prove to be a significant factor contributing to further dynamic progress in cross-border cooperation. Oblast residents are issued passes on applying to the Consulate of the Republic of Poland in Kaliningrad, whereas Poles intending to visit Kaliningrad can obtain passes from the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Warsaw and the General Consulate of the Russian Federation in Gdansk. Government proxies for cross-border cooperation were appointed in the process of developing structures supporting cross-border relations and a proxy working body called the Polish-Russian Council was formed for the cooperation of regions of the Republic of Poland and the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation. The inclusion of the Kaliningrad Oblast into Baltic Europe tourist routes and the development of business tourism has stimulated the growth of high-standard tourist infrastructure, as shown by the intense growth in the number of hotels and holiday resorts. Though the development of cross-border cooperation, including small border traffic, has basically failed to draw numerous tourists from Poland to the most attractive tourist locations in the Kaliningrad Oblast, it provides such an opportunity. Since the return of VAT invoices qualifying for VAT reimbursement is not issued by hotels, catering facilities and some discount shops, the actual expenditure of Russians Tourist trips of Poles to the Kaliningrad Oblast develop much slower. In 2009, an idea was voiced for Poland, Lithuania and Russia to apply to the European Commission with an initiative for the small border zone to cover the entire Kaliningrad Oblast. The visits of Kaliningrad residents, apart from commercially oriented ones, also include recreation, tourism, medical tourism visits, etc. Lithuania's doubts also resulted from a growing concern that with the entire Oblast covered by small border traffic, too much of the country's area would be exposed to it. Poland and Russia, supported by Germany, applied to the EU to cover the entire Oblast with small border traffic in April 2010. The citizens of the Kaliningrad Oblast, who up to 1 June 2007 were entitled to a free visa pursuant to an agreement dated 25 June 2006 in Sochi between the European Union and the Russian Federation, were to pay 35 euros for a visa. The agreement on small border traffic covered the entire Kaliningrad Oblast and, on the Polish side, Pomerania with the cities of Sopot, Gdansk and Gdynia and Puck, Gdansk, Nowy Dwor and Malbork powiats; as well as Warmia-Mazuria voivodship with the cities of Elblag and Olsztyn as well as Elblag, Braniewo, Lidzbark, Bartoszyce, Olsztyn, Ketryn, Mragowo, Węgorzewo, Gżycko, Goldap and Olecko powiats (Fig. The parties agreed to create favourable conditions and support direct relations between the regions and cities of both countries, and in particular the Polish north-eastern voivodeships and the Russian Kaliningrad Oblast. The enlargement of the Schengen Area had a significant impact on Kaliningrad Oblast relations and cross-border cooperation with its neighbours. The enlargement of the Schengen Area had a strong impact on relations of the Kaliningrad Oblast and its cross-border cooperation with neighbours. Tourism development plans assume further growth of guest rooms in the coastal therapeutic
zone, in Kaliningrad, the Curonian and Vistula Spits, on the southern coast of the Vistula Spit, on the southern and eastern coast of the Curonian Spit, in the Vishtinetzki region, and in the valleys of the Lyna, Pregolya, Sesupe and Neman rivers. The development of cross-border cooperation, including small border traffic, has not resulted in attracting a substantial number of Polish tourists to the Kaliningrad Oblast, but it has provided such a possibility. The visits of Kaliningrad residents, apart from commercially oriented ones, also include recreation, tourism, medical care related visits, etc. However, as scientists from Kaliningrad projected, with the easing of the visa system and the development of transport and tourist infrastructure the role of tourism shows a growing trend. However, as scientists from Kaliningrad anticipated, with the easing of the visa system and the development of transport and tourist infrastructure, the role of tourism shows an upward tendency. Ecological tourism, eco-tourism and agro-tourism as well as conference and business tourism show a great future potential. The developing relations between Kaliningrad residents and their EU neighbours even before the small border traffic agreement indicated that the new options opened since the end of July 2012 would contribute to more dynamic development of these relations. Under the process of adapting to the common visa policy, Poland and Lithuania lifted visa duties for nationals of countries covered by this visa-free border traffic in Europe. The agreement on small border traffic came into force on July 27, 2012, covering the entire area of the Kaliningrad Oblast and selected Polish poviats of Pomerania and Warmia–Mazuria voivodeships. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the tourist structure in the Kaliningrad Oblast has been subject to change. Residents of the Kaliningrad Oblast inhabiting it for at least three years are entitled to a special pass for a period of two to five years for a fee of 20 euros. Kaliningrad residents looking for recreation and ways of spending leisure time come to participate in big sporting and cultural events, e.g. music concerts held at the new Baltic Arena stadium or the Ergo Arena Hall in Gdansk. At the same time, in 2003, Poland and Lithuania introduced a visa duty to nationals from countries which are not part of the EU agreement, including Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. Poland and Russia, supported by Germany, applied to the EU for small border traffic to cover the entire territory of the Oblast. The falling interest of Kaliningrad inhabitants in travelling to Poland had a clear impact on local travel bureaus, which noted a dropping interest in several–day–long trips to Gdansk by up to 80%. Observations made during two work days and two off–work days in analogous periods in 2010 and 2013 showed a 12–fold growth in the number of Kaliningrad residents shopping in the biggest shopping mall in the Tri–City after introducing visa–free traffic in the border region. Nevertheless, border traffic between Poland and Kaliningrad grew regularly exceeding four million in 2012 (Table 1). The Kaliningrad coast is among the few coastal regions of Russia well qualified for summer recreation. Nevertheless, border traffic between Poland and Kaliningrad grew steadily, to exceed four million in 2012. Over 100 tourist agencies organise trips in the Oblast and to other regions of Russia and abroad. Natural conditions and the right infrastructure place tourism and recreation among priorities in the Oblast’s economic development. It is a necessity because of the unique location of the Kaliningrad Oblast. Half of them were tourists from the Oblast, with the other half representing tourists from other regions of Russia. According to the data of the Customs Office in Olsztyn, Kaliningrad residents presented approximately 40 thousand invoices for a total sum of 55 million zlotys. Kaliningrad citizens looking for leisure, recreation and entertainment come to participate in great
sporting and cultural events in Gdansk, Sopot and Gdynia. The group of foreigners, mainly Russians from Kaliningrad crossing the border under the small border traffic agreement, keeps growing (Figs 3 and 4). The introduction of visas between Poland and Russia hindered and restricted local border trade which had for years been the only measure mitigating social and economic problems of the cross-border regions. The introduction of visas between Poland and Russia hindered and restricted the local border trade, which had for years been the only measure mitigating social and economic problems of the cross-border regions. These changes mostly involve Kaliningrad and health resorts in Svetlogorsk and Zelenogradsk as well as several border region locations such as Sovietsk and Bagrationovsk. Together with Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and other countries which joined the European Union in 2004, Poland started implementing the Schengen legal order at the end of 2007. By the end of the first quarter of 2013, the number of Poles crossing the border increased, and starting from the second through third quarters of 2013 the number of foreigners, mainly Russian nationals coming to Poland, showed dynamic growth (Fig. 2). Approximately 70 agro-tourist homesteads have been established, mainly in the Zelenogradski, Polesski, Slavski and Nesterovski regions. International tourism started developing after 1990 when the Oblast opened to foreigners. A new form of spending leisure time in the Oblast is agro-tourism. On December 21, 2007 the Schengen zone, the area with no border controls, spread to cover 9 further countries, among them Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. The situation was similar in the relations between Kaliningrad and Lithuania. In recent years the tourism sector in the Oblast has been (experiencing dynamic development.