
3. The Nordic countries and the EU–NATO relationship: further comments

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I. Introduction

The Nordic countries have undergone a number of changes over the past 15 years. Like all other countries in Europe, they have been affected by the fall of the Berlin Wall. A predicament that they share with all other smaller countries is their limited possibilities to influence developments. To a great extent, therefore, their policies have constituted reactions to events and to the policies of larger states.

All the Nordic countries retain the same institutional affiliation (in security terms) that they had during the cold war: this might surprise many, given the vast changes since 1989. In her chapter on the Nordic countries and their role in the relationship between the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Teija Tiilikainen describes and analyses the way in which Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden relate to the two now dominant Euro-Atlantic organizations. This chapter offers comments on a number of analytical points made by Tiilikainen, but it also cites some additional factors and conclusions that may help to explain the past and present positions taken by these four countries. The final section speculates on where future developments in the EU and NATO might take the Nordic countries.

An important basis for the analysis in this chapter is the fact that, even after the cold war, the European and world scenes have been characterized by dramatic events and developments. This has meant that the two organizations in focus here—the EU and NATO—have undergone substantial change. It was hardly to be foreseen in 1991–92, as the Swedish and Finnish applications for membership of the European Community were submitted, that the EU would become such an important actor in the field of security. The events taking place in the former Yugoslavia turned all four countries under study into active players in European crisis management, and this in turn had an immediate influence on their own countries—a new experience for them all. European security thus became, in a totally new way, part of the Nordic countries' own national security. The attacks on the USA on 11 September 2001 had a further, huge impact on the security agenda, affecting all countries regardless of their institutional affiliation. Finally, the USA's policy towards Iraq—developed outside NATO and the United Nations—has had a strong influence on perceptions of cooperation in Europe.

II. The positions of the four Nordic countries

In several ways, as pointed out by Tiilikainen, the positions of the four Nordic countries covered here differ from each other. She highlights two particular reasons for this, one being their historical identity and the other their general orientation towards European integration. Others could be mentioned, geography being a prominent factor in explaining both their previous and their more recent choices. External factors are heavily involved, too, as indicated above. For Finland, in particular, the external factor of the Soviet Union was important during the cold war, since the 1948 Finnish–Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance explicitly prohibited Finland from pursuing certain policies. For Finland neutrality was therefore the only option, whereas for Denmark, Norway and Sweden there was a real choice to be made. In 1948 a Swedish proposal for a Scandinavian defence union was made and discussed by these three states. Discussions ended, however, after Norway had concluded that strong military assistance, and thus a connection to the major Western powers, was needed for its defence. Norway and then Denmark chose the Atlanticist option, whereas Sweden saw continued non-alignment as its best choice.¹

Generally, this author sees more similarities among the Nordic countries than Tiilikainen does. Atlanticism, it can be argued, has been a strong and continuous characteristic of all the Nordic countries' policies, albeit cast in different forms depending on their institutional affiliations. During the cold war a strong US military presence in the northern part of Europe was a reassuring factor, since the region was of vital strategic importance for both NATO and the Warsaw Pact. For Norway, in particular, geography must be seen as a strong factor here. As Tiilikainen says, quoting Mikael af Malmberg, Swedish non-alignment has relied in practice on the US presence in Europe,² as did the security of European NATO countries. As she also mentions, Finland and Sweden in their reactions to European security and defence policy proposals have often emphasized Atlanticist viewpoints. This is not unique; all the European countries want the USA to continue to be interested in European security matters, even though their precise interpretations of how far the US involvement should stretch are not identical.

Danish policies towards the (pre-2000) Western European Union (WEU) can also be explained in terms of Atlanticism rather than of concerns about sovereignty. Denmark was the only Nordic country that was involved in European

¹ Andrén, N., *Maktbalans och Alliansfrihet: Svensk Utrikespolitik under 1900-talet* [Balance of power and non-alignment: Swedish foreign policy in the 20th century] (Norstedts Juridik: Stockholm, 1996), pp. 66–81. See also Herolf, G., 'Sweden: continuity and change', H. Ojanen with G. Herolf and R. Lindahl, *Non-Alignment and European Security Policy: Ambiguity at Work*, Programme on the Northern Dimension of the CFSP no. 6 (Ulkopoliittinen instituutti: Helsinki, 2000).

² af Malmberg, M., 'Sweden in the EU', eds B. Huldt, T. Tiilikainen, T. Vaahtoranta and A. Helkama-Rågård, *Finnish and Swedish Security: Comparing National Policies* (Försvarshögskolan: Stockholm, 2001), p. 44.

security discussions from an early stage. Its views on the WEU were thus formed at a time when this organization had different ambitions from those it developed at a later stage. In Denmark, WEU policies were seen as expressing limited European interests, pursued at the expense of those of NATO and therefore a threat to NATO.³ For a small Atlanticist country, not being able to wield much influence on the policies of the WEU and seeing WEU defence guarantees as nugatory as compared with those of NATO, Denmark chose the policy of staying outside specifically European defence endeavours.⁴ This opt-out has recently come to be seen by many Danes as a constraint.

III. The meaning of non-alignment and relations with NATO

The non-aligned countries also demonstrate much parallelism in their policies: long after the fall of the Berlin Wall, not just Finland and Sweden but also fellow EU members Austria and Ireland have remained non-aligned. However, they have also undergone a number of changes. Austria and Finland have both changed the term used for their security status from ‘neutrality’ to ‘non-alignment’. Sweden, which already used the term ‘non-alignment’, abandoned the term ‘neutrality policy’ (as did Finland).⁵ All have made policy moves that would have been inconceivable or at least more complicated during the cold war. Sweden and Finland applied for membership of the European Community in 1991 and 1992, respectively, and joined the EU in 1995 along with Austria. (Austria had applied in 1989, while Ireland had been a member since 1973.) All four non-aligned EU members entered partnership with NATO, joining the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) or its successor from 1997, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), and the Partnership for Peace (PFP).⁶ For all four countries, participation in these bodies meant that they were in partnership with NATO, rather than waiting for future membership.

The question is therefore why Finland and Sweden have not exchanged their non-alignment for NATO membership. One reason might lie in the fact that the changes they have made are seen as satisfactory: the two countries are now doing what they want to do in terms of defence activism and see NATO as a valuable partner with which they share their values and can participate in common efforts to promote them.

³ Danish Commission on Security and Disarmament, *Dansk og europeisk sikkerhed* [Danish and European security] (Sikkerheds- og Nedrustningspolitiske Udvalg: Copenhagen, 1995), p. 291.

⁴ In effect, Denmark stayed outside the WEU institutional system until 1992 and then opted to become only an observer—a status designed for non-NATO members of the EU—rather than taking the full WEU membership it would have been entitled to as a member of both the EU and NATO. For details of WEU membership arrangements see the WEU website at URL <<http://www.weu.int/>>.

⁵ Ireland uses the term ‘military neutrality’.

⁶ Finland and Sweden joined the PFP in 1994, the year it was established, Austria in 1995 and Ireland only in 1999. Austria, Finland and Sweden had observer status in the NACC; Ireland did not participate in the NACC and did not join the EAPC until 1999.

A second reason surely lies in the views of the general public. Tiilikainen refers to the strong support in Sweden for the policy of non-alignment.⁷ This is true, and there is little prospect of this changing. Finnish public support for non-alignment is also high.⁸ Although it is commonly said that Finnish public opinion changes more easily when the government takes a lead, it is hard to imagine that a majority of the population would in the near future accept the idea of NATO membership.

Tiilikainen refers to two kinds of neutrality, Finnish neutrality being ‘instrumental’ and Swedish neutrality ‘ideological’. Both of these terms could be interpreted in several ways. An ‘instrumental’ approach might be equated with the pursuit of a policy that is in the Finnish interest. The conclusion would be that party political ideologies and public opinion are of little importance in deliberations among Finnish leaders on the future of continued non-alignment. Conversely, the ‘ideological’ approach would then be equated with the notion that neutrality (or rather non-alignment) is a policy to be preferred for its inherent value, tied to the normative beliefs of the population. In a sense, this notion is prevalent in Sweden today, but it should not be labelled as ‘ideological neutrality’ since this term implies an equidistance from the former Eastern and Western blocs that never characterized the Swedish population at large, the press or successive governments. Indeed, a number of breaches of neutrality by Swedish governments, always favouring the Western powers, have been revealed.⁹

A further question is to whose views such categorizations refer. At least in Sweden, there is a division between the views of the elite and those of the broader public. In both Finland and Sweden, nostalgic and exaggerated views on the value of non-alignment and neutrality are more likely to be found among the latter group. Governments and the elite, on the other hand, have a more sober view of the value of neutrality in time of war. These groups seek to further such alternative national goals as maximizing influence with the means

⁷ In an opinion poll undertaken in Sweden in Sep.–Oct. 2004, 67% of respondents supported continued non-alignment, 17% supported NATO membership and 16% were undecided. Swedish National Board for Psychological Defence, *Opinion 2004* (Styrelsen för Psykologiskt Försvar: Stockholm, 2004), URL <<http://www.psycedef.se/reports/default.asp?FileID=80>>, p. 79.

⁸ In an opinion poll undertaken in Finland in Sep.–Oct. 2004, 61% of respondents supported continued non-alignment, 34% supported joining an alliance and 5% were undecided. Unlike in Sweden, the question referred to non-alignment versus alignment, rather than explicitly mentioning NATO. Among those supporting alignment, 52% saw NATO as the preferred organization. In a follow-up question on which kind of alliance they preferred, 59% of respondents preferred NATO. Finnish Advisory Board for Defence Information, *Suomalaisten mielipiteitä ulko- ja turvallisuuspolitiikasta, maanpuolustuksesta ja turvallisuudesta* [Finnish views on foreign and security policy, national defence and security], Ministry of Defence, Helsinki, 27 Jan. 2004, URL <http://www.defmin.fi/print_page.phtml?menu_id=175&lang=1&chapter_id=1785>, kuvio 1, p. 9, kuvio 3, p. 11, and kuvio 9, p. 17. See also chapter 18 in this volume.

⁹ One such breach was the extension of runways at Swedish airbases in the east of the country. The Swedish Commission on Neutrality Policy thought that this should be viewed as facilitating emergency landings by NATO bombers returning from the East. Swedish Commission on Neutrality Policy, *Had There Been a War . . . : Preparations for the Reception of Military Assistance 1949–1969*, Report of the Commission on Neutrality Policy, Translation of Statens Offentliga Utredningar 1994:11 (Stadsrådsberedningen: Stockholm, 1994), p. 31.

they have available, within the restrictions imposed by parliamentary opposition and public views.

IV. Institutional EU integration versus military contributions

Finland and Sweden

Openness to EU integration has been more far-reaching in Finland than in Sweden. Whereas Sweden has felt freer to reject some types of cooperation, Finland has been driven by a need to be positioned at the centre of the Union. As Tiilikainen writes, security was a strong reason for Finnish membership of the EU and the expression ‘never alone again’ has often been heard from Finns. Another good example mentioned by Tiilikainen is the fact that the Finnish decision to adopt the euro was perceived as a political choice. The difference is striking here: in the Swedish discussion of this issue, many referred only to the economic factors.¹⁰

Nevertheless, there is still some hesitation in the Finnish attitude when it comes to security engagement: peace enforcement is still not doctrinally accepted, and the terms of the Finnish law requiring a UN mandate for international missions in which Finnish forces engage are stronger than in the equivalent Swedish law.¹¹ Also, as Tiilikainen mentions, the notion of territorial defence remains strong in Finland. Sweden does not share the policy restrictions mentioned here and is also moving away from a defence policy centred on territorial defence.¹²

Finland’s attitude may in part be explained by the fact that it is a neighbour of Russia—geography thus coming into play again. However, this would not explain why peace enforcement has been sensitive for Finland at a time when Sweden is not only emphasizing the importance of training for such tasks but has also been actively engaged in one such operation—the EU’s Operation Artemis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2003. The general Finnish approach to such matters that are ‘operational’ rather than institutional—

¹⁰ Finland adopted the euro as it was established, without a referendum. In the Sep. 2003 Swedish referendum, 55.9% voted against introduction of the euro and 42% in favour. Swedish Election Authority, ‘Folkomröstning 14 september 2003 om införande av euron’ [Referendum of 14 September 2003 on introduction of the euro], 18 Sep. 2003, URL <<http://www.val.se/val/emu2003/resultat/slutresultat/>>.

¹¹ Republic of Finland, Act on Peace Support Operations, English translation of Act no. 514/1984 as amended, 31 Dec. 2000, URL <<http://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/1984/en19840514/>>; and Kingdom of Sweden, Lag om väpnad styrka för tjänstgöring utomlands [Law on armed force for service abroad], Swedish Code of Statutes 2003:169, 16 Apr. 2003, URL <<http://www.notisum.se/rnp/sls/lag/19921153.htm>>. The Finnish act, which states that Finland may not be a party to coercive military measures governed by Articles 42 or 51 of the UN Charter, is reported to be under reconsideration. See Finnish Government Information Unit, ‘Review of Finland’s Act on Peace Support Operations’, Press release, 12 Nov. 2004, URL <<http://www.vnk.fi/vn/liston/print.lsp?r=89952&k=fi>>.

¹² Swedish Government, ‘Vårt framtida försvar’ [Our future defence], Regeringens proposition no. 2004/05:5, Riksdag, Stockholm, 23 Sep. 2004 URL <<http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/4416/a/30463/>>. See also chapter 7 in this volume.

contrary to the Swedish approach—is to be less concerned about restrictions based on principle.

Tiilikainen interprets Swedish participation in EU-led crisis management operations as being ‘power politics’. The commitment of Swedish elite forces to Operation Artemis, an operation run mainly by France, was indeed made with certain purposes in mind. The fact that the UN had asked the EU to be part of it was one important reason, but another could be seen as the defensive side of the rationale proposed by Tiilikainen: that this action was an attempt to dispel the view held by many countries that being militarily non-aligned also means fearing military engagement of a more demanding nature and seeking only to engage in civilian crisis management. This is not to say that Sweden has not sought and will not seek to gain as much influence as possible in the EU. For example, Sweden actively sought and acquired the position of a director for one of its nationals in the European Defence Agency, an important organ for Sweden.¹³

Comparing Finland and Sweden in these two respects thus highlights a certain parallelism: Finland seeks close integration in order to join an inner core of the EU, whereas Sweden seeks to prove its value to the organization in other ways than institutionally.

Denmark and Norway

The issues of importance for Finland and Sweden are also at the forefront for Denmark and Norway. While formally the statuses of Denmark and Norway are not similar, in practice—because of the Danish opt-outs—they both stand outside the European Security and Defence Policy, the more so since Norway has now lost the link to it that the WEU provided. As Tiilikainen explains, the situation is easier for Denmark since through the EU (not least in the context of constitutional debates) it can take standpoints that bring Denmark closer to the centre and also influence structural developments. Denmark also has a shorter path back to full cooperation within the ESDP, since it is an EU member.

For Norway, after two referendums on EU membership, the path is longer. Therefore, if Norway wants to avoid becoming marginalized (as Pernille Rieker describes it), the only path left for some time ahead is to make itself useful through its activities within the ESDP, offering ‘troops for influence’.¹⁴ Here a dilemma common to all small countries arises: regardless of the efforts made, any military inputs provided will by necessity be small compared with those of

¹³ Ulf Hammarström of Sweden heads the EDA’s Industry and Market Directorate.

¹⁴ See Rieker, P., ‘Europeanisation of Nordic security: the EU and the changing security identities of the Nordic states’, Doctoral thesis, University of Oslo, Department of Political Science, 2004, pp. 223–33. The expression ‘troops for influence’ is taken from Græger, N., ‘Norway and the EU’s defence dimension: a “troops for influence” strategy’, N. Græger, H. Larsen and H. Ojanen, *The ESDP and the Nordic Countries: Four Variations on a Theme*, Programme on the Northern Dimension of the CFSP no. 16 (Ulko-oliittinen instituutti: Helsinki, 2002).

the major countries. The danger is thus that no one will notice the implied bargain.

Most probably, the only way in which small countries are likely to be seen as adding real value, whether in the context of NATO or the EU, is if they take responsibility for regional stability. This is something for which major organizations and countries have limited capabilities and for which neighbouring countries, even small ones, have both expertise and willingness. This is precisely what the Nordic countries did vis-à-vis the Baltic region in the 1990s, with considerable success. This region is now safe, but this in itself means that the Nordic countries now no longer have a ‘natural’ security assignment where they can pursue valuable activities and earn credit.

V. European and world developments

External events have had a formidable influence on the way in which European states have interacted with each other and with organizations like the EU and NATO. Many of the developments during the 1990s served as a trigger to increase European cooperation. The wars in the former Yugoslavia led to a realization of the existence of a new world in which conflicts affected countries regardless of their institutional membership and in which all countries could have a role in handling them regardless of whether they were part of NATO or the EU.

For the Nordic countries, the Nordic Coordinated Arrangement for Military Peace Support (NORDCAPS) became the concrete expression of such cooperation, providing a framework in which training could be pursued with a view to joint involvement in crisis missions.¹⁵ The tradition has continued in the context of the ESDP battle groups, one of which is composed of Estonian, Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish forces.

Another factor that has made the differences between the two organizations less important is the growing tendency to establish work-sharing agreements in cases of crisis. One example was the crisis in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) in 2001. In this case, NATO, the EU, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the UN worked together constructively, each contributing its particular strengths and avoiding mutual rivalry while giving an opportunity for all interested states to contribute to solving the conflict. Many other examples have followed in which civilian and military means have been combined in order to settle a conflict, taking a long-term perspective.

Furthermore, a number of events have contributed to make the security-related issues dealt with by the EU more central than those dealt with by

¹⁵ NORDCAPS was established in 1997 with the aim of strengthening existing cooperation in the Nordic Cooperation Group for Military UN Matters (NORDSAMFN) in military peace support operations and expanding it to cover operations mandated or lead by others than the UN. More information is available at URL <<http://www.nordcaps.org/>>.

NATO. One of them was the 11 September 2001 attacks on the USA, which put the combating of terrorism high on the agenda. While NATO members immediately invoked the collective self-defence terms of Article 5 of the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty, it was obvious that civilian instruments were most useful against this set of ‘new threats’. As one reflection of the international and national repercussions of the attacks, the European Security Strategy agreed by the member states in December 2003 included as its most important goals the fight against terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, state failure and organized crime.¹⁶ Looking at this list of threats and the means to combat them, it is obvious that the means at the EU’s own disposal—wide-ranging as they are and well suited to getting to the roots of conflict—give the organization a prominent role in fighting the conflicts of the future.

In the same way, the enlargement of the EU was clearly seen by all the Nordic countries as a highly efficient means for creating security and stability in Europe. While NATO membership was sought for its own sake, membership of the EU could deeply reshape the states seeking membership and build up their capacity for working as democratic nations, in a way that the more limited NATO membership criteria could not.

At the same time, US policies have contributed to a crisis for NATO. As the USA pursues its policies either alone or together with only a few partner countries, the situation for small countries like Denmark and Norway has deteriorated sharply. Important NATO issues are no longer discussed in plenary sessions but are instead dealt with in smaller forums. The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 is one example of this behaviour: it clearly shows how the most prominent member of an alliance now sees that alliance as only one of several available forums within which to work. The role of the smaller countries has, in this context, been mainly to increase the number of members that the coalition can claim to include.

A clear shift in the focus of policy and effort from NATO to the EU has taken place in all four countries. Denmark and Norway see the disadvantages of working only within the NATO fold. The *Finnish Security and Defence Policy 2004* hardly mentions NATO.¹⁷ The Swedish defence White Paper, also published in September 2004, mentions NATO several times but declares that current developments mean that NATO is increasingly relevant to Sweden through its membership of the EU.¹⁸ The document makes many, strong references to the EU, in particular the sentence ‘It is hard to imagine that Sweden would be neutral in the event of an armed attack on another EU country’.¹⁹ Even though,

¹⁶ Council of the European Union, ‘A secure Europe in a better world: European Security Strategy’, Brussels, 12 Dec. 2003, URL <http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/reports/78367.pdf>.

¹⁷ Finnish Prime Minister’s Office, *Finnish Security and Defence Policy 2004*, Government Report no. 6/2004 (Prime Minister’s Office: Helsinki, 2004), URL <<http://www.vnk.fi/vn/liston/vnk.lsp?r=88862&k=en>>.

¹⁸ Swedish Government (note 12), p. 17.

¹⁹ Swedish Government (note 12), p. 23 (author’s translation).

as Tiilikainen notes, this sentence is combined with the statement that non-alignment remains, its significance as another major step being taken away from what was once the established Swedish policy is far-reaching. In this author's view, the shift of defence interest towards the EU in Finland and in Sweden has taken place for the same reasons as in other countries: the EU is simply the more relevant organization for the problems facing Europe today.

VI. Conclusions: the future

Obviously, countries find it easy to adjust their policies but much harder to adjust formal affiliations (and in the case of Denmark, policies that are formally entrenched). For Finland and Sweden it seems that the issue of whether or not to join NATO is slowly withering away—strong public opinion and the lack of enough political will have together taken the issue off the political agenda. At the same time, Norway will be hesitant to have another referendum on EU membership, and Denmark might lack the popular will to do something about its relationship with the ESDP. In all four countries, however, there seems to be a gap between the general opinion that things are fine as they are and the elite view that non-membership means a lack of ability to influence. As long as this gap is not bridged, it will be difficult for the elites, if they so wish, to change the views of the rest of the population.

The path of future developments in the Nordic countries, as in the past, will of course also depend on the future progress of the EU and NATO. Tiilikainen ends by saying that the Nordic countries have been good at adapting themselves; that judgement can be endorsed. The future of their institutional ties will, accordingly, depend on what they themselves are adapting to. As small states they will not shape events. The USA, as well as the major states in Europe, will largely steer further evolution, while the small countries will seek to position themselves as advantageously as possible in the new situation.

What could lead to stronger cooperation between the Nordic countries? One possible answer is a common threat or challenge in the region. It is hard, however, to imagine a scenario in which the Nordic countries would feel that they need common institutional affiliations. While the post-cold war period has seen remarkable adjustment in terms of policies, there has been remarkably little change on this basic point. Clearly, the Nordic countries attach much less importance to such matters than many other countries do. They also take a relaxed view on cooperation among themselves: they are independent countries and cooperation is important only when it promises results.

Regional cooperation is on the whole a matter fraught with difficulties for both the countries themselves and the two organizations. On the one hand, with the ideal of subsidiarity, matters should be solved at home. Baltic regional cooperation can be seen as an example of this. Common projects like NORDCAPS or ambitious attempts to use particular Nordic experiences for the good of all must also be one of the aims of European integration.

The problem is when regional groups become involved in zero-sum games, one pitted against another in the competition for common EU resources. Arguably, in many cases, if what is sought is an integrated and harmonious Europe, it is healthier that countries should not seek to form a regional group but instead find partners among all members of the organization.

If the present development continues, the most likely scenario is one in which institutional borderlines gradually wither away as the organizations grow larger and their memberships become more heterogeneous. This scenario has some advantages, promising less institutional rivalry and greater ease of cooperation. However, it would not be the best solution for the Nordic countries if it were to be combined with a trend towards ad hoc cooperation involving only the major states, the signs of which can already be seen in NATO. Big and small members together need, therefore, to master the problem of making efficiency and cohesion meet; no one would be happy with a Europe in which only a few countries were seriously involved in shaping its future.