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### Nordic Peace - Another Dimension of Nordic Exceptionalism

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## Nordic peace

### – Another dimension of Nordic exceptionalism?

When “Nordic exceptionalism” is discussed, the emphasis is usually on how our societies are constructed, e.g. whether the welfare state was invented by Swedish Social Democrats or by Bismarck. I would like to suggest that the relations among our societies, and in particular the peace, deserve equal attention.

Let me begin with our record in different time perspectives. During the five centuries culminating in the Napoleonic wars we had 60 wars: within our states, between our states and with our neighbours. Yet in the 20th century the Finnish revolution was the only war inside our states; wars with our neighbours were limited to Germany attacking Denmark and Norway in 1940 and the Soviet Union Finland in 1939 (plus Finland joining Germany against the Soviet Union in 1941); and there was not a single case where we were even close to a war with each other. Something had happened.

#### Our glorious non-wars: the record

Our pacific relations were not for lack of conflicts. In several cases, we had conflicts about things that tend to be highly explosive: autonomy, secession, territory, language. The main non-wars in the 20th century were:

- ⑨ Norway seceded from Sweden in 1905 by a unilateral declaration of independence. While there was some rattling of Swedish sabres, the predominant political forces in both countries were against the use of military means, and the secession was eventually formally recognized by Sweden after a couple of months of negotiation resulting in the Treaty of Karlstad in August 1905.
- ⑨ When Finland became independent in 1918, the issue arose what to do with the *Aaland Islands*, which had become permanently demilitarized by an international treaty after the Crimean War. Their (almost entirely Swedish) population arranged a referendum by petition, where more than 90 per cent opted to join Sweden rather than Finland. The two states agreed to refer their dispute to the League of Nations, who passed it on to the Permanent Court of Arbitration (the predecessor to the International Court of Justice). The Court, having heard their historical, geological, constitutional, etc. arguments, awarded sovereignty over the islands to Finland, but the award also contained a number of guarantees for the continued Swedish-ness of the islands in terms of language, criteria for local citizenship, land-owning, and so forth. The Aaland Islands population is the largest one to have had its fate decided by arbitration by an international court after a dispute between two states.
- ⑨ The status of *Svalbard* (Spitzbergen) was settled by an international treaty in 1920 where Norwegian sovereignty over the archipelago was recognized, all

other signatories obtained the right to exploit natural resources there (now only exercised by Russia) and it was made permanently and completely demilitarized.

- ⑨ The Permanent Court of Arbitration had Scandinavia on its agenda once more a decade later, when Denmark and Norway were in a dispute about the sovereignty over some 100,000 square miles in *Eastern Greenland*. The Court decided in favour of Denmark, making this the largest land area to be ruled on by an international court after a dispute between two states.
- ⑨ *Iceland's* independence resulted from peaceful negotiations concluded by a treaty in 1918. *Iceland's* unilateral severing of the remaining formal ties with Denmark in 1944 was completely in accordance with this treaty, the only Danish objection being that it would have been nicer of the Icelanders to have waited until Denmark itself had been liberated from the German occupation (and *Iceland* from British occupation).
- ⑨ In 1946, a referendum was arranged by the population of the *Faroe Islands*, although there was no constitutional provision for it. There was a scant majority for independence from Denmark, but the Faroese elections later in the year gave slightly less than half of the seats in the Faroese parliament to pro-independence parties, and the issue was eventually settled by a compromise on home rule.
- ⑨ *Greenland's* status changed in 1950 from that of a colony to becoming a part of the Danish realm, Denmark being sensitive about the UN rules for annual reports on colonies. *Greenland*, or Kalaallit Nunaat, eventually got its home rule in 1979 and quickly left the EC (which the *Faroe Islands* never joined).  
Apart from these major conflicts, recent decades have also seen a long series of conflicts about economic zones, fishing rights etc. between several of the Scandinavian states and dependencies, as well as with some neighbours, *Iceland's* "Cod War" with the UK being the legendary case. Several conflicts were settled by arbitration (Norway vs. Denmark over Jan Mayen) or negotiations (Norway vs. *Iceland* and Sweden vs. USSR); concerning the rest (including Norway vs. USSR/Russia) there are agreements on how to behave until the issue is settled.

In the 1980s, Sweden and Denmark had a dispute about oil drilling rights close to the Danish island Hesselø in the waters between them, both governments using a heated language. The opposition leaders in both countries stated (and were quoted in the neighbouring country) that their own governments were too clumsy and inflexible in the conflict. The compromise that was soon reached acknowledged Denmark's claim to an economic zone around the island, Sweden gained fishing rights in a strip of the Baltic Sea as a consolation.

We may add a domestic case: the repeated manifestations of a language conflict in Finland. After the Russian takeover in 1809, Swedish remained the sole administrative language in spite of the Swedish minority steadily dwindling from its initial 25 per cent; Finnish was then given an equal position by the mid-century, and an attempt in the 1890s to introduce the Russian language was defeated by civilian resistance. When the issue reemerged after the crushed revolution, there were many who had heated feelings about it; but it

resulted in a compromise where very few states in the world can match Finland's generosity to what is now a minority of 6 per cent with Swedish as mother tongue.

This series of "glorious non-wars" is impressive. Peaceful secession from a neighbouring state, with no connection to war, is a rare phenomenon; before the 1990s, the only parallels to the Norwegian secession in 1905 were Singapore leaving Malaysia in 1963 (actually invited to do so) two years after Great Britain had federated them when leaving, and the dissolution of the United Arab Republic after a few years of marriage between Egypt and Syria. All these Nordic cases of arbitration and agreement by negotiation have also turned out to be long term successes: the conflict issues were never reopened. (The long-standing dispute between Norway and some major signatories to the Svalbard Treaty does not question the Treaty itself, but is rather about how to interpret its application and extrapolation to the economic zone around the archipelago so as to reconcile Norwegian sovereignty with the rights of the signatories to exploit natural resources.)

### Some non-explanations

<sup>1</sup> Deutch et al. 1957.

<sup>2</sup> Adler & Barnett 1998.

So what happened in between and how could – and did – it happen? If we use the terms of Karl Deutsch<sup>1</sup>, who used the Nordic countries as an early example, a "security community" had been created. Yet there is something that does not quite fit. Deutsch's paradigm was reintroduced and revised a few years ago by Adler and Barnett<sup>2</sup> but they keep some of his basic assumptions: that security communities are created around one dominant state and that they evolve from military alliances based on common threats or economic alliances for mutual benefit.

NATO or the EU might be adduced as examples of this; the Nordic area is not a good one. Each Nordic state always saw *some* external threat, but the location of the threat sometimes changed, and it was never *common* before the Cold War, which was, from this point of view, a couple of generations too late to serve as an explanation. The most drastic division was in the early 1940s, when Finland was "brother-at-arms" with Germany, which kept Denmark and Norway occupied. And to the extent a common threat is defined during the Cold War, it is not a specific state or alliance, but is seen rather at a more abstract level, where the threat is seen as lying in an increased tension in the Nordic area and its surroundings and the remedy lies in attempts to coordinate measures to keep the tension down – the so called Nordic balance.

Thus the Nordic community was *not* built up around any form of military cooperation; from that point of view, the Nordic area is a continuous "failure". Denmark's two wars about Schleswig-Holstein (in 1849–1852 and 1863–1864) attracted thousands of Swedish and Norwegian volunteers, but when Charles XV had promised the Danish king to take Sweden into the war, his own government said "No" in 1863. Ideas of a defence union with Finland were promoted by political actors in Sweden in 1938–1939, including the

Social Democrat foreign minister, but were rejected by the government. After the Soviet attack on Finland in November 1939, it went no further than declaring Sweden non-belligerent (rather than neutral), thus being able to give or lend Finland great amounts of military equipment and permit many thousand Swedish volunteers to join Finland's forces. It would not (and nor would Norway) permit British-French military assistance to Finland through its own territory in early 1940, but – as a once-only exception – granted the transition of a German division from Norway to Finland in 1941. Discussions about a Danish-Norwegian-Swedish neutrality defence union appeared in the 1920s and early 1930s; when the security environment gradually worsened, they petered out, and in 1937 the Danish Premier Stauning wrote them off, stating that Denmark did not want the role of watch dog. In 1945, Denmark, Norway and Sweden were all back to, or still ran, their prewar policies of isolated neutrality, and in 1948–1949 they had negotiations on a neutrality defence union. This failed, however, much due to the Atlanticist wing in the Norwegian Labour party, to whom such a union was only of interest if being a first step towards what became NATO. Denmark then failed to interest Sweden in a bilateral defence union between them and finally followed Norway in opting for NATO (as did Iceland). Sweden keeping its “non-alignment in peace aiming at neutrality in war” (NATO membership rapidly became a non-issue) and Finland concluding its Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Aid Agreement with the USSR in 1948, the Nordic area was now more split than ever in terms of military arrangements. To the extent any cooperation has occurred, it has either been top secret (such as Sweden's coordination with NATO via Norway) or quite informal and based on all countries taking each other's security concerns into account in their own policies and having a joint interest in keeping the strategic importance of, and tensions in, the Nordic area and surrounding waters as low as possible. The “Nordic balance” may best be described as a balance of latent possibilities. The creation of the Danish-German Baltic Approaches Command in 1961 was seen as a threat by the USSR, which asked for consultations with Finland in accordance with their Agreement. Norway then hinted that closer coordination between Finland and the USSR might lead to a revision of the Norwegian policy on foreign bases, after which President Urho Kekkonen persuaded Premier Nikita Chrushev not to press the call for consultations.

Nor can our community be said to be built around any institutions for *economic* cooperation. The most that was achieved in the early phases was a customs union between Sweden and Norway, and that was dissolved in 1896. Repeated negotiations about a free trade area or a Nordic Economic Zone in the post-WWII period failed. The reasons seem to be parallel to the failure of all military grand plans: the five Nordic countries simply did not have sufficient common interests and were looking in different directions both in terms of main threats and attractive major partners – in addition, some saw the grand plans as an end in themselves or as a substitute for joining bigger military or economic arrangements; others saw regional plans as a first step to joining the

bigger ones. All joined EFTA in 1960, when there seemed to be a choice to make between Great Britain and continental Europe. Once this changed with the British entering the EC, Denmark quickly joined them (the Faroe Islands did not, however, and Greenland soon left the EC after gaining home rule in 1979), but no other Nordic country did. In the next round by the mid-1990s, the Nordic division remained, but the pattern was changed by Finland and Sweden joining, while Norway and Iceland stayed out.

Norden remains anomalous even if we look at it in terms of trade, rather than institutional arrangements. It was only after the creation of the community that trade among us started to grow beyond the traditional circa 10 per cent the other Nordic countries together took of each country's trade. After a rapid growth during World War I, it sank to a somewhat higher level, and the same thing repeated itself during and after World War II, the eventual level – after a further growth period beginning around 1960 – growing to 20–25 per cent, which to each state made the other Nordic countries taken together more important than any other single trade partner. And in the 1970s and 1980s, the relative development of their trade with each other and with the EC for a long time showed little relation with who joined the EC and who did not. Furthermore, the higher level of trade has not led to a higher degree of political integration, at least not if that is taken to mean the creation of supranational bodies that can oblige member states. Neither the Nordic Council (parliamentarians) from 1953, nor the Nordic Council of Ministers from 1970 have that character, and there is no Nordic court.

Furthermore, it is difficult to see the Nordic security community as built around a core state. Throughout the post-Napoleonic period, Sweden's main claim to being a core state would lie in being the militarily strongest state; but that does not seem relevant. During the formative nineteenth century of the Nordic security community, it was clearly Denmark that was the richest state in terms of GDP per capita, even getting a considerable Swedish labour immigration; it was only a little into the twentieth century that Sweden took over that position, recently losing it again. In terms of political development, finally, it is rather Norway that is pioneering, introducing parliamentarianism a generation before it was firmly established in Denmark and Sweden around 1920; and Finland was first with universal (including female) franchise in 1906. True, Sweden has sometimes tried to play a leading role, but this has often been self-defeating, making the others see it as “too big for its boots”.

Having great powers as neighbours, the Nordic area was indeed affected by *Realpolitik* during the two last centuries, and it may also have contributed to a few of the non-wars. Great Britain disapproved of the Danish position in 1863 and provided no support. It also made it clear that it would disapprove of a war in 1905. In the immediate aftermath of World War I, Sweden and Finland would have incurred high political costs by entering a war over the Åland Islands. But it is hard to see *Realpolitik* as any significant factor in explaining the genesis of the Nordic community in the 19th century. If anything, it did so

in a negative way: it probably made the genesis easier as after the Napoleonic wars we were an area of rather low strategic interest until Atlantic naval strategies – and later nuclear strategies – increased it in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And during the Cold War, where there was a common (although informally so) Realpolitik of our states, it consisted precisely of trying to reduce the Realpolitik effects of the Cold War on our area.

### ...and some explanations

The Nordic development does not solely offer anomalies in relation to the Deutsch framework and its later emendations. Where the framework fits better, this mainly has to do with the central role Deutsch gives to communication – and with cognitive and normative developments. Migration made citizens from another Nordic country the biggest (or even two biggest) group(s) of non-citizens in each Nordic countries, and each country has a sizable group of its own citizens with more than superficial knowledge of other Nordic countries through having returned from them. Language and religion made communication easier, inter alia by providing for a common construction of meanings and values. There is much of a *language community*, albeit part real, part imagined. Danish, Norwegian and Swedish are understandable to each other with some effort and good will (and English as a reserve option); Icelanders tend to master some Scandinavian language, although decreasingly so; the Finland Swedes constitute one link to Finland, and educated Finns can mostly communicate in Swedish, but again decreasingly so. These decreases do not matter much, however, in a discussion of the genesis of the community. The Protestant culture is shared by all, secularization having made little difference in this respect; and here, too, it is the situation in the nineteenth century that is important. National romanticism from the first half of the nineteenth century involved rediscovering or inventing older national history, e.g. by going to the Icelandic sagas for inspiration. This meant that much national mythology, such as the pagan deities and the Viking myths, became common to Danes, Norwegians and Swedes, making for more of a common narrative. In both cases, commonality rather than content seems crucial: Protestant countries in general hardly have a record of being especially peaceful, and the common myths were rarely tales of peace.

The reconciliation movement created a common ideology, initially called “Scandinavianism” and much later renamed “Nordism” (to signify that Finland had become a “family member” of equal standing). To someone with Lund University as alma mater, it is tempting to see the beginning in 1829, when the great Swedish poet Esaias Tegnér created his Danish colleague Adam Oehlenschläger *doctor honoris causa* in the cathedral of Lund, his long poem including the key lines (in my amateurish translation): “The time of division is past / we should not have allowed it to start / in the infinite Kingdom of Thought”.

This ideology was initially carried by a movement of academic teachers and students; it then spread to influence broader middle class groups and finally, towards the end of the nineteenth century, to encompass working class organizations, getting intertwined with some of the other reform movements: trade unions, socialist and liberal parties, cooperative movements, sectarian churches, the peace and arbitration movement, the abstention movement. It eventually became one of the factors preventing the Norwegian secession in 1905 from leading to military encounters. If this movement can be seen as a major reinterpretation of relations, the same is true for another ideology that was for a long time intertwined with it: neutralism. Swedish neutrality started as a purely pragmatic policy after 1814; only later did it get an increasingly principled and programmatic character, thus becoming an “ism” and remaining a cornerstone of Swedish foreign policy with a dual anchoring in Realpolitik and idealism. During the half-century before World War I, neutralism also grew strong in Denmark and Norway, where it was also intertwined with Scandinavianism and pacifism. That all three countries managed to stay out of World War I strengthened the neutralist tradition, and it remained predominant until World War II; only after that did the Nordic countries enter different paths as described above, but with the community firmly established long ago.

Scandinavianism may also have served as a midwife for another structural tradition of long standing: Nordic NGOs. Whether we speak of trade unions, scientific associations, sports organisations, etc., there is often a Nordic association with its recurrent activities intrapolated between the national ones and the European or global ones they may be associated with. In this respect too, the early development of civil society with its development of shared identities preceded – and promoted – cooperation at a governmental level, rather than the other way around, especially if we look at the genesis period of the community. Yet we should distinguish between “shared” and “common” identities. By shared I mean that some elements of identity are common, whereas others are not. In this respect, the Nordic countries certainly exhibit shared identities; but this definitely does not mean that all identities are shared. “Nordic” has not become a substitute for Danish, Norwegian, etc. identity; the point is rather that it is compatible with them all and that there is no conflict between them. The nations are still there and, as the narrow majorities for or against in all the Nordic EU referenda may be taken to demonstrate, many see them as threatened, whether by Europeanisation and globalisation reducing the protective shell defined by the state – or by Others immigrating. In some discourses, it may be interesting to discuss whether the nations – and the threats – are “real” or “imagined”; in the present context we may rather see them as real precisely because of being imagined. It was a strength that Nordism was never seen as a threat to the single nations and that Nordic migrants were not seen as Others.



### In lieu of a conclusion

Adler and Barnett trace the failure of Deutsch to get much followers to Realism being on the up-and-up for decades after World War II – and Realists regarding him as too Idealist. My review above seems to point in a different direction: the Realist elements in the Deutsch tradition make the Nordic community anomalous, whereas the more Idealist elements fit it far better. There may therefore be good arguments for seeing the Nordic community as *sui generis*, let us call it a “peace community”, rather than as a species of the genus “security community”. It is hardly unique in history – we are not that exceptional – but we should look for other parallel cases than the standard “security communities” when trying to get a deeper understanding of the genesis of the Nordic community.

This has some implications for the current debates on the creation of a “Baltic Sea security community”. At first glance, we have several bits and pieces around the Baltic Sea. There is the old Nordic community, here represented by Denmark, Sweden and Finland, that is (around the Baltic Sea) included in the EU security community, with Germany added long ago and all others except Russia in 2004. NATO, to which we may refer as almost a security community (Turkey and Greece being anyhow far away), complicates the picture, the new EU members have also joined NATO, whereas the great opinion poll majorities against membership in Finland and Sweden (strengthened by recent wars) make them unlikely candidates within the foreseeable future.

With nine riparian states, there are altogether thirty-six bilateral relations to consider, many of which have been discussed by scholars in the area (Kiel, Copenhagen, Uppsala, Tampere, etc.). Six of them are in the old EU-cum-Nordic security community, sixteen were recently transformed from EU/non-EU into intra-EU and six from non-EU to intra-EU relationships, leaving the eight relations with Russia as the only ones left in their own category. No attempt will be made to go through all these pairs one by one. In the best cases, we have nascent security communities in some groups of these pairs or at least prospects for that; in the worst cases, we do not even have that, but active threat perceptions. Some overall features can be discerned however.

One of them is expressed by the German term “*Einbindung*”. Before World War II, a small state essentially had three options, all of them quite risky, as history demonstrated: satellite relations to a threatening great power; isolated neutrality; or joining a great power opposing the one seen as a threat. The post-war period created a fourth alternative: to make the potentially threatening great power less so by joining an organisation (EU, NATO, etc.) where it belonged together with other great powers. This was adopted, sometimes with enthusiasm, by Germany’s neighbours in the West and, more important, by Germany itself, no matter what government it had: they all wished to have Germany tied in by obligations in common organisations, so as

to remove the fears of Germany –and German fears – that had repeatedly spiralled into European catastrophes.

If the German *Einbindung* was crucial for the creation of a West European security community, as can be argued in Deutschian terms, then the obvious next step towards a wider community would seem to be the *Einbindung* of Russia. Yet among the most recent EU/NATO members at the Baltic Sea it is not easy to see much of such logic: no enthusiasm for Russia joining the EU and NATO, nor much for organisations where it is a member, such as the OSCE, the UN or for that matter the Partnership for Peace. This may have several different reasons. Russian membership in the EU and NATO may be seen as so unrealistic anyhow that there is no point in rooting for it. It may also be that the new fourth alternative has not really been discovered yet; at least in the early years of independence, the debate in the states that are now new members seemed to continue where it was interrupted in 1939/40, with a strong emphasis on “security” in the most traditional sense, whereas the discourse in their Western neighbours has moved far beyond that, from conceptualization of “security” at one level only (state, usually called “nation”) to several levels and from one sector only (the politico-military) to several. This cleavage is not permanent however, and processes of securitizing or de-securitizing issues are moving on, creating new opportunities. It also becomes increasingly clear that there is no permanent “security” to consider: the connotation of the term is shifting all the time, depending on the relative strength of different “securitizing actors”, as is dramatically illustrated by the development after 11 September 2001. When traditional politico-military security thinking initially loomed large in the post-communist states (for understandable reasons), this created an unusual distribution of roles: Germany, Russia and the Nordic countries trying to de-securitize military relations in the Baltic, Poland and the Baltic states pulling in the opposite direction and therefore seeking security guarantees. Arguments from Western states, whether NATO or the Nordic neighbours, seem to have persuaded the Baltic states to mollify their earlier expressions of perceived security threats in their formulations of doctrines. One of the important things determining how much of a chance there may be for a future Baltic Sea security community is precisely how “security” is conceptualized and by whom.

When relations have been discussed in “security community” terms, it has to a large extent also been in Deutschian terms, for example, by looking for a core state and discussing whether or not Russia could fill that role. For the reasons mentioned, the other post-communist Baltic states initially did not think much in “security community” terms – and if they did, they would rather look at EU and/or NATO in a “core” role, sometimes wishing for Finland and Sweden to join NATO. Yet notions of a “Baltic Sea security community” may fall between two conceptual chairs. One of them is really less ambitious than Deutsch: trying to make military confrontations as unlikely as possible, using traditional diplomacy, Confidence Building Measures, etc. along the lines of

the Helsinki process. And the other one is really more ambitious, being about a “peace community”, rather than a “security community”. In the latter case, some extension of the Nordic community may be a good conceptual point of departure – but then we are looking at small steps, and it may well stop short of something Pan-Baltic, at least within the foreseeable future. If we look at the explanatory factors for the Nordic community suggested above, Estonia would then be closest in these terms: common Protestant culture, relations to Finnish that are not much more distant than the Scandinavian languages to each other, centuries of common history with Denmark and later Sweden. Latvia lies a bit further away (part Protestant, short common history with Sweden) and Lithuania even further – and behind them Poland and, at maximal distance, Russia. And the efforts required to overcome these distances are rather different from those in the “security community” tradition – except for its Idealist components.

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