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Åland, Norden, and Europe in the Early Post Cold War Era, 1989-1995

Abstract

The relationship between the EU and the Nordic countries has sometimes been complicated. This includes the autonomous Åland Islands. During the Cold War, when Finland's relationship with European integration remained strictly limited, the Nordic Council served as a singularly important policy platform for Åland. Following the end of the Cold War, there was a geopolitical realignment, with both Finland and Sweden joining the European Union. This caused substantial anxiety for Åland, which feared that the Nordic countries would be absorbed into an increasingly integrated Europe. This article analyses the speeches of Ålandic representatives in Nordic Council sessions between 1989 and 1994 from a constructivist perspective to show how Åland viewed itself in Europe and Norden during a period of realignment.

The Nordic region has been said to have a complicated relationship with the rest of the European continent. The Nordics have been labelled as the "other European community"[1] and even as "reluctant Europeans"[2]. Where does the autonomous territory of Åland fit into these broader narratives about Norden? On one hand, its political, economic, and cultural fate is deeply connected with those of Finland and Sweden, and, on the other hand, it remains somewhat of an outlier both in terms of the autonomy act's relationship to the Finnish constitution, and in relation to European Union law.

This article analyzes how representatives of Åland rhetorically constructed Norden and Europe vis-à-vis one another during sessions of the Nordic Council between 1989 and 1995. The platform of official Nordic cooperation was, and continues to be, essential for the conduct of Åland's external relations, which, alongside other cases of sub-state diplomacy, is often labelled as "paradiplomacy". It allows for representatives of Åland's legislature and executive to main-

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tain personal and professional relationships with other Nordic countries, while also upholding a sense of equality of the Ålandic identity and brand within the broader Nordic community. Åland's active efforts at the Nordic level to promote the "Åland Example" as a model way of resolving interethnic and interstate conflicts on the international stage have been described as a form of "norm entrepreneurship"[3], aligning with broader Nordic foreign policy analyses.[4]

The immediate Post-Cold War era can be described as a critical juncture for Åland's external affairs, as the end of the Cold War and the rapid acceleration of European integration put official Nordic cooperation in a difficult position. Indeed, the rapid developments between 1989 and 1995 saw Sweden and Finland join the European Union (EU) and caused deep soul searching within Nordic cooperation about what purpose Nordic institutions would serve on the new European Union dominated continent. The Nordic Council was one of the most important forums where the future of Nordic cooperation within a new Europe took place. Thus, its general debates between 1989 and 1995 provide indispensable empirical material for an analysis of Ålandic conceptualizations of Europe and Norden in an era of change.

This article begins with a brief overview of Åland's participation in official Nordic cooperation. Then it analyzes the speeches by representatives of Åland during sessions of the Nordic Council by utilizing constructivist methodologies focusing on the use of political language. It concludes with an analysis of how the concepts of "Europe" and "Norden" were used in relation to each other and to the Ålandic leadership's self-understanding within this conceptual constellation.

Why are Åland, Greenland, and the Faroe Islands a part of Nordic cooperation?

With around 30,000 inhabitants – roughly 0.5 percent of Finland's population – one might question the importance of this territory in overall Nordic history and politics and, furthermore, why anybody would consider including such a numerically small part of Norden in the structures of interstate cooperation. Similarly, while Greenland and the Faroe Islands are proportionally small in population compared to mainland Denmark, they nevertheless take part in the work of Nordic cooperation on the grounds that they exercise jurisdiction in the policy areas where official Nordic cooperation operates in. Considering the level of cooperation between the three island territories, and that their

status has always been considered jointly within the framework of the Nordic Council (NC) and Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM), this section introduces the background of the development of territorial autonomy in the Nordic region and how it relates to Nordic cooperation. The topic of this article is particularly pertinent given the recent struggles of the Faroese and Greenlandic parties to obtain "full membership", which resulted in the Greenlandic boycott of the NC in November 2024, as well as the ongoing geopolitical tensions in the Arctic and Baltic Sea regions in the 2020s.

The Åland question in the early 20th century saw the Swedish-speaking Åland mobilizing to seek reunification with Sweden, which had lost its eastern half (Finland) to Russia in 1809. This created tensions between Sweden and the newly independent Finland over sovereignty claims concerning the archipelago. The issue was eventually referred to the nascent League of Nations, which decided that Åland would remain a part of Finland, its demilitarized status (in force since 1856) would be complemented by declaring the territory of Åland to be neutralized, and the local population would be guaranteed its Swedish language and culture through a regime of self-government, including restrictions on landownership and political participation for non-domiciled persons. The combination of security considerations for Sweden, sovereignty considerations for Finland, and cultural considerations for Åland has been labelled as the "Åland Example".[5]

The experience of World War II had significant consequences for the Danish realm, after it lost contact with its North Atlantic possessions. Iceland became independent, the Faroe Islands gained home rule in 1948, and Greenland became a part of North American defence planning through the establishment of American troops on the island.

It was in the aftermath of this war that Nordic cooperation was formalized and institutionalized. The NC, an assembly of Nordic parliamentarians, met for the first time in 1952. Finland participated in the work of the NC from 1955 onwards, after the death of Stalin allowed for more freedom of movement in Finnish foreign policy. Initially, the legal basis of cooperation rested solely on the national legislation of the cooperating parties, which was unusual for an international organization. The cooperation was further formalized with the adoption of the Helsinki Treaty on March 23, 1962, creating a type of "constitution" for the NC and later the NCM.[6]

The original way of accommodating the Faroese was to appoint an MP from the archipelago to the Danish delegation to the Nordic Council. There is eviden-

ce that some legislators in Åland had already taken note of this model as a potential inspiration for themselves, even though no immediate action followed.[7]

The late 1960s saw the Faroese push for full participation in official Nordic cooperation once again. The Faroese claims, brought forward from the Danish side[8] to the Council, argued that the Faroe Islands already exercised jurisdiction in the fields of Nordic cooperation. Åland was included after its parliament submitted a written request to the Finnish government, arguing that the autonomy regimes of Åland and the Faroe Islands were similar enough to warrant equal treatment.[9]

The NC's response to these demands was to allow a system in which Åland and the Faroe Islands could appoint their own members to the Finnish and Danish delegations. This arrangement ensured direct representation for both autonomous territories, even if it fell short of formal equality with the five Nordic state parties. It was neither full membership nor observer status but something in between.[10]

The flags of Åland and the Faroe Islands were flown alongside the five Nordic states' flags in the session in Reykjavik in February 1970, a symbolic claim of equal belonging for the two autonomous territories. Furthermore, this represented an explicit recognition of the internal sovereignty of both island realms and the development of their paradiplomatic engagement with their near environment.

The NCM was established in 1971 after failed negotiations for a Nordic Economic Union (NORDEK). It was empowered to make binding decisions as opposed to the Council, which functioned as a deliberation forum and issued recommendations. Despite its name, it is not a single council but rather several separate councils of ministers organised by respective policy area – such as culture, finance, and labour, among others. The autonomous territories have been allowed to participate in the NCM's deliberations since 1976 without a right to vote.[11]

The Faroese were not satisfied with the system established in 1970 and pushed once again in 1977 for "full membership" on the grounds that the Faroese were a Nordic nation among others. Greenland became autonomous in 1979 with the Home Rule Act. The Home Rule Act was adopted after Greenland expressed dissatisfaction with being compelled to join the European Economic Communities (EEC) with Denmark in 1973, primarily due to the EEC's fisheries policies affecting Greenland's largest export. Greenland chose to obtain Overseas Territory Status, which granted it access to funds from the EEC. The

Faroe Islands, by contrast, became a third party, meaning that they would have to deal with the EEC bilaterally.

The response of the NC toward the Faroese attempts was to reform the Helsinki Treaty to formally recognize the de facto participation of the autonomous territories within the NCM and to allow them to establish their own NC "delegations" within their respective national frameworks. The reforms resulted in the territories gaining the formal right to speak in the NCM, while binding decisions made by the NCM within their jurisdictions would apply to them only if they chose to opt in to the individual decision. The number of NC members was expanded to 87 and the territories had two representatives each, again as a part of their national delegations.[12]

Ultimately, the autonomous status of the three island realms was the primary deciding factor for their inclusion in the workings of official Nordic cooperation. Their internal sovereignty over a plethora of issues was the basis of their external recognition for that sovereignty. In this sense, Nordic cooperation became an important platform for Åland, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland to conduct foreign policy, or "paradiplomacy".[13]

Constructivism and discourse analysis

The two classical schools of thought in the discipline of International Relations have been realism and liberalism. Realism stresses the conflictual nature of global affairs, while liberalism focuses on the conditions for cooperation.[14] Both theories maintain rationalist epistemologies and hold shared assumptions on the nature of international relations, such as the core assumption of "anarchy" between interstate relations as an objective fact. The explanatory power of realism lies within its focus on the exercise of military power while liberalism's strength lies in its focus on diplomacy and negotiation. They both maintain a state-centric worldview as the main agent of global affairs. As such, they tend to overlook the role of autonomous regions in international politics. The failure of either school to predict the end of the Cold War and the subsequent events brought about the rise of constructivism as the third large theory within IR.[15]

Constructivism emphasizes the socially constructed nature of politics and is a part of the interpretivist critique of liberalism and realism, especially from the late 1980s onwards. Building on a distinction between "brute facts" and "so-

cial facts"[16], constructivism stresses the intersubjectivity of global politics and argues that "anarchy" is not an inevitable fact of interstate relations, but rather something that is a result of human agency.[17] Constructivist theory tends to focus on norms and rules, the role of identity in political action, and the mutual constitution of agents and structure.[18] This focus on discourses and action allows constructivism to engage with political change and the subjectivity of non-state actors in the global arena, such as international organizations and autonomous territories. Therefore, as a response to rationalist traditions of realism and liberalism, constructivism is the most suitable theoretical approach for the purposes of this article.

In terms of methodology, constructivism focuses on the use of political language. This means that constructivist ontology is often combined with a discourse analytic lens. In practice, the analysis of discourses stays at the public level and focuses on what the political actor communicates to their interlocutors and the public.[19] Discourse analysis is particularly useful when applied to material such as the minutes of the Nordic Council, when the whole exercise of the public debate is precisely to communicate discourses about the relevant theme of the session and Nordic cooperation more broadly.

The end of the Cold War and European integration

For Finland, the issue of joining the EEC during the Cold War was difficult considering its "special relationship" with the Soviet Union. Sweden, on the other hand, maintained a policy of neutrality, avoiding affiliation with larger political blocs. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union brought about a new context where Finland had more room to maneuver.

Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Austria all applied for EEC membership in the early 1990s, which also raised several questions for Nordic cooperation. The question was now if Norden and Europe were complementary or conflicting communities.[20] Hansen and Waever have analyzed how the Nordic national identity constructions[21] affected the respective countries' debates on the EU through a constructivist perspective.[22] Johan Strang's analysis of the rhetorics of Nordic cooperation shows that Europe has traditionally functioned as a supranational, utopian, bureaucratic, capitalistic, conservative, or elitist "other" in order to contrast it with a Nordic cooperation "self" that is progressive, democratic, socially responsible, and pragmatic.[23] However,

Strang notes that such othering does not necessarily imply euroscepticism (as many of the NC members were in favour of European integration), but rather that it has served as way of negotiating the Europe-Norden relationship, as well as bolstering the Nordic community identity and the NC as an institution.[24] Despite being a part of the broader Nordic-European process, analyses of Åland remain few and far between, and Nordic EU research continues to be state-centric.[25]

Åland's identity construction reflects its contemporary and historical geopolitical experiences. The archipelago is a Swedish-speaking region located between Sweden and Finland, endowed with self-government and a demilitarized and neutralized status. Although not a party to any of the international treaties regarding Åland, Åland's political leadership has not hesitated to express opinions on its demilitarization and neutralization, linking them to the archipelago's identity as "the islands of peace".[26]

The following section uses a constructivist methodology to analyze how core political concepts are utilized. The main material is speeches by Åland's representatives in the Nordic Council. This section provides an empirical analysis of how "Åland", "Norden", and "Europe" were used politically in Ålandic paradiplomatic discourses.

Norden in Europe discussions in Stockholm (27 February-3 March 1989)

Full membership in European integration had long been a controversial topic for Finland – and therefore also Åland – during the Cold War era. Towards the end of this period, however, the controversial nature of the question had largely dissipated, so much so that the editor in chief of *Nya Åland*, Hasse Svensson, lamented the lack of a European policy or even discussion of European integration by Åland's delegation to the Nordic Council in 1988.[27] This was to change shortly, only a year later during the annual session of the Nordic Council.

Åland was represented by Sune Eriksson, the Premier and leader of the Liberal Party, who held the main speech during the 37th session of the Nordic Council in Stockholm. The overarching discussion was coloured by the publication of an NCM report "Norden in Europe I and II", analyzing the effects of an increasingly accelerating European integration process on the Nordic region. This clearly affected Åland's positioning, or lack thereof as well.

Eriksson noted that European integration had taken an increasingly large, but justified, space within Nordic cooperation. He said that in the earlier discussions about European integration there had been a sense that cooperation with the EEC was both "unavoidable" and "necessary", and that a failure to do so would cause issues in trade and industrial policy, inevitably leading to economic problems.[28] As the leader of one of the autonomous territories within the Nordic region, Eriksson stated that he would touch upon certain questions regarding the importance of small communities' ability to manage their own affairs in a way that would prevent their living standards from deteriorating.[29]

Already in the opening lines, we see the construction of "Europe" as something inherently external to the "Nordic" and as an inevitable reality – embodied by the EEC – that calls for a response from Norden. In this political scenario, Eriksson depicted Åland as a small society needing to safeguard its ability to determine its own fate amid pressures of integration.

He then explicitly stated that the potential problems of an extensive integration process in Europe, were not only directed at sovereign states, but also minorities with special status within those states – whose status could potentially be eroded or pushed to the margins.[30] He argued that the expectation of reciprocal exchange of labour and services, along with the opening of the right of establishment, would challenge the guarantees forming the basis of the Ålandic society's status.[31]

He then shifted to agricultural policy by noting that the sector was still a significant part of Åland's economy, and the demands of a large free market of agriculture products could cause substantial issues for its agriculture. Furthermore, he added a regional policy dimension to his argument by stating the importance of maintaining healthy communities on rural parts of mainland Åland and the archipelago.[32]

Eriksson also highlighted the significance of cross-border cooperation and expressed his disappointment over the decrease in the budget allocated to this field, especially considering that "cross-border contacts have increasingly been taking place at a higher level, metropoles, capitals, and other important centres". He concluded by stressing the vital role of the Nordic Council in the marine environment of the Baltic Sea and its importance for the Åland Islands.[33]

The speech overall carried a very ambiguous tone toward European integration and framed both Åland and Norden as passive reactors to powers much larger than themselves. The lack of a proactive vision for Norden is noteworthy,

although staying outside of the EEC was also not explicitly mentioned as an alternative. Ultimately, the dilemma lay in the tension between the centralizing, universalistic tendencies of European integration and the highly particularistic regime of Åland's autonomy.

Winds of change cause an extra session of the Nordic Council in Mariehamn (14 November 1989)

The NC traditionally met once a year. However, the gravity of geopolitical shifts during this period also created a sense of urgency at the NC. It, therefore, decided to hold an extra session, the third such meeting hitherto. The purpose of this extra session was to "clarify, which challenges were confronting Nordic cooperation as a result of the developing European integration process, and to strengthen their own common positions"[34]. The location was also symbolically important, as Åland served as the host for Nordic representatives during this turbulent time.

Åland was once again represented by its Premier, Sune Eriksson. He repeated that the efforts in Europe to create a common market with no borders on goods, services, capital, and persons had a substantial effect on the Ålandic society. The issue, he claimed, was not only the preservation of the special arrangements that formed the basis of Åland's regime, but also the concentration of power to multinational corporations, states, and supranational organs. This, he argued, would weaken regional influence at the European level.[35]

Striking a slightly more positive tone, Eriksson stated that the general developments in international trade and the new potential for increased cooperation in research, education, and technology were in the interests of Åland's societal development. He noted, however, that problems would arise when the issues of concern for Åland's autonomy regime were dealt with, directly or indirectly. He summarised these issues in three questions:

> "1. In what way can a self-governing region legitimize and achieve influence in a process in which not all policy fields are within its own competences, and the driving forces and institutions of this integration process are at the national or international level?

> 2. To what extent will the national basis of autonomy, such as language, local traditions, culture, and the political right self-determination, be affected?
>
> 3. To what extent can changes (such as crises or a quick restructuring in key industries) in the material basis change the national grounds? The principle of economic reciprocity would mean that certain exceptions on cultural and environmental impacts, the freedom of movement, and other issues that are essential for the autonomy."[36]

He continued his speech by noting that the province of Åland could not avoid being affected by, or pulled into, the integration process. Their goal, therefore, was to ensure Åland's active participation without threatening the fundamental pillars of its autonomy and interests. To achieve this, Eriksson argued that Åland would need, throughout this process, to be heard, informed, and allowed to participate – or, if deemed necessary, to be exempted from certain international treaties and agreements. He concluded by stating that from Åland's side, they were in principle supportive of all proposals to "quickly strengthen cooperation within Norden"[37].

Eriksson maintained an ambiguous posture towards Europe, albeit with a comparatively positive undertone. His main concern was the preservation of Åland's agency amid the centralization of power in a globalized age. He conceded that Åland and the Nordics had little in the way of alternatives to the integration process, but also acknowledged the possibility that if managed well, Åland could be a positive force within the broader European integration process. There was no elaboration about what strengthened Nordic cooperation would look like, and Norden was taken as an inherently positive concept.

Europe of the Regions as an opportunity? in Reykjavik (27 February- 2 March 1990)

The European challenge to the state-based international order created some level of anxiety for the European states that transferred parts of their sovereignty to the supra-national structures of the EU. From a regional perspective, the "Europe of the Regions" discourse was frequently employed to describe how integration and decentralization would blur the lines between a state

and substate units in international affairs, thereby allowing for greater legitimacy for regional paradiplomacy and territorial autonomy.[38]

It was Sune Eriksson once again who represented Åland in the following general debate of the Nordic Council. He began by noting that Åland had been included in the Finnish delegation dealing with European integration and expressed that Åland was ready to "take advantage of all the opportunities that this development offers"[39]. He continued that, at first glance, Åland, as a small society, did not appear to benefit from the freedoms established by European integration nor have the capacity to affect its own conditions. However, he argued, owing to its autonomy regime, Åland could "play a role and steer events"[40].

Taking a step further, he claimed that the general tendency towards the diffusion of borders between nations was a desirable development, and, in this context, certain regions with already well-established self-governance could serve as a "model for regional development in general"[41]. This was an extremely thinly veiled expression of confidence in Åland's autonomy system – not only within Norden, but also within a "Europe of the Regions", where the old state-centric world order would be replaced by a new one granting sub-state regions increased opportunities to acts as agents in international policy. The statement also follows the use of the "Åland Example" as a normative argument, even if implicitly.

Eriksson then lamented that work and other economic opportunities were increasingly concentrated to central regions, exacerbating the differences between the centre and the periphery. He was, however, optimistic that solutions could be found through the framework of strengthened Nordic cooperation and, more broadly, within the context of European integration. Additionally, he mentioned the importance of maintaining strong economic conditions in peripheral regions to complement their self-governance and expressed confidence that Åland could contribute positively in this area.[42]

Overall, Eriksson shifted into an even less apprehensive tone towards European integration in Reykjavik. He stressed opportunity over threat and even implied that Åland would fit well and serve as an example for other regions. Perhaps it was the willingness of Finland to include Ålandic officials within Finland's delegation on European integration that gave the Premier confidence in their continued inclusion within the on-going process. It should be noted that despite the normative rhetoric from Åland regarding the "Åland Example" and the self-appointed moniker of "the Islands of Peace", European integra-

tion was framed as a universalistic and primarily economic phenomena, not as a peace project.

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania visit the Nordic Council in Copenhagen (26 February-2 March 1991)

Representatives of the newly independent Baltic States were in the audience and were acknowledged by the President of the NC before the session. International questions, such as the new developments in the Baltic Sea region during the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the continuation of the European integration process, were dominant during the session. The two representatives in the NC from Åland[43] viewed the increasing international policy debates in the NC as a positive development, offering Åland a platform to participate in external affairs. One of them, however, also voiced concern that Norden could lose its role as a platform due to being overshadowed by Europe.[44]

Sune Eriksson was still Åland's Premier during the next session of the Nordic Council. In the general debate, he stressed the importance of regional policy and cross-border cooperation, citing the efforts of the NCM in the two fields. Furthermore, he underscored the value of regional participation in these policy areas, arguing that by being active regions "can strengthen themselves and the Nordic region as a whole"[45]. He mentioned the cooperation between several Baltic Sea islands, such as Bornholm and Gotland, although he admitted that this was in its very early stages. Eriksson also voiced his hope that cooperation in the educational sector within Norden could be seen as complementary to what the Baltic countries were otherwise offered by Norden. He also highlighted the environmental sector as a potential field for deeper cooperation.[46]

Inevitably, the topic of the European Communities came up. Eriksson said: "With Norden approaching towards the European Communities, the regions of Norden will be confronted with a new, and perhaps not so favourable situation."[47] Nevertheless, he argued that it was a positive development that the situation had received attention within the context of EC integration. Furthermore, he maintained that regions would be able to participate in the process regardless of the direction that Nordic inclusion in the EC framework might take. Eriksson said it was too early to discuss the implications for the regions, though certain changes in regional policy could already be discerned.

On the more hopeful side, he claimed that "if the expression of Europe of the Regions is to be believed, this points towards some hope for regions"[48]. In that context, he argued that the forms of cooperation adopted by the different Nordic countries would also be decisive for the regions.

Turning to Åland specifically, Eriksson expressed concern over the potential establishment of an "EC-Border" in the Sea of Åland. He warned that this scenario would worsen cross-border cooperation and create economic and trade policy problems that would be very difficult to resolve.[49] Eriksson concluded on a more positive note, voicing his hope that regional cooperation would develop rapidly to constitute a real factor in Nordic cooperation that "strengthens, develops, and creates new benefits for all in Nordic cooperation"[50].

This time, the Ålandic representative focused heavily on the effects of European integration on border regions within Norden. He conceptualised the EC as a potential disruptive force for the Nordic countries in general, and Åland in particular. The interconnected nature of Åland's economy with Finland and Sweden was the underlying rationale for his concern about an "EC-border in the Sea of Åland", alongside an implicit fear of separation from Sweden with which Åland had close political, cultural, and economic ties. This is supported by the fact that the Sea of Åland refers specifically to the western waters between Åland and Sweden. The considerable unclarity at this point was the possibility that Sweden might choose a different policy position on EC membership than Finland and Åland, thus belonging to a different trade block. This would have meant potential difficulties in westward trade for Åland due to unaligned customs and tariffs. The possibility of Åland choosing to remain outside the EC was not openly entertained by Eriksson. Norden was again portrayed as inherently positive, and therefore the solution continued to be "more Nordic cooperation".

The Mariehamn Declaration at the extra session in Mariehamn (13 November 1991)

Åland held elections for the regional parliament in October 1991, after which the new Premier Ragnar Erlandsson, leader of the Centre Party (in coalition with the Social Democrats and the Conservatives), took charge of managing Åland's EC process. However, at the time of the extra session of the Nordic Council, he was not a member of Åland's delegation. Instead, Centre Party MP Olof Salmén represented Åland in the Council's deliberations.

A day before the session, the Nordic Prime Ministers signed a declaration committing to a review of the structures of official Nordic cooperation on the assumption that most or all Nordic countries would become members of EEC. The largest local newspaper in Åland described the declaration by noting that "The Prime Ministers drive Norden towards Europe"[51].

The theme of the session was "Norden after 1992", named after a report examining what the future of Nordic cooperation would look like within the broader context of European integration. Salmén began his speech by expressing his satisfaction with being able to hold the meeting on Åland, which he saw as a sign that "The Council remembers the existence of the autonomous regions"[52]. He continued by stating that Åland had, over the years, come to appreciate Nordic cooperation and had been happy about "being allowed to participate on an equal footing", emphasizing that Nordic cooperation should now "be rationalized, strengthened, and improved"[53]. Furthermore, Salmén argued that Nordic cooperation should be expanded to include European matters, and the working procedures reformed. He elaborated that this would, above all, mean more informal information sharing, which, he argued, would be "beneficial for our Nordic inhabitants"[54].

Salmén specifically mentioned cooperation in the Baltic Sea region as a potential focus area for a renewed and refocused Nordic cooperation. In fact, he proposed that Norden formulate an action plan for the region, with Åland playing a central role in these plans.[55]

Salmén noted that a change in the functioning of the Nordic Council and Nordic Council of Ministers would require an amendment to the Helsinki Treaty. For Åland, he emphasized, it was of utmost importance that "the status of the autonomous regions should not be allowed to deteriorate and should at least be consolidated at its current level"[56]. Despite their small size, the autonomous regions, he argued, could offer "nuggets" of value to Nordic cooperation as a whole, and that "nuggets are a rare product". Salmén hoped that the positive view regarding their participation would continue in the future as well. He elaborated that the autonomous regions already participated in the work of the Council of Ministers when issues of particular importance for them were under discussion, and that this practice should be continued and consolidated in an era where cooperation increasingly took place at the prime ministerial level. If a total revision of the Helsinki Treaty were to be accepted by the Parliament

of Åland, the autonomous territory had to be included in the process from the preparation stage to ensure that its viewpoints were adequately represented.[57]

Salmén concluded by stating his conviction that "integration in Europe will demonstrate the importance of increased cooperation in the Nordic region"[58]. He hoped that the Nordic region would increase communication and coordination amid discussions about further integration in Europe because "information about the positive and negative effects of expanded European cooperation will benefit us all in the Nordic region and enable faster and better decisions"[59].

Despite the change of speaker, the overall Ålandic tone remained the same. Åland was seen as an actively participating part of Norden, which constituted its natural political community. Some anxiety over the amendment of the Helsinki Treaty was expressed, but ultimately this was hardly a critique of the inherent value of Nordic cooperation. Salmén stressed the role of communication and information exchange as the primary added value of Nordic cooperation. It is noteworthy that the informal element of Nordic cooperation was particularly singled out by Åland's representative. Europe remained both an opportunity and a threat, something distant that needed to be adjusted to, and the answer was always "more Norden". What exactly Nordic cooperation would look like in this scenario remained unclear.

Continued discussions about reform in Helsinki (3-6 March 1992)

The new Premier, Ragnar Erlandsson, was appointed to the Åland delegation to the Nordic Council in November 1991 and represented Åland in the next session in Helsinki. At this point, Sweden had already applied for EC membership, Finland would do so in the same month, and Norway followed in November 1992. The theme was yet again Norden's relationship with European integration. This was also the month that Finnish accession negotiations started, and Åland was represented with two delegates in the Finnish negotiation team. The Ålandic government sent its first EC-related communiqué to the regional parliament, noting that in many fields Åland's interests aligned with those of Finland, while also demanding recognition of its monolingual status, demilitarization and neutralization, representation in the European Parliament, and the preservation of restrictions on non-domiciled persons.[60]

Erlandsson began by noting the gravity of the situation: "Now that we stand before a new European order, there are many questions about the future of the Nordic countries."[61] He asked: "Can the Nordic countries maintain their special characteristics, their 40-year-old rather uncontroversial form of cooperation built on the idea of consensus while the EC sucks up one Nordic country after another into its effective and coercive relationships of cooperation and dependency?"[62] Erlandsson also expressed concern about the situation of autonomous regions, stating: "We, from Åland, will not give up the protective statues that exist within the autonomy act and the international obligations that are found in several international agreements and peace treaties."[63]

Referencing the use of the term "Nordic Model", he argued that the "Ålandic Model" could serve as an example of a way of resolving minority issues in Europe peacefully and through consensual political solutions. Additionally, Erlandsson referred to the proximity of Åland to parts of Eastern Europe and the Baltics, describing it as a "central meeting spot" for conferences. He also pointed to the environmental action plan of the Ålandic government as evidence of Åland's commitment to be actively engaged in the social and political processes in its environment.[64]

Turning his attention to the achievements of Nordic cooperation, the Premier observed that many of its results – such as the common labour market, the passport union, and the removal of many cross-border problems – had come to be perceived as so "self-evident" that nobody thought of them as "successes made through agreements in the Nordic Council"[65]. Erlandsson noted that the three Nordic autonomous territories depended on sea transport and argued that measures such as taxes, surcharges, and fees (as a result of European integration) would be "against the spirit and purpose of Nordic cooperation"[66].

Premier Erlandsson also mentioned his satisfaction with Åland's arrangement in the European Economic Area (EEA) treaty, which allowed the autonomous territory to keep restrictions on the right of establishment for businesses and owning property on Åland for people without regional citizenship. He now formulated three potential options for Åland's future relationship with the European Communities, should Finland decide to join: 1) the right to remain outside the EC as per the Autonomy Act, 2) joining the EC, or 3) joining with certain derogations.[67]

Referring to the previous meeting in Mariehamn, Erlandsson observed that the conditions for Nordic cooperation were heavily affected by each Nordic country's chosen relationship to the EC, noting that Greenland and the Faroe-

se had chosen to stay outside the union. He stated that he expected the Ålandic government to be an active participant within the Finnish EC negotiations as per the Autonomy Act.[68]

Erlandsson admitted that the structures of Nordic cooperation would require reform in the context of the Nordic countries' integration into Europe, but he rejected the possibility of a weakened status for the autonomous territories according to the Helsinki Treaty. This required, according to him, active and intense participation by Åland in this reform process to "contribute to the further profiling of Norden as an exemplary society"[69].

Erlandsson concluded by expressing his satisfaction that Åland was able to host certain extra sessions of the Nordic Council. He also highlighted the importance of including West Nordic cooperation within "practical Nordic cooperation" and noted that the Ålandic government supported the efforts of the Baltic states in developing "democratic and humane" societies.[70]

The Ålandic constructions of "Norden" and "Europe" were once again built on a Norden that was familiar, trustworthy, and an inherently positive force for the world. In line with the "norm entrepreneurship" discourses on Norden, Åland firmly placed itself as a part of this tradition and framed itself as an active agent interacting with its political environment. A clearer vision for the relationship with the EC was also put forward, informed by the positive experiences with the EEA agreement. Nevertheless, expressions of dismay were also attached to the distant European project, perceived as a coercive force assimilating the Nordics into its alien ways.

Fear of losing status in Norden addressed in Århus (9-11 November 1992)

Building on the reform proposals set out in the Mariehamn declaration and the ongoing EU membership applications of Finland, Sweden and Norway, the Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland presented an overview of the reform efforts. Regarding the autonomous territories, she stated that they would maintain "their unique position" within Nordic cooperation, adding a dimension to the "people to people" cooperation in the region.[71] *Tidningen Åland* covered the speech with the title "The Autonomies Maintain Their Position".[72]

The Ålandic Premier Erlandsson opened his speech at the session by painting a picture of Nordic cooperation that "has been built over the last 40 years in the spirit of cooperation and within a large Nordic community"[73]. Noting the changes taking place on the European continent, he stated that "during recent times, events have pushed Nordic cooperation into a self-critical and in some regards anxious position"[74]. He asked if Nordic cooperation was at an inflection point, needing to decide if it would be relegated to the "archives of history" or be constructively built to such a state that the Nordic countries could "hold their heads high and advertise the people-to-people cooperation that permeates the Nordic peoples' social traditions"[75].

The Premier stressed the importance of the network of relations established through the formal structures of Nordic cooperation that ran the risk of being disrupted or rendered irrelevant through the prioritization of European integration. If this were to happen, he argued, the peoples of Norden would "sell their soul to a Europe that probably would not even understand the meaning of the Nordic model of cooperation"[76].

Here, Erlandsson once again played on the trope of a Norden that is an inherently good actor in global affairs and a Europe that is distant and potentially incapable of understanding this very inherent goodness. He also repeated that Åland wanted to be able to participate in Nordic cooperation at the same level even in case of reform and happily acknowledged the Norwegian Prime Minister Brundtland's statement to this regard. He made it explicit that he considered autonomous regions to be superior to other regional forms of administration.[77]

Erlandsson observed that Åland's relationship with the EC differed from those of Greenland and the Faroe Islands. Åland, he argued, had a "constitutional and active interest" in participating in Nordic cooperation on the question of European integration, especially considering that the Autonomy Act stipulated that international treaties contravening the Act required a 2/3 majority in the Parliament of Åland in order to be considered valid for the territory.[78] Indeed, both the EEA agreement and a potential accession agreement with the EC would fall within this context.

The Premier then turned his focus on the proposals to reform Nordic cooperation, largely repeating the previous positions on maintaining Åland's level of participation in the platform as it was. He expressed some irritation that most of Åland's questions about participating in high level meetings were met with assurances that Åland would "be able to" participate, but whether this meant "lunches or decisions" was unclear to Erlandsson.[79] Regarding their

emphasis on the informal nature of Nordic cooperation, he insisted that there could be no informal Nordic cooperation without formal cooperation, as the contacts Åland had been able to build over the years were a result of the formal structures of Nordic cooperation. He also expressed his scepticism about proposals to compartmentalize the policy areas of Nordic cooperation into European and Nordic fields, arguing that policy content should be the decisive factor in this restructuring.[80] Erlandsson concluded by stating "the beautiful and white Nordic swan needs wind under its wings to be able to fly high and confidently so as to draw well deserved attention from far beyond the Nordic countries"[81].

Yet again the Ålandic representative expressed unambiguous positivity towards all things Nordic and Åland's place within the Nordic community. He emphasized the causality between the formal structures of the NC and NCM and the informal networks in which Åland could participate through their work. Erlandsson, even more so than his predecessors, explicitly argued that Norden was an exceptional region and construct – one that was more familiar and whose cooperation functioned on a "people-to-people" basis. Europe, by contrast, was still framed as a potential threat to Norden, portrayed as a distant and coercive force. Any separation between Europe as a continent and Europe as an integration process was not touched upon by Erlandsson.

Security policy debates in Oslo (1-4 March 1993)

Security policy was also discussed in the NC, a policy field that was a sensitive matter during the Cold War. While security policy was formally a matter for the central state, Åland had since the 1980s expressed its own interpretation of the demilitarization and neutralization conventions and its relationship to its autonomy. The NC session in Oslo was yet another opportunity.

Åland was once again represented by Ragnar Erlandsson, the head of the Ålandic government. He began by asserting that Åland's autonomy system gave it a unique opportunity to give Nordic cooperation a "good starting point" for addressing European issues that touched upon Åland's legislative competences.[82]

Regarding EC membership, the Premier stated that without special derogations for Åland's business environment, property acquisition protections, and the basis of the autonomy regime, Ålandic society would be pushed in an "unacceptable direction"[83]. He therefore argued that it was important to

include autonomous territories in the formulation of the Nordic approach to Europe.

Erlandsson took note of a statement by the then Swedish Prime Minister, Carl Bildt, about Norden being in a transition period to a new peace and security order in Europe. He then added that Åland represented a separate security regime based in international law. "In accordance with international law," he said, "we consider ourselves a party in relation to the treaties in force"[84]. Erlandsson then expressed his assumption that "EC membership would not lead to EU measures and decisions affecting the demilitarized and neutralized status of the islands." He did not refer to the EC/EU question for the remainder of his speech and chose to focus on other questions, including the budgeting of the NC and NCM, a proposal to establish a pan-Nordic TV, cross-border issues, and welfare policies.[85]

This was the first time during the EU process that Ålandic representatives actively spoke on the security policy implications of EC/EU membership within the NC sessions. Explicitly acknowledging the security policy implications of Åland joining the EU, they stressed the importance of maintaining the status quo of what they considered to be "the Åland example/model" for peaceful cooperation. Going even further, they claimed that Åland was a party to the international treaties governing the islands' status, despite the fact that Åland could not formally be a party to any international treaty as it lacked recognized statehood and acceptance from the central state to sign treaties (which Denmark allowed for the Faroe Islands and Greenland, provided that the subject matter fell within their purview).

Some legal experts have argued that Åland has indeed gained some level of international legal subjectivity through its participation in several international platforms.[86] Using this ambiguity, the Ålandic government clearly pushed the boundaries between state and substate entities when it came to the meaning of subjectivity in international relations.

It is also noteworthy that there was no understanding of the EU as a "peace project" as often propagated by the EU officials themselves. This absence of a peace discourse put Åland more along the lines of being a typical Nordic "reluctant European", especially considering the implicit security policy considerations of the Finnish policy-making elite during the EU process.[87] In other words, the "Islands of Peace" did not appear convinced about the idea that peace was the EU's primary function.

"A UN body on Åland": the NC session in Mariehamn (8-10 November 1993)

The next session of the Nordic Council took place in Mariehamn, the capital of Åland. This was a remarkable feature, considering that the previous meeting on Åland was just two years prior. Erlandsson was once again representing Åland as head of government. The local press highlighted the proposal from Åland arguing that Åland's expertise in demilitarization and minority issues should be utilized by the United Nations as well.[88]

The theme was once again security policy, and Erlandsson built upon the content of his last contribution in the previous session. He began with summarizing the international treaties and agreements that governed Åland's status according to international law.[89] He argued that Åland's constitutional status, its autonomy, and its demilitarization and neutralization were the three main pillars of "Åland's international legal status", and that "any attempt to disrupt one of these cornerstones must be seen as an attempt to disrupt the other two"[90].

With the end of the Cold War, the Premier noted the emergence of a new security situation in the Baltic Sea region. He added that this had caused some circles in the Finnish military to argue in favour of abolishing the islands' non-fortified status. He emphasized, however, that the Finnish political leadership was fortunately strongly in favour of maintaining the status quo regarding Åland's international status and that similar voices had been raised in Sweden and Russia as well.[91]

Erlandsson asserted that the Ålandic understanding of the concept of security was one "not built on military strength" but rather on "gaining respect through contacts with other countries and people". Such security, he argued, could be achieved through "mutual exchange of goods, experiences and personal contacts with the aim of eliminating preconceptions and suspicions"[92]. He noted that the "Nordic approach to society" could serve as a model for the rest of Europe, adding that "we have no reason to be restrained in constantly reminding people that Norden always strives to solve conflicts between countries and peoples by peaceful means and not by military force"[93].

He continued to stress that "in Åland, we feel safe without fortifications" and that outsiders had "questioned the basic belief of peaceful coexistence". In opposition of this, Erlandsson said Åland's authorities had done all they could to uphold the basic viewpoint that the peoples of the world could reach consen-

sus through peaceful means. Regarding EC membership, he hoped that Åland's international status would be "respected and understood" by the EC and asked rhetorically: "Yes, why not expand it to other areas?"[94]

To conclude, the Åland Premier went so far as to propose the establishment of a United Nations institution on Åland. In Erlandsson's ideal scenario, this would be an institution that would address demilitarization and minority issues. He also argued that Russia had previously supported a similar proposal and would likely support his idea. Relating this idea to Norden more broadly, he contended that such an institution would "stabilize the situation in the Northern Baltic Sea and would strengthen Norden as corner of peace in the world"[95].

During this session, the representative of Åland showed no lack of ambition in placing Åland within a broader international context, even beyond Europe and Norden. Åland was constructed as an active agent in matters relating to the demilitarized and neutralized status of the islands, which it regarded as inherently tied to its autonomy regime. In this respect, Åland's position differed from that of Finland, which has traditionally considered the autonomy of Åland to be a separate legal order.

Europe was framed as a new potential platform for Nordic and Ålandic exceptionalism to "lead the way" for the rest of the continent, which was portrayed as less inherently peaceful as the Nordics. Europe was, therefore, no longer depicted as a threat but rather as an opportunity, and even as a student for Åland and Norden. Russia, meanwhile, was framed as a potential supporter of a UN institution on Åland, considering its presence in the Baltic Sea.

EU and reform debates continue in Stockholm (7-10 March 1994)

The following session of the Nordic Council took place after the formulation of the accession treaty of Finland in February 1994. Åland was incorporated into the treaty through an additional protocol, the "Åland protocol", which was justified with reference to "Åland's status according to international law." According to the protocol, Åland was to remain outside of the EU's tax harmonization regime, thereby allowing tax free sales on ferries to and from Åland, and to maintain restrictions regarding regional citizenship on the islands.

The EU used this formulation to prevent setting a precedent for other attempts to obtain derogations from EU primary law. Åland and Finland, however, disagreed about the interpretation of its meaning.[96] Finland argued that the reference to "international law" pertained strictly to Åland's autonomy, whereas Åland maintained that it encompassed both its autonomy and its demilitarized and neutralized status.

Premier Erlandsson yet again served as the main representative for Åland during this session. He acknowledged the need to review Nordic cooperation considering the increasing internationalization in the region. Even in a scenario where Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Åland would join the European community, Erlandsson argued that "we feel that we have something to give, both to European and to Nordic cooperation." Furthermore, he noted that Åland had "won recognition for its negotiation objectives: that the EU explicitly recognizes Åland's special status"[97].

However, the Premier also acknowledged popular speculations that Åland could become a tax haven as a result of the exemptions granted in the Åland protocol. He countered by stating that "we are well aware that EU intervention is imminent if the tax exemption is used for any other purpose that keeping the distinctive Åland society alive"[98]. He reiterated his satisfaction with the "EU explicitly recognizing the international status of Åland" and that Åland could serve as a model for finding sustainable solutions to ethnic conflicts around the world.[99]

Despite positivity directed at the EU, Erlandsson also mentioned points of tension regarding EU membership. In particular, he stated that Åland should be given a seat in the European Parliament (EP). He justified this demand on the grounds that the Parliament of Åland had agreed to transfer a part of its legislative power to the EU level and, therefore, deserved direct representation in the EP, in the same way as members states. Erlandsson further argued that the EU's recognition of Åland's special status could only strengthen the case for Ålandic representation in the EP.[100]

The Premier of Åland also referred to the newly established Åland Islands Peace Institute hosting a conference with representatives from Azerbaijan and Armenia as an example of the potential enduring power of the "Åland Example". He suggested that Nordic funds could be used to hold such meetings on Åland, and by doing this, the Nordic countries "could demonstrate how to solve conflicts by peaceful means" and that this would "add a new dimension to the Nordic Model"[101].

After discussing pan-Nordic TV proposals and issues pertaining to the Baltic Sea region, he concluded by reiterating: "We on Åland are ready to be active at all levels around the Baltic Sea. We have experience in minority and peace-building endeavours. Åland wants and can be the power of example to make the Baltic Sea region into a sea of peace."[102]

In the spirit of the "Europe of the Regions" discourse, the EU was presented less as a threat and more of as a benign force – one that "recognized" Åland's international status and provided a platform for Ålandic paradiplomacy rooted in the "Åland Example". Norden was framed as the natural context for this paradiplomatic activity, and the Åland Example was also presented as a case for Nordic norm entrepreneurship more broadly. Unlike in previous sessions, the Åland representative also vocalized specific claims regarding direct Ålandic representation in the EP, which rested on the assumption that the Nordic EU candidate countries would indeed join the union.

History accelerates and uncertainty lingers in Tromsø (15-16 November 1994)

In the last session of the Nordic Council prior to EU membership, Erlandsson began by describing Nordic cooperation over the years as "characterized by stability, consensus, and Nordic stability"[103]. However, he observed that changes in Eastern Europe had caused a new foreign and security policy alignment toward the EU in the Nordic countries – at such a tempo that "the old stable electorate is finding it difficult to keep up". He continued: "Even the relatively idyllic Åland islands are struggling to make decisions about the future."[104] Reflecting on Åland's geographical position between Sweden and Finland, Erlandsson stated that Åland looked forward to an EU integration that "would stabilize the opportunities to establish contacts both eastward and westward"[105].

Premier Erlandsson then turned to the results of the EU negotiations, which he described as satisfactory from Åland's perspective. He noted that there were some unresolved matters, such as Åland's demands for a seat in the EP and the application of the tax exemption, but considered it reasonable to expect a two-thirds majority in the Parliament of Åland to approve the EU deal after the Swedish electorate's vote in favour of membership on November 13.[106]

The Premier then repeated the idea that, despite Åland not having formal competences in foreign and security policy decision-making, it could nonetheless play a positive role in peace-building processes – such as those in the Caucasus – by hosting conferences and peace talks on the islands.[107] He also argued that such conferences could be supported through international and Nordic means and would bring new meaning to the concept of "the Nordic welfare and social security model"[108].

Additionally, he took note of the EU referendum results in Finland and Sweden, which had produced a clear divide between rural and urban regions – the former largely opposing EU membership and the latter being mostly in favour. He reminded the council that Greenland, the Faroe Islands, and Åland were also sparsely populated parts of the Nordic region and therefore argued that it was imperative for the Nordic EU members in particular to safeguard the interests of such areas. Erlandsson continued to stress the importance of taking care of the structures of Nordic cooperation so that they could, in turn, "safeguard the regions that today feel threated by the centralistic approach that the EU essentially stands for"[109]. He concluded by asserting that the reassessment of Nordic cooperation should prioritize cross-border cooperation and maintaining a living countryside and archipelago in the Nordic region.

Conclusion

During the immediate post-Cold War period, Ålandic discourses about itself were primarily focused on its paradiplomatic agency, not only at the Nordic and European levels, but also on proposing policies at the UN level and expressing opinions on security policy. Examining how Ålandic representatives used and thereby constructed their identity vis-à-vis the Nordic and European levels allows for a multilayered analysis of Ålandic paradiplomacy within the context of the post-Cold War Nordic Council sessions.

Åland's agency was framed within a clearly liberal internationalist worldview, in which, despite its small size, it could serve as a positive example for the rest of the world. In this light, Åland's norm entrepreneurship as a promoter of liberal values diverged somewhat from Finland's considerations regarding the EU, which had implicit security policy implications. Åland was consistently portrayed as a potential contributor to the "Nordic Model" through its advocacy of the "Åland Example" as a good example of peaceful conflict resolution.

Demonstrating considerable ambition, Åland's representatives even proposed that the UN should finance an institute for conflict resolution in Mariehamn.

The Nordic level was clearly framed as Åland's natural in-group. Especially important were the informal networks established through Åland's active participation in the official structures of Nordic cooperation. In this way, Nordic cooperation was an indispensable part of Ålandic paradiplomacy during the Cold War era, when Finland's engagement with European integration remained limited. The potential abolishment or loss of such a platform was considered a serious problem for Åland, as it considered these informal networks a result of formal participation – as opposed to the state parties, which maintained official bilateral diplomatic relations. Norden was portrayed as distinct from, and superior to, the rest of Europe, characterized by its people-to-people ties, its "societal model", and its non-coercive, non-centralizing form of cooperation.

Europe, and thereby European integration (in the form of the EC/EU), was framed as a centralizing and universalistic threat to the particularistic basis of Åland's autonomy. Moreover, the sense of accelerated integration after the Cold War era gave the EU a coercive and domineering presence in the otherwise consensual and non-centralized Nordic region. Nevertheless, as the process went on between 1992 and 1994, Ålandic representatives adopted a somewhat more optimistic view on the EU accepting the need for derogations for Åland and acknowledging "its status according to international law". The concept of Europe was essentially equated with the European integration process, despite Åland and Norden being geographically European as well. Åland also hoped to be an agent for stability in the Baltic Sea region, which was in turbulence after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Compared to the Faroe Islands or Greenland, Europe represented a more significant political question for Åland. This was not simply due to its geopolitical integration with Finland and Sweden who themselves were oriented towards the EU, but also because the EU directly affected important Ålandic matters, such as the continuation of tax-free sales and agricultural policy. This contrasted with the lack of derogations for key North Atlantic industries, notably fisheries.

Overall, this period was a time of uncertainty and anxiety for Åland's representatives in the Nordic Council. One of their main concerns was the potential loss of their most important platform for paradiplomacy within a larger European context, accompanied by losing a sense of distinctiveness in an era of harmonization and integration.

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