

'Finland, a bridgehead between Russia and NATO' from Combat (30 October 1955)

Caption: On 30 October 1955, in the wake of the Finnish Parliament's vote in favour of accession to the Nordic Council, the French newspaper Combat emphasises the strategic importance of Finland to the Soviet Union.

Source: Combat. 29.-30.10.1955. [s.l.]. "Finlande, pont avancé entre la Russie et l'OTAN", auteur:Andersen, Georges , p. 1;9.

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Finland, a bridgehead between Russia and NATO

Yesterday afternoon, the Finnish Parliament voted unanimously to join the Nordic Council.

The Nordic Council was formed in 1952 under the auspices of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. Hitherto, its members were Denmark, Iceland and Norway. Although the Council had confined itself strictly to non-strategic issues (in particular, coordination of national initiatives and resources with regard to the labour market, tourism, trade, customs and cultural activities), the Kremlin has looked at it askance, denouncing it on more than one occasion as a by-product of the Atlantic coalition. Accordingly, for reasons of 'prestige and security', it had always opposed Finnish membership.

Two months have now elapsed, and the situation is completely different. Events have moved much faster than expected. The great clearing of the air among the Four in Geneva was followed by the visit of Juho Kusti Paasikivi and Urho Kaleva Kekkonen to Moscow. The Soviet leadership, having 'reconsidered the matter', has decided to allow, and even encourage, Finland to join the 'Club of the Nordic States', where its work is henceforth bound to be useful 'from the viewpoint of peace as well as that of Soviet Russia.'

Killing two birds with one stone

The time is well chosen. The handing back of Porkkala ensures greater popularity and a more solid basis within Finland itself for the policy of frank and loyal collaboration with the USSR initiated by the President of the Republic, Mr Paasikivi, to which Mr Kekkonen has adhered and is now conforming more closely than ever. Permitting Helsinki to join the Nordic Council, or suggesting that it does so, allows the Russians to kill two birds with one stone. *On the level of Finnish domestic politics*, it strengthens the position of the Kekkonen government, which has been criticised by its Conservative, Liberal and Social Democratic opponents for isolationism, i.e. for 'obstructing' the parliamentary assembly of the Scandinavian states. *On the international level*, Finland's accession will soon 'neutralise' the Council, whose prima ballerinas (the Prime Ministers of the Nordic countries) will no longer be able to meet without their Finnish colleague.

Heroic enemy and faithful client

Although new horizons are opening up for Finland, it will certainly not be easy for the country to move out of the Russian orbit. It is held there by economic factors even more than political considerations. The substantial fall in world prices for cellulose and timber threw the economy of the heroic Finnish people into deep crisis. Nevertheless, by 1952, Finland's foreign debt, which amounted to half a billion dollars in 1930, had been cut by half. That was largely due to its trade with the USSR, which is still predominant. In the first half of 1953, Finnish exports to Russia reached 17 600 million Finnmarks, i.e. 25.6 % of total exports, while imports from that country amounted to 15 700 million (22.3 %). In 1954, exports to the Soviet Union accounted for 29.5 % of Finland's total exports, resulting in a surplus of 70 million roubles, part of which (20 million roubles' worth) was to be paid into the Finnish Treasury in gold and the rest in 'solid' currencies (sterling or Swiss francs). In addition, under an agreement signed in February 1954, Finland has been granted a three-year loan of 40 million roubles (or 8 887 kg of gold). It can draw on the loan in dollars or in other currencies, as it prefers, provided it makes repayments in the same currencies at an interest rate of 2.5 %.

Significantly, Britain, which was Finland's best customer for decades before the war, is now only in second place (18.4 % of Finnish exports in 1954, compared with 23.7 % in 1953), while the United States comes third, with only 7.5 %.

The men of the moment

The fact is that Finland enjoys 'preferential' treatment by the Soviet leaders. Obviously, Finnish politicians know this and permit themselves attitudes and decisions that would be unimaginable on the part of Russia's other neighbours or 'protected countries'. One example will suffice. A few months ago, the Helsinki Government was formally invited to take part in the Warsaw conference on Eastern European security. Its

reply was a clear and categoric refusal. Yet Moscow took no offence, as proved by the scale, warmth and outcome of the Finnish statesmen's recent visit to Moscow.

In addition, Finland is fortunate enough to be not only an inexhaustible source of champion marathon runners, it has also produced a long line of men of the moment like Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim, Pehr Evind Svinhufvud and Kyösti Kallio, of whom Juho Paasikivi is only the latest.

A passionate cross-country skier, Paasikivi combines the skills of a good administrator (he was Director of the country's largest private bank for 20 years) with those of a scholar and a diplomat and possesses a deep understanding of human psychology. His extensive study of the Slavonic languages has certainly contributed to his success. But apart from his diploma as a teacher of Russian language and literature, his chief asset in dealing with Moscow is his perfect knowledge of the ways of thought of the great Russian nation. That is why, despite his bourgeois origins, his education, and the unshakable convictions of an old Conservative, the Kremlin leaders prefer him to some of their strictly orthodox Marxist partners.

Despite his 85 years, Paasikivi currently seems 'indispensable and irreplaceable' to both the Finns and the Russians. No wonder his friends in Helsinki and Moscow, and even those who have no liking for him, are seeking to persuade him to prolong his 'reign'.

Georges Andersen