

## **The varying degrees and meanings of Nordicness in Finnish foreign policy**

### **Abstract**

Geography and political history make Finland a borderline Nordic country: one that has not always self-evidently been part of the Nordic countries, but also a country for which being identified as Nordic has been all the more important. Finland has successfully used 'Nordicness' as an instrument to recognition and influence internationally. Historically, the Nordic neighbours have been a reference group of outstanding value for the country, and a platform from which to approach particularly the UN. But in what sense would its foreign policy be 'Nordic'? While some of the 'exceptional' features of Nordicness, such as internationalism or solidarity, may well apply to Finland, the country has also stood out because of security political considerations. Perhaps more than the other Nordics, it would place security first and not place values before interests. At the same time, the importance of Nordic cooperation has considerably increased in security and defence policy, with strong support among the political parties and the public. This article aims at shedding light on the meanings of 'Nordicness' in Finland and on its use as an instrument in foreign policy. It also discusses bilateral relations with Sweden as a special manifestation of 'Nordicness'.

### **Key words:**

Finland, Nordic countries, foreign policy, security, interests

### **1. Introduction**

Being 'Nordic' is in many ways important in Finland; 'Nordicness' also matters in Finnish foreign and security policy. But what is it in concrete terms?

Its Northern location notwithstanding, Finland has not always been self-evidently a Nordic country. Despite the long history as part of Sweden, what sets Finland apart is the language, culture (in part also religion), geography and 19-20<sup>th</sup> century political history. For Finland, Nordicness is not given, but a choice. Often, it has been seen as the best possible choice, or the preferred option.

As defined in the introduction to this special section (Brommesson forthcoming a), 'Nordicness' refers to the perception and recognition of a Nordic role in the foreign policy of the various Nordic states. Role, then, is understood as a position in a social dynamic, for instance, in interaction between states or in international organisations. 'Nordicness', then, may be about defending a specific policy, but it is above all about identification and about expressions referring to Nordic history, norms and practices.

This special section explores the variation of Nordicness between the countries. This article, while analyzing Nordicness in Finnish foreign and security policy, also takes up the important variation in time within the country. This article explores whether Nordicness is for Finland more an instrument than part of its identity, or something intrinsic to its policies. It posits that compared to other Nordic countries, Finland's way of looking at Nordicness might be more clearly instrumental. Nordicness, when instrumentalised, can serve many purposes, such as legitimising political decisions.

In terms of the model used in this special section (see Brommesson forthcoming a), we see Finland moving in time from showing rather low density of Nordic belonging but high level of construction of foreign policy by the Nordic environment (number 3 in table 1.2. in the introductory article) to an increase in Nordic belonging, higher cultural density, shared norms and identity. An interesting Finnish feature is an oscillation, or growing variance, in the degree of impact of Nordic

environment on foreign policy. We would see that Finland now oscillates between foreign policy being based on strategic calculations and foreign policy constructed around Nordic norms and identity, that is, between 2 and 4.

The way in which this analysis has been conducted starts from separating foreign and security policy: we expect that in security and defence, less Nordicism, or policy construction by the Nordic environment, can be detected compared to foreign policy, as cooperation is newer and Finnish security policy traditionally further away from other Nordic states. We trace policy change in time through analysing government white papers, and opinion polls, parliamentary debates and party positions as indications of identity change.

We start with an analysis of the building of Nordic belonging in foreign policy, and the ways in which Nordicism has been used as an instrument. Moving then to security policy, we see how the successful building of a Nordic identity has led to a strong consensus on the positive impact of Nordic security and defence cooperation – the contents of which, however, are somewhat unspecified. Following the model specified in the introductory article, we take a closer look at recent cases where Nordic countries, Nordicism or Nordic cooperation have been referred to in foreign and security policy debates and detect interesting oscillation. While the traditional idea of ‘Nordic’ being something positive is still visible, there have also been instances where being Nordic has been presented as a burden. In other cases, Nordicism seems to retain its relevance as a reference point but may have new contents: Nordics might be a reference group for reactionary rather than progressive, inward- rather than outward-looking policies. These examples give reason to reflect on the possibilities of using ‘Nordicism’ opportunistically and on the possibility that the empirical contents of what ‘Nordic’ actually is might change from a ‘text-book’ style of Nordic altruistic and common good oriented foreign policy towards more manifest self-interest.

## **2. Instrumental use of Nordicism in foreign policy**

The Nordic countries have traditionally functioned as an essential reference group for Finland. It has been of outstanding value for the country to be identified with these countries, and to have a Nordic identity. Arguably, a small country needs cooperation and institutional backing not only for material or practical reasons, but also for building actorness in international relations. Actorness, in turn, includes both the ability to participate and recognition, preferably a positive image. The Nordics made Finland more easily recognisable and increased its credibility and reliability in international relations from the 1950s and 1960s up to the 1990s. Nordiness was a very useful instrument that in time grew into more of an identity.

For Finland, Nordicness has been a path to foreign policy cooperation both regionally and globally in the United Nations, an instrument to international recognition, participation and influence. To understand this choice of path, given the cultural and linguistic differences between Finland and the Scandinavian countries, it is important to remember how Nordic features have shaped Finnish domestic politics and the political system. The Nordic welfare state and civil society model provides an important background for this discussion. The Finnish civil society is Nordic in character, even though for Finland, being 'Nordic' can often be translated as being close to the Swedish model. As Kettunen (2001) puts it, one could speak about a Nordic model or a code for reform and modernisation, comprising elements such as local autonomy, openness, full employment, social rights, and equality.

Probably because of their societal similarities, Nordic citizens share also broadly similar political preferences and patterns of political behaviour: trust in national political institutions and in fellow citizens is higher than in other parts of Europe, turnout in national parliamentary elections is comparatively very high, and in general Nordics display strong levels of political participation. Interestingly, when turnout has declined in Finland, the discussion has centred on how Finland is 'falling behind' its Nordic neighbours. Moreover, Nordic party systems are for historical reasons

also quite similar, having specific agrarian parties and recently also witnessing the rise of populist or radical right parties. Cooperation between Nordic parties has also been close throughout the decades. (E.g., Bergman and Strøm 2011; Bengtsson et al. 2014; Arter 2016; Karvonen et al. 2016).

In the 1950s and 1960s, Nordicism was not only a central ingredient in the development of the Finnish political and societal system, but also a tool in foreign policy. Getting closer to the Nordic neighbours in foreign policy was of utmost importance for Finland to establish itself in international relations. In 1948, Finland had signed the Agreement on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance with the Soviet Union, which in essence impeded the use of Finnish territory for attacks against the Soviet Union and in general terms recognised Finland's desire to remain outside great power conflicts. While military alliances with Western countries were impossible, even closer economic cooperation that could potentially restrict Finland's decision-making autonomy was out of question.

Nordic cooperation was for Finland a way out of this isolation towards more room for manoeuvre in foreign policy. Membership in the Nordic Council – which was not uncontroversial either but was achieved in 1955 – meant that Finland could cooperate even with Nordic NATO members. Nordic cooperation was also the basis from which to act in the UN system. Finland joined the United Nations in 1955, too, and as a part of the Nordic group, it gained the possibility to access positions of influence thanks to rotation among the Nordics in GATT, IMF, ILO, UNESCO and in the UN Security Council. Cooperation with the Nordic countries, all keen on strengthening multilateral organisations and notably the UN, and particularly cooperation between defence ministers since the 1960s, opened the way for Finland to a prominent role in UN peacekeeping. Since 1956, Finland has taken part in over 30 UN operations with over 50 000 personnel.

Nordic identity played an important part also in the process of Finland applying for European Union membership. President Martti Ahtisaari noted in 1994 that Finland is a Nordic and a European

country that will not lose its Nordic identity as a member of the EU. When preparing for membership, the notion of 'Northernness' came up as something important also for economic reasons and in fields such as health and environment. At the same time it was particularly the opponents of EU membership that emphasized the value of Nordicness: many of them envisioned a Nordic alternative to European integration that would build on the success of post-Second World War cooperation among the Nordic countries. This applied also to security policy, as it was perceived that through joining the EU Finland would move closer to NATO and would need to compromise its position as a militarily non-aligned country.

The relative thinness of Nordicness as identity, one could argue, has meant that Finland has also been ready to abandon the Nordic reference group when it is felt to have a negative influence. This points to Nordicness being more an instrument than a consolidated part of identity. Two such examples include discussions on Northern policies and on Eastern enlargement during the early years of EU membership, and the 2012 campaign for a seat in the UN Security Council.

For Finland, the early years of EU membership were characterised by taking distance from Sweden and Denmark in the EU. Now, the fear was that Finland would be perceived by other EU members as being part of a Nordic bloc that could hamper further integrative efforts. Moreover, Sweden and Denmark were not as integration-minded as Finland; for Finland, cooperation with the Commission was central and it wanted to be in the 'core' of the EU. 'Nordic' was potentially a burden. This stance was manifest in two important cases in the late 1990s. On EU enlargement, the Nordic countries had been consulting each other and adopted a shared position that all Baltic states should be taken in at the same time. The European Commission, however, advocated an approach whereby the most advanced would get in first, placing Estonia apart from the other two. Finland had first been together with the fellow Nordics but shifted to supporting the Commission's view on Eastern enlargement. Similarly, Finland came up with the initiative on the Northern Dimension of the EU

without first consulting its Nordic EU neighbours. Interestingly, in both cases, the common Nordic stance eventually prevailed. When the Eastern enlargement of the EU finally took place, there was no longer differentiation between the acceding countries, and the Northern Dimension was a policy issue where Finland turned back to its neighbours in early 2000s and got support from both Denmark and Sweden (Ojanen 2005b).

The unsuccessful Finnish campaign for a UNSC rotating seat is a more recent case where the apparent burden of being 'Nordic' becomes visible. Traditionally, Nordic countries have agreed on rotation in presenting candidacies to the UNSC. Sweden failing in getting in the Human Rights Council and Iceland's failure to get elected in the UNSC meant quite a long pause in Nordic representation. It was Finland's turn to candidate in 2012.

Finland was not elected, and a notable part of the blame was put on Nordicness. A report on the reasons for the failure was commissioned from the International Peace Institute (IPI), and the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE reported the findings with the telling title of "*US think tank: Not everyone cares for the Nordic "know-it-all" attitude*"<sup>1</sup>. As the authors of the report put it, "The core values which the Nordics stand for ... like human rights, the rule of law, the responsibility to protect, etcetera, is (sic) not necessarily that popular amongst the majority of the membership in the United Nations. And this is paired with a perception that the Nordics consider themselves to be morally superior, that there is a "besserwisser", condescending attitude towards others based on the values and ideological issues".<sup>2</sup> The Finnish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Erkki Tuomioja, when interviewed on the issue, pointed out that "there was small comfort in the fact that Sweden suffered

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<sup>1</sup> [http://yle.fi/uutiset/us\\_think\\_tank\\_not\\_everyone\\_cares\\_for\\_the\\_nordic\\_know-it-all\\_attitude/6571358](http://yle.fi/uutiset/us_think_tank_not_everyone_cares_for_the_nordic_know-it-all_attitude/6571358)

<sup>2</sup> Terje Rød-Larsen, President of IPI, François Carrel-Billiard, Managing Director, and Francesco Mancini, Senior Director of Research (and Rapporteur) produced the interview-based report of the International Peace Institute (IPI) at the request of the Foreign Ministry of Finland called "Taking stock, moving forward. Report to the Foreign Ministry of Finland on the 2012 Elections to the United Nations Security Council". April 2013. International Peace Institute. [https://www.ipinst.org/images/pdfs/130406-UNSC\\_Elections\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](https://www.ipinst.org/images/pdfs/130406-UNSC_Elections_Report_Final.pdf)

even more catastrophically from the situation, having lost an important position on the Human Rights Council”.

The IPI report then makes some suggestions for the Nordic countries. Positing that “many in New York consider these recent failures [of Nordic countries not being elected] as “a wake-up call for the Nordics”, it says that “Large segments of the UN membership acknowledge the particular profile of the Nordics as a “moral pillar” of the UN. But, for elections, they also tend to consider a Nordic candidate as one competitor among others, and very often not too different politically from the other Western candidates.” The Nordics would thus seem to have lost their particular profile or their competitive edge.

### **3. The increasing role of Nordic cooperation in security and defence**

In security and defence policy, one could expect less policy construction by the Nordic environment than in foreign policy. After all, cooperation in this field is newer, and Finland is in many ways an outlier in its defence political thinking. Still, we find today a broad consensus on the exclusively positive impact of Nordic security and defence cooperation. This may be attributed to the success in the building of a Nordic belonging and identity (moving in the model from 3 to 4).

We trace identity through analysing the public perception of and opinions on Nordic cooperation: high popular support and clear inter-party consensus are signs of consolidated identity. As to the policies, we trace policy change through the government white papers on foreign, security and defence policy. These reports also show that the actual content of cooperation is often unspecific; moreover, a lot of what takes place in concrete terms is not ‘Nordic’ in the sense of involving all Nordic states, but is bilateral Finnish-Swedish cooperation.

The differences between foreign and security policy that we see in this article are based on the understanding that the longer history in foreign policy cooperation means a stronger identity



impact; moreover, foreign policy is more clearly linked to societal and welfare policies (domestic and international) that are in the centre of Nordic cooperation and identity. Security and defence, then, would have been for much longer a separate and more ‘national’ policy domain.

The Nordic ‘exceptionalism’ in terms of internationalism (Lawler 1997), solidarity (Bergman 2006), the linkage between domestic and international welfare obligations (Bergman 2007) and the underlying priority of international egalitarianism over self-interest could apply to Finland. Wivel (2014: 83-84) would add to these features a progressive foreign policy agenda of peace, disarmament, cooperation, human rights, ecologically sound development and solidarity with the Third World. Sometimes, *Norden* would appear as pacifist.

Internationalism, welfare and egalitarianism as well as the common good are elements that the official accounts of the principles and goals of Finnish foreign policy would include. Growing Finnish interest in civilian crisis management and the emphasis on broad understandings of security are part of this, for instance the 1990s’ regional security thinking where military factors were downplayed in favour of, e.g., social and environmental considerations (Northern Dimension initiative, and Baltic Sea region cooperation). The growing Finnish interest in peace mediation looks quite Nordic, too, including as it does a focus on the role of women. Emphasising the civil society in fields such as development cooperation would be still another Nordic policy trait. One could argue that Nordicism has consistently grown in foreign policy.

While these features may be common for the Nordic countries, they do not necessarily lead to cooperation between them. As Strömvik (2006) puts it, no clear Nordic identity might exist in international relations as the countries’ foreign policies are in the end quite different and as there is not always coordination in issues that seem to be of shared interest, like crisis management. Nor do the countries cooperate actively in peace mediation – they may even compete with one another (Joenniemi and Lehti 2014).

When we move to security and defence, we see that Nordic defence cooperation agenda is much younger than that in foreign policy. We also see that different affiliations between the Nordic countries, notably as to NATO, but the impact of these is not always predictable. The differences in their defence political affiliations do not necessarily determine their policies. The attitude towards the Treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons<sup>3</sup> is a recent case where being a NATO member or being non-allied could make a difference. Yet, Finland sided with the nuclear powers and with NATO together with Denmark and Norway: it did not take part in the negotiations and has not signed the treaty, speaking instead in favour of the NPT regime.

Security and defence policy is where Finland has been seen to differ from the other Nordics. The centrality of the neighbouring Russia for Finnish security and defence is an outstanding feature, manifest as a driver for Finland to cooperate intensively with its neighbours to the West, but also as a constraint to the forms that cooperation can take. More than the other Nordics, Finland would place traditional security considerations first, and follow a more cautious line vis-à-vis the superpowers.<sup>4</sup> It would stand out as the least willing among the Nordics to defend values, while it would often be the only one speaking about credible national defence and overall emphasise territorial defence. It views participation in international operations as a means to improving national capacities and training its own defence forces. (Cf. Wivel 2014.) Rieker (2004), referring to Finland's war experiences and its geographical position, brings up the Finnish emphasis on security policy, the importance of traditional security and territorial defence, and the way in which cooperation and international activities are described as serving national defence capabilities. Thus, "security guarantees", or expression of readiness to defend others, would come up only in an

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.un.org/disarmament/ptnw/>

<sup>4</sup> For instance, Sweden would have been more critical of the US than Finland, generally speaking (Möller and Bjereld 2010).

implicit way, and international cooperation in security policy would be legitimised using arguments about national security.

Heikka (2005) even speaks of an unchanging nature of Finnish strategic culture that essentially consists of full integration to the core of Europe to facilitate shaping of Europe's grand strategy, binding Russia into international society, in particular through the EU's instruments, and maintaining a credible independent defence capability and developing interoperability with NATO. Contrary to most analyses that identify EU membership as a major watershed in Finnish security policy, Heikka underlines continuity in defending an anti-hegemonic security order in Europe, or joining and strengthening a Western power coalition seeking to contain and/or transform the Soviet Union, the revisionist power. He concludes that Finland can for this reason hardly be called a Nordic country, if by Nordic one denotes a political community characterised by a certain pacifism, where foreign military involvement is minimised, the military is strictly under political control, and where military force is applied with caution. (Heikka 2005: 106-108.)

It is, however, clear that security and defence has changed a lot in recent years, for Finland as well as for Sweden and the other Nordic countries. In the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014, Finnish security and defence policy has become more outspokenly dependent on international cooperation. Legislative changes enabling the defence forces to receive and give military assistance (outside the realm of crisis management) were introduced in 2017. Finnish relations with NATO have been deepening in time from the Partnership for Peace agreement of 1994 to signing a Memorandum of Understanding on Host Nation Support in 2014 and the Enhanced Opportunities partnership from 2015. Finland is an active participant in NATO operations, training and exercises, and the importance of cyber defence is growing in this cooperation.

Deepening cooperation with NATO and support for defence integration in the EU are not the only elements of cooperation. There are more and more bilateral defence-related agreements.<sup>5</sup> The most far-reaching ones are with Sweden, where cooperation is said to extend beyond peacetime.

What is interesting is that of all these forms of international cooperation, Nordic cooperation seems to enjoy highest popularity. The Advisory Board for Defence Information (ABDI) opinion poll of November 2017 shows this very clearly. When asked which factors improve Finland's security, the order was as follows:

participation in Nordic defence cooperation, 83 % (79 % in 2016);

participation in the EU's common defence, 70% (62 % in 2016);

membership in the EU, 62 % (54% in 2016);

increasing international economic interaction, 52% (48 % in 2016);

participation in international crisis management duties, 51% (46 % in 2016);

military non-alignment, 46 % (45 % in 2016);

possible NATO membership, 29 % (32 % in 2016).

In these annual polls, the question about Finland's military cooperation with the Nordic countries has been asked since 2012, and public support for Nordic cooperation has been consistently high. In 2016, for example, 94 % took a positive view on military cooperation with Sweden and with all the Nordic countries.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The recent bilateral agreements and memoranda can be found at the Finnish Ministry of Defence website, [https://www.defmin.fi/ajankohtaista/kansainvaliset\\_sopimukset](https://www.defmin.fi/ajankohtaista/kansainvaliset_sopimukset).

<sup>6</sup> The ABDI polls are available at [https://www.defmin.fi/en/tasks\\_and\\_activities/media\\_and\\_communications/the\\_advisory\\_board\\_for\\_defence\\_information\\_abdi/bulletins\\_and\\_reports](https://www.defmin.fi/en/tasks_and_activities/media_and_communications/the_advisory_board_for_defence_information_abdi/bulletins_and_reports).

We interpret this popularity as a sign of identity. Another sign would be increasing consensus among political parties. In order to understand the role of the Nordic countries in Finnish foreign and security policy, and to explore any potential differences between political parties, we analysed all Finnish foreign and security policy white papers, or the Government Foreign and Security Policy Reports, published since the mid-1990s (N = 8, with the reports dating from 1995, 1997, 2001, 2004, 2009, 2012, 2016, and 2017) and the parliamentary debates (N = 23) on those reports.<sup>7</sup>

In the first reports Nordic cooperation was primarily referred to in the context of crisis management, although it was also seen important in terms of regional stability in northern Europe and the Baltic area. This is not surprising given that Finland, as well as the other Nordic states, were in the 1990s amending their respective peacekeeping laws in order to enable participation in various crisis management operations. The debates were quite heated in Finland, with the move away from traditional UN-led peacekeeping towards peace enforcement causing serious concern among a section of members of parliament (MPs) (Ojanen 2005a; Raunio 2018). In this changing post-Cold War-era security context, the contribution of Nordic countries in crisis management was highlighted:

'The starting point for developing Finland's ability to contribute to international crisis management lies in the further advancement of Nordic cooperation. Experience has shown that through cooperation the Nordic countries can significantly increase their weight in international community. The lessons derived from the operation in Bosnia emphasize the virtues of Nordic planning and training...' (VNS 1/1997, 46)

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<sup>7</sup> The authors are responsible for translations of the plenary debates and of those government reports not available in English (1995, 1997, 2001, 2009). In the 2015-2019 legislative term the government produced two reports, one on foreign and security policy and the other on defence policy.

Practical achievements such as the NORDCAPS (Nordic Coordinated Arrangement for Military Peace Support) agreement come up repeatedly. Cooperation among Nordic countries in arms purchases, in turn, is a topic that is more or less constantly emphasized. However, Nordicism was also more broadly seen as a starting point for international cooperation and identity in world politics.

We see clear illustrations of Nordic belonging in these reports. In 1995, it was stated that

‘Belonging to the Nordic region and close cooperation with other Nordic countries is the building bloc of Finnish society, an indicator of democracy, fairness and welfare. ... Finland has sought influence particularly through cooperation with the other Nordic countries, and this has shaped the international identity of Finland’ (VNS 1/1995, 5.)

and in 2009, the similarities are seen as the reason for common goals:

‘Because their societies are so similar, the Nordic countries have common goals in several issues that are central to security, such as climate change and working together in a globalizing world. ... The Nordic countries have the possibility to bring up jointly agreed goals and advance them also in other forums, such as the UN, EU, OSCE and NATO.’ (VNS 11/2009, 56)

In 2004 and 2009, the primary reference group changes from the Nordic countries to the EU and to cooperation with NATO. At the same time, however, bilateral ties with Sweden receive much more attention than before while Nordic cooperation continues to be actively referred to in the reports and the speeches. In the 2012 report (published in English in 2013), bilateral cooperation with Sweden is very much at the centre of the discussion. A clear political will to deepen security

cooperation with Sweden is expressed and the ‘historical, special relationship’ between the two countries is often repeated (see also Brommesson forthcoming b). Already the 1997 report emphasized such ‘special’ ties:

‘Sweden’s security policy choices are important for Finland given the historical special ties and shared interests of the two countries. Finland and Sweden share similar views about improving regional security and stability, which provide the basis for widening mutual cooperation’ (VNS 1/1997, 44.)

The report from 2012 concluded that

‘The intensifying Nordic foreign, security and defence policy cooperation supports the strengthening of the role of the Nordic countries in the international arena, promotes stability in Northern Europe as well as in the Baltic Sea area and northern regions, and provides a practical approach to handling wide-ranging security questions. Closer Nordic cooperation advances and expands Finland’s options in influencing its neighbourhood. Nordic defence cooperation improves cost-effectiveness and interoperability. Cooperation in international crisis management operations is already time-honoured. NORDEFCON provides the framework for the intensification of defence cooperation.’ (VNS 1/2013, 72)

In 2017, Sweden’s role was prominent:

‘Sweden enjoys a special status in Finland’s bilateral cooperation. Defence cooperation with Sweden aims at strengthening the security of the Baltic Sea region as well as the defence capabilities of both countries. Finland and Sweden will deepen their mutual cooperation

which is being developed to facilitate operational planning in all situations. Examples of these may include the protection of territorial integrity or exercising the inherent right of collective self-defence pursuant to Article 51 of the UN Charter. No predetermined limits will be set on deepening the bilateral defence cooperation. Finland will actively participate in this cooperation.’ (VNS 7/2017, 18)

The other Nordic countries are hardly mentioned individually, with the exception of Norway in the 2009 report (as a result of a 2008 report between Finland, Norway and Sweden on deepening security cooperation between the three countries) and the Icelandic Air Policing exercise, which divided opinions in the plenary as several speakers saw it taking Finland uncomfortably close to NATO. This results quite simply from the basic understanding that Denmark, Iceland and Norway belong to NATO. There is also quite widespread frustration among the MPs towards lack of concrete contents in Nordic cooperation and bilateral links with Sweden. Several pro-NATO MPs in turn question whether a defence alliance with Sweden would offer any real value for Finland. They see that Sweden is considerably less interested in cooperation, and there is even mistrust of the western neighbour, at least in part explained by Sweden applying for EU membership in the early 1990s without consulting Finland. Some MPs would like to see a formal treaty between Finland and Sweden, but acknowledge that Sweden is opposed to the idea.

Finland’s potential NATO membership application is in the debates strongly linked to Sweden’s choices:

’We have discussed Finland’s potential NATO membership. We must take into account that Nordic cooperation is of fundamental importance also from this perspective as it is of course self-evident that Finland would only join NATO together with Sweden. Hence negotiations and



close ties with Sweden are absolutely essential.’ (MP Pertti Salolainen, National Coalition, PTK 3/2013)

Turning to party positions, we see a broad consensus about Nordic cooperation – both regarding the general desirability of such cooperation and the need to deepen it, especially through bilateral links with Sweden. As summarized by MP Sofia Vikman (National Coalition, PTK 3/2013): ‘Further development of Nordic cooperation is a logical path forward and there seems to be a unanimous agreement about it here, and that is good.’ While the national political culture in foreign and security policy remains quite consensual, the left-right cleavage often structures the discussions, with centre-left parties emphasizing a more comprehensive or broader approach to foreign affairs, including human rights and development policy, and centre-right parties being more against cuts to defence spending and more supportive of developing closer links with NATO – ideological differences which were already visible even during the Cold War era (Joenniemi, 1978). (Raunio 2016.) Such disagreements do not surface in debates about Nordic countries, indicating that there is a widely-shared feeling of Nordic identity or belonging among political parties.

#### **4. “The new Finland that is now being built is no longer a Nordic country”**

From the analysis above, one could conclude that a Nordic identity and belonging indeed has developed. Changes that are perceived as going against this Nordic identity tend now to cause concern.

Two recent significant developments merit attention: the influence of the economic crisis and the new party-political constellation with a growing populist party (in government since 2015). One concrete result of the two developments combined has been budget cuts in development aid and international crisis management. In addition, the government of Juha Sipilä (composed of Centre

Party, the Finns Party and the National Coalition, in office from May 2015) made changes in the emphases in development aid as more resources were given to Finnfund (Finnish Fund for Industrial Cooperation Ltd.), making it more business and export oriented.<sup>8</sup>

In the ensuing debates, the threat that these changes pose to Finland's Nordic identity come up as a central concern. In the parliamentary debate on 2 June 2015, some pointed out that Finland is drifting apart from its Nordic reference group (Ville Niinistö, party chair of the Greens, MP Nasima Razmyar, Social Democrats) and instead saw that Finland was plummeting to the level of old Eastern European countries (MP Sirpa Paatero, Social Democrats), ending up in a "very shameful league" (MP Nasima Razmyar). MP Heidi Hautala (Greens) saw that Finland no longer is a Nordic country as it no longer is on the same level with them in development policy and has become a small power in peacekeeping. (HS 5.6.2015.)

As its defence, the government maintained that its programme represented continuity in Finnish foreign and security policy and that the economic situation meant that the priorities and means of development policy had to be rethought; still, it underlined the long-term goal of 0.7% GDP for development aid. Interestingly, even the government used the Nordic countries as the reference point when defending its decisions. Minister for foreign trade and development Lenita Toivakka (National Coalition) legitimised the new turn by referring to the Nordic countries (and the Netherlands) having done good job in bringing enterprises into development policy and thus helping companies grow in developing countries.<sup>9</sup> Finland would thus be doing what the Nordics already do. Many commentators pointed out that the traditional Nordic emphasis on global

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<sup>8</sup> Finnfund is a Finnish development finance company that provides long-term risk capital for private projects in developing countries.

<sup>9</sup> Typical for the Nordic development policy thinking would be working through civil society organisations and the generous spending, made possible by an exceptionally large domestic consensus on the issue (this is Nordic exceptionalism in this field, according to Hansen et al. 2015).

responsibility was weakening and that the immediate geographical vicinity gained prominence in Finnish policies. “The new Finland that is now being built is no longer a Nordic country”, the former minister of foreign affairs Erkki Tuomioja wrote on Facebook.

### **5. Concluding reflections: what is ‘Nordic’ today, anyway?**

In this article, we have shown important variation in what Nordicness means in Finnish foreign and security policy. Characteristically, Nordicness has been an instrument, and a very useful one too, in Finnish foreign and security policy. Over time, a Nordic identity has been consolidating, too. What we can see is a movement from low to high identity but also a variation in the degree to which Nordicness matters in foreign policy. Nordic cooperation and Nordicness continue to be highly appreciated in Finland – both in official foreign and security policy, including defence, as well as among the political parties and the broader public opinion. Bilateral relationship with Sweden has clearly become more important, a feeling shared in Sweden (see Brommesson forthcoming b). In fact, the very notion and desirability of Nordic cooperation has at no point been contested. Yet we have also highlighted the instrumentality of Nordicness for Finland: through Nordic cooperation Finland has gained stronger, primarily positive, recognition in international politics, but at the same time Finland has not hesitated to divert from the Nordic reference group when national interest has so demanded (for a broadly similar argument about Denmark, see Wivel forthcoming). Such instances first became more numerous since the 1990s, explained by the EU replacing the Nordic countries as the main reference group for Finland, and are now growing in other forms.

But what about the concrete policy substance behind Nordicness? In the end, one might ask whether the Nordics themselves are changing, and so their policies change, too. Is any of them ‘Nordic’ in the classic sense any longer? We see several changes taking place: for instance, Sweden’s foreign policy values are changing from national, or Nordic, or global, to European, and references to

European identity gain importance (Brommesson 2010).<sup>10</sup> In fact, we can see signs of ‘Nordicness’ turning even into a way of legitimizing policies that deviate from the classic picture of what Nordic is. An example could be to refer to the other Nordic countries’ policies as a reason to tighten refugee policies. In the Finnish parliamentary debate on the government’s budget proposal in June 2015, minister for foreign affairs Timo Soini (Finns Party) noted that Nordic cooperation is a way to increase efficiency in combating illegal immigration and human trafficking; MP Ben Zyskowitz (National Coalition) pointed out that Finland cannot have practices that differ much from those of its Nordic neighbours unless it wants to have tens of thousands of asylum seekers every year; and MP Teuvo Hakkarainen (Finns Party) said that other Nordic countries have for years had a readmission agreement while Finland did not [but should have].

Such signs of change might be linked to the overall change of Nordic societies and politics. As elsewhere in Europe, populist or radical right parties have increased their support in the Nordic region, Finland included. While more mainstream political parties continue to advocate Nordic cooperation, it is often such nationalist parties and movements that see the Nordic community as an alternative to the EU. On a more profound level, one can ask whether the societal changes in the Nordic countries – including growing income inequalities, different levels of multiculturalism, varying engagement with European integration – also impact on the cohesion of the Nordic countries’ international role and image. Are we seeing these changes reflected in Nordic foreign policy? If yes, what would the consequences be?

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<sup>10</sup> See Elgström and Delputte (2016) for change in development policy, and Pedersen (2018) for new status-seeking through militarized activism and good relations with the US rather than traditional Nordic internationalism.

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