

Address given by Martti Ahtisaari on relations between Finland and Sweden in a changing Europe (Stockholm, 14 April 1994)

Caption: On 14 April 1994, Martti Ahtisaari, President of the Republic of Finland, delivers an address at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs in Stockholm on relations between Finland and Sweden in the future Europe of the Fifteen.

Source: Speech by President Martti Ahtisaari at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs in Stockholm, April 14, 1994. [ON-LINE]. [Helsinki]: The President of the Republic of Finland 1994-2000, mise à jour 18.02.2000[28.07.2003]. Available on http://www.valtioneuvosto.fi/tpk/eng/speeches/speech_texts-1994.html.

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Publication date: 04/09/2012

Relations between Finland and Sweden in a changing Europe

Ladies and gentlemen,

Recent changes in the international system have shown that foreign and security policy can be pursued successfully only on a basis of exact knowledge. We need research of a high standard, and extensive discussion among experts.

The Swedish Institute of International Affairs enjoys great prestige; it has provided a meeting place for students of international relations and commissioned important research. I wish it every success in its work.

It is also my pleasure to be able to speak today at the Institute.

I consider it important that researchers continue to have sufficient interest in relations between our various countries and in their history and substance. This is an area which unfortunately still lacks sufficient recognition as a central factor in our international relations and standing. It deserves such recognition, however. We can also hope that adequate attention will be focused on the history of these relations in the curricula of our schools.

I shall be concentrating on a review of Finnish-Swedish relations amid the changed conditions in Europe.

Relations between our countries are good, but do not lack new or demanding challenges. The historical relationship between Finland and Sweden is a special one, but it is also more than that.

President J.K. Paasikivi wrote in his diary that there may be no issues between Sweden and Finland which either party is unaware of or would not wish to discuss. I concur with this view.

Our societies are part of a single area with homogeneous values and culture and we are both part of Scandinavia. Frontiers do not separate us; rather, they have brought us closer together and will continue to do so.

Despite the similarities in our societies and cultures, we have occupied different geopolitical positions. This fact has affected our international status and our choices of foreign policy. The significance of geopolitics will not disappear as rapidly as the media would have us believe.

Finland and Sweden have much history in common - in fact we have a shared history; for 600 years Finland was the eastern part (rikshalva) of the Kingdom of Sweden. Gustavus Vasa, like all the other kings of Sweden, was also the ruler of the Finns. Nevertheless, the political separation of Finland and Sweden was part of an inevitable historical process.

The political separation of Finland from Sweden was not merely the consequence of linguistic differences or geography; it can instead be largely attributed to geopolitics. Finland was and remains Russia's neighbour, a geopolitical area, a borderland separating Sweden from Russia.

At Tilsit Finland obtained a new ruler, but not a new political or social system. Finland had developed as part of the Kingdom of Sweden over the centuries. Finns had become masters of their own land. It was, however, through the political union with Sweden that we created the foundation of our own identity, of a Finnish nation.

When Alexander I formally elevated Finland to the status of nation at the Diet of Porvoo in 1809, the ground for eventual complete independence had already been broken.

The Swedish constitutions and other laws remained effective in Finland, as did the Swedish administrative model on the whole. The autocratic Tsar of Russia was the constitutional Grand Duke of Finland. The union of Finland with Russia did not cut cultural ties with Sweden. Even after independence, our constitutional

acts retained much from the Swedish era.

Since gaining our independence, we have discovered the importance of politico-geographical position for the history of our countries. Sweden was unable to defend Finnish territory. As an independent state, we have been able to maintain our position. We have pursued our own foreign policy and been prepared to defend our country at great sacrifice. Our defensive efforts in 1939-40 and in 1944 were crucial to the foundation on which security was built in the other Nordic countries after the Second World War.

The material and moral support offered by Sweden to Finland during the war was significant.

Amid the major changes that have occurred on our continent this century we have nevertheless taken a different approach in security policy from our neighbour Sweden.

Now we are again confronting change in the international community. Are our roads converging?

Ladies and gentlemen:

European integration and the collapse of communism have opened the way for the evolution of a continent based on shared values and co-operation. Historical ties between the countries and nations of Europe are being restored. The Baltic States are free. They are gradually being integrated with the countries around the Baltic Sea and more broadly with the European Union. Russia still faces decades of change, but we can already recognize that its vast territory will also be inevitably integrated more closely with the rest of Europe, although at a different rate. This will mean changes in existing geopolitical relations.

However, Russia will remain a great power, whose interests will be decided accordingly. Russia cannot be a mere part of the European area of integration and security. The same also applies to certain other large countries in this region.

Russia is also a Russia of regions. St. Petersburg and its surrounding areas, Karelia and Kola will have greater opportunities for economic and cultural ties with the Nordic countries.

With the exception of Iceland, the Nordic countries may soon be members of the European Union. Differences between the Nordic countries with respect to international politics, and what their varying positions meant or would mean for European integration, may come to an end in 1995. I indeed hope that all the Nordic countries seeking membership will be able to enter the Union at the same time. The decision rests with our citizens.

There is every reason to give thorough consideration to the diverse implications of the changes confronting us.

Finland and Sweden now find themselves in a similar position with regard to security policy. In a speech on Mannerheim given on June 4, 1992, which aroused considerable attention, Prime Minister Carl Bildt noted that "the basic requirements of the foreign and security policies of both Sweden and Finland are closer today than ever before in the modern era".

I can readily understand that this perspective is prominent in our appraisal of the current situation, but we cannot be certain that the present course of development in Europe will continue to be entirely positive. Peace in Europe still rests on unstable foundations.

Finland and Sweden have concluded their negotiations concerning membership of the European Union. Are we now setting off on the same road in foreign and security policy, or at least heading in the same direction?

The question is that we will strengthen European security by steadfastly developing the kind of relations that bind all European countries. Both Finland and Sweden agree that enlargement of the European Union is the best guarantee of developments that will further stability on our continent.

Three factors are closely related to thinking on Finnish security policy:

- (1) We need to make our own contribution to maintaining peace in the world, primarily in Europe and our own region. This will be supported by
- (2) maintaining a credible national defence capability, and
- (3) our efforts to develop the CSCE and other regional security provisions.

These same factors are central to assessments of security policy in Sweden. This will be of significance when we eventually contribute to the common foreign and defence policy of the European Union. The Union is seeking to develop its role as a factor in international policy by relying on the foundation of values provided by the CSCE. Finland and Sweden share the assumption that by developing the common foreign and security policy of the EU, we will create the best environment for closer co-operation between the Nordic countries and northwestern Russia.

Europe should gradually form a security area in which the defence systems would make war between the countries in the region or threats of military action impossible. In the next few years there must be dispassionate discussion of these issues, with strengthening of our common security as the goal.

Changes in international relations and possible EU membership will also make Nordic co-operation more important. The Nordic countries will, of course, reflect their own interests in the EU, which will bring issues pertaining to northern Europe more strongly to the fore in common EU foreign and security policy. I am certain that this can only be an advantage for the development of the EU.

Ladies and gentlemen:

Finland, Sweden, Norway and Austria have applied for EU membership on the basis of their own national interests, and made their own independent assessments of what is best for them.

The European Union will depend for a long time to come on co-operation between nation-states, but also on competition, albeit regulated competition, between them.

The European Union is a unique combination of states, a community. Our continent is undergoing a process of profound change, high unemployment and a period of uncertainty for democratic institutions. Europeans must, however, rediscover their self-confidence. Here the European Union will play the key role.

The White Paper aimed specifically at reducing unemployment, approved at the Union summit in December 1993, constitutes one of the main points of departure for efforts to eliminate mass unemployment.

Finland and Sweden are welfare societies which are now undergoing a demanding period of reform. The European Union will offer them a natural environment in which these reforms can advance steadily.

We now face an era of great opportunity, which we must not lose by focusing excessively on the fears of the past.

EU membership would mean a step which in my opinion would best ensure the permanent historical closeness of Finland and Sweden. EU membership will open a new page in relations between our countries.

Ladies and gentlemen:

Relations between states come down in the final analysis to relations between their citizens. Since the Middle Ages, Finns have moved to Sweden and Swedes to Finland, and they have also traded.

The greatest wave of migration in our history took place in the 1960s, when hundreds of thousands of Finns went to Sweden in search of work. Thus Finns in Sweden came to form the largest ethnic minority there and to play an active part in Swedish society.

Today, some 500,000 people of Finnish origin live in Sweden; they are not temporary immigrants, but Nordic citizens, living in a Nordic country. Through their hard work and stamina they have earned their place in Sweden. While reading Peter Englund's fine work "Ofredsår," I came across Per Brahe's description of the Finns. This is how Englund put it:

"The fact is that many considered the Finns more hard-working than the native Swedes; as Governor General Per Brahe said in 1638, "When people from this country go to Sweden and elsewhere, one man works as hard as three others, and they go speedily about anything they do."

Finns have won their special status in Sweden over the centuries.

Ladies and gentlemen:

Finland and Sweden face a historic challenge. The governments of our countries have negotiated good terms for EU membership. It is important to discuss the importance of membership and to build national mutual understanding.

The European Union will offer us a means to respond positively to the challenges of worldwide economic competition and co-operation in security. Let us, Finns and Swedes alike, be part of this process for which we now have a historic opportunity.