

Statement by Ahti Karjalainen (Geneva, 14 May 1970)

Caption: On 14 May 1970, at the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) ministerial meeting in Geneva, Ahti Karjalainen, Finnish Foreign Minister, outlines the decision of his government not to sign the Nordek Treaty.

Source: Archives historiques des Communautés européennes, Florence, Villa Il Poggiolo. Dépôts, DEP. Edoardo Martino, EM. Coopération nordique 1967-1969, EM 58.

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Statement on European integration by the Finnish Foreign Minister, Ahti Karjalainen, at the EFTA ministerial meeting in Geneva, May 14, 1970

Before entering into the substance of our discussion under this agenda item, I should like to say a few words about the so-called Nordek plan. You may remember that the negotiations on the Nordek treaty were concluded at the beginning of March, and that the draft treaty was submitted to the Nordic governments. The Finnish Government considered that the draft treaty met, as to its contents, our objectives. Having regard, however, to the evolution of European integration my government did not find it warranted to initiate the internal procedures for bringing the treaty into force, and decided that it should not be signed at that stage.

When the change in the attitude of the EEC countries gradually emerged last autumn, the inherent value of Nordek became affected. In other words, its very function as a mechanism for developing a purely intra-Nordic co-operation — which we understood to be the basic feature of the plan — became questionable. As, however, at that moment even the date for the official beginning of the negotiations on the enlargement of the EEC had not been fixed, we did take part in the finalizing of the draft treaty. But when the treaty was ready to be signed my government had to take into account that certain new developments had emerged. We therefore felt that our signing the Nordek treaty could have led to misunderstandings as to our attitude towards the EEC.

The decision of Finland not to sign the Nordek treaty at that stage did of course not reflect a change in our positive attitude towards Nordic co-operation in general. We want by every available means to develop this natural and important collaboration on all possible fields of economic life — as has been the case hitherto.

Naturally, our economic ties with the other Nordic countries form only a part of our trade relations with the outside world. We shall continuously seek to safeguard our economic interests and to maintain our competitive position in all markets. In accordance with this policy, as the negotiations on the enlargement of the European communities are approaching, my government has officially informed the EEC Commission that Finland is interested in opening negotiations with the EEC at a time suitable to both parties with a view to bring about a commercial arrangement compatible with our neutrality.

It is still too early to predict in detail the arrangements that may emerge from our discussions with the EEC. But our basic attitude is clear, our approach towards the EEC is based on our neutrality and our economic interests. We are not contemplating any kind of membership relation with the EEC. We seek an arrangement of a purely commercial nature with certain definite aims in mind. First, the very great share of both EFTA and EEC markets of our foreign trade make it vitally important for us to maintain our competitive position on an enlarged EEC market. Secondly, we seek comprehensive solutions which would safeguard the growth of our exports in all fields. Thirdly, we want to ensure the maintenance of EFTA benefits. Indeed, the rebuilding of trade barriers or the creation of new ones cannot be in anyone's interest.

Our approach to the EEC Commission is also an evidence of our conviction that the neutral countries have a role to play in the development towards a trade system in Europe where barriers to the free exchange of goods are removed. To our mind neutrality is well compatible with participation in economic and technical co-operation with both Western and Eastern Europe. We consider this an important means of pursuing the aims of our foreign policy. I should add that we have noted with satisfaction that the EEC countries have shown interest and understanding in regard to the position of neutral countries.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I should like to welcome the recommendations to ministers made by the Council at official level regarding the procedure for exchange of information and consultation on forthcoming negotiations and discussions between EFTA countries and the EEC. We attach great importance to this collaboration in Finefta and look forward to the full exchange of information at every of the negotiations, to the benefit of all concerned.