

# Enlarging a Security Community: Competition in the High North

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*The paper outlines the foundations of the "Nordic balance" as a low tension zone in the bipolar Europe during the Cold War. The co-operation in regional "security community", as perceived by Karl Deutsch shares certain common feelings and practices closely related to the orientation of peaceful change. Such "community" was created as both effective and natural, and this process was not imposed through a formal framework of supranational institutions. However, after the events of 1989-91 the Nordic balance disappeared while the security community was preserved. These events transformed the North European security situation creating two pillars of "parallel action", one consisting of Denmark, Sweden and Finland, and the other of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania*

**KW:** Nordic balance, bi-polarity, security community

## 1. Introduction

During the Cold War, the Nordic countries formed a low-tension zone in bipolar Europe. Sweden was a neutral in the middle of the zone, Finland was a Soviet-dependent neutral to the East, and Denmark and Norway were low-profile members of NATO to the West. The low profile meant, i.a., that they did not host foreign bases or nuclear weapons on their mainland territories. The philosophy behind the so-called 'Nordic balance' was that Soviet power abstention vis a vis Finland was a prerequisite for the Danish and Norwegian low profiles in NATO - and vice versa.

Moreover, since the beginning of the century the Nordic countries have jointly constituted a so-called 'security community'. This concept, as framed by the American political scientist Karl W. Deutsch, means a group of people who have attained a sense of community, a 'we feeling', and institutions and practices strong enough to assure dependable expectations of peaceful change. This means, in turn, the solution of mutual problems without resort to large-scale physical violence<sup>1</sup>.

According to Deutsch, transactions such as communication, trade and tourism should lead to convergences in culture and a high degree of interdependence, paving the way for a security community. It may arise without the establishment of supranational institutions; the Nordic countries since 1907, or the US and Canada since 1870, are mentioned as examples of such 'pluralistic' security communities.

This peacefulness, both **among** the Nordic countries and as a low-tension area in virtue of the Nordic balance, marked a difference to the military build-up in Central Europe during the Cold War and to violent conflicts in other parts of the world. Although it was **basically** due to favourable geopolitical fundamentals, probably, rather than popular transactions as such or any inherent peacefulness, the peaceful state of affairs was good PR for the region and its countries. The Nordic countries' solid support for the UN as such and contributions to UN peace-keeping forces in particular served to underpin this image. Unavoidably, there was occasionally a certain self-righteous flavour to this role as 'world conscience'.

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## 2. Cooperation and Competition

After the big European turbulence 1989-91, with the East European revolutions and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Nordic security community is still intact, but the Nordic balance is gone. As elsewhere, the power configurations of Northern Europe have been transformed. Apart from the Russian great power, mostly preoccupied with its internal problems, what has developed in Northern Europe during the post-Cold War era seems to be two pillars of 'parallel action'. The first one consists of Denmark, Sweden and Finland; the second one of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. In addition, we have West-Norden in the form of Norway, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands. I shall focus here mainly on the former of the two parallel action pillars, even though, of course, the remaining landscape is a vital prerequisite for understanding its dynamics.

What is parallel action, then? **Parallel action** is carried out by units with the same values, roughly the same resource base and the same task environment<sup>2</sup>. Denmark, Sweden and Finland share the values of protestant democracy and egalitarianism. Protestant democracy refers to century-long diffusion from the religious sector to broader societal layers, translating the protestant 'priesthood of all believers' to preferences for non-hierarchical modes of political organisation, including participatory democracy, grass-root influence, etc. Egalitarianism refers to the economic counterpart to this phenomenon, emphasising the reduction of cleavages between rich and poor, both domestically and on a global scale. Also, the countries have a roughly similar resource base ('small states', to use an unfruitful but accepted term). They all share the EU agenda and have Baltic Sea shores. With the prevailing great power restraint, this latter feature gives them the re-emerged states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as essential task environments and cooperation partners - although not partners on an equal footing with themselves.

This leads to a pattern of parallel action among Denmark, Sweden, and Finland, meaning both cooperation and competition. Cooperation/mutual inspiration and competition/jealousy/rivalry in this sense are actually two sides of the same coin. The more you cooperate, the more you have in common, and therefore the more you can quarrel about. You can quarrel about coordination or its absence, who should take the honour for this or that initiative, and so on. For every assistance effort there is a credit side, but the more credit to one party, the less to another, evidently. But what is the ultimate issue in all

this, then? One issue is, of course, who (if any) should be the informal leader of the so-called 'Baltic sea region'.

That is not just a question of which capital should be visited by president Clinton or who should host the secretariat of the Council of Baltic Sea States. It is a question of the popularly underestimated, but nonetheless important, commodity of political prestige - that we are familiar with from a great power context. Political prestige is a convertible currency that is important, since it can be used as an asset in future situations; 'we can speak with added weight in various fora'. My point here is just that this competition is something natural; there is nothing embarrassing about it, as it is sometimes depicted in Nordic media. Parallel action is what could be theoretically expected in view of the three preconditions mentioned above, also in a security community.

There are nuances, of course. The advantages of Sweden and Finland in this competition are their 'true' Balticness in geographical terms and the real historical and mental ties to countries on the opposite shores, being largely absent in the Danish case. Denmark's advantage, on the other hand, is its status as the only Nordic country being both a NATO and an EU member. Finland borders Russia and this makes for greater caution in high politics, but it also has its special relationship with Estonia, geographically and linguistically conditioned. The Finnish relative indifference to Latvia and Lithuania during the EU enlargement process, compared to the postures of Denmark and Sweden, sustains the view that the Danish and Swedish overall leadership ambitions are stronger than that of Finland. Still, Finland is unwilling to accept someone else's leadership. In rough outline, it seems that the three countries in question constitute a leadership troika regarding regional cooperation and influence on Estonia, whereas Denmark and Sweden form a corresponding duo in relation to Latvia and a troika together with Poland in relation to Lithuania.

What about Norway, then? Norway shares values with those in the parallel action pillar, has approximately the same resource base, but a different task environment. Bordering Russia to the 'North of the North', the Barents cooperation is more important for Norway than the distant Baltic countries; specific interests like oil, fish and nuclear waste are at stake (of course, Norway displays a certain interest in the Baltic Sea cooperation in return for others doing the same regarding Barents, but that is marginal after all). In the Cold War setting, Denmark

and Norway performed parallel action within NATO, because they were both frontline states and could therefore support each other in giving credibility to the same low profile. Denmark, having got rid of such concerns from 1988-89, and Norway, being moreover outside the EU, whose agenda is common to the parallel action states, Norway is indeed the odd man out in political terms, together with Iceland (not performing any less successfully for that reason, one should add).

One can argue, of course, whether to label the parallel action pillar 'Nordic'. Firstly, however, that would be an insult to Norway and Iceland. Secondly, 'Nordic' gives it a flavour of romanticism that is quite out of tune with realities. As the parallel action pillar functions, it is very much the national interests of Denmark, the national interests of Sweden, and the national interests of Finland that are being pursued in mutual cooperation and competition. There is much more high politics in the relations between these countries today than ever since at least 1949<sup>3</sup>.

With the three countries all being EU members and sharing the Nordic values and task environment described above, the 'North-EU' pillar is probably the most precise label.

### 3. Enlarging a Security Community?

It has been suggested to incorporate the Balts in the established Nordic cooperation machinery, the Nordic Council and Nordic Council of Ministers. Still, adding 5+3 to become 8 does not change the real political picture in the North, which is one of 3+3, the two pillars of parallel action. An institutional amendment of this type cannot change geopolitical fundamentals, and hardly even modify their implications. However, in addition to improving the virtues of the 3+3 structure in itself, the North-EU pillar can support the Baltic one on its way into the EU. In particular Denmark and Sweden are willing to make that effort on a comprehensive basis. Currently, the EU with its 'soft security' is what seems realistic (and sufficient) for the Balts, given the reserved attitudes among larger NATO-countries regarding enlargement and given progress in Russian disarmament. The long-term ambition that Denmark,

Sweden and Finland seem to nurture is to transform the Baltic Sea region in its entirety into a security community. This must, by necessity, involve Russia in the process. If and when the Baltic countries have gained EU membership, a necessary - though hardly sufficient - prerequisite for such a community to be established is a stable and interdependent EU-Russia relationship.

Evidently, the Nordic countries, including Denmark, Sweden and Finland, do still constitute a security community among themselves. But even a security community may have its political rivalries. However, being a security community is no longer a Nordic privilege in the Europe of stable EC/EU integration. Also, the three countries have now included an area in their task environment that is in no way a security community, i.e. the Baltic eastern shore. Even though Denmark, Sweden and Finland have renounced sole responsibility for the Balts' security, referring it to the EU or NATO as a whole, they have put their prestige at risk on the consolidation and prosperity of the Baltic states and, in a long-term perspective, probably an enlargement of their own security community to the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea. Apart from the inherent risk, it entails opportunity as well.

Should they be successful in their endeavour, this might actually be as much of a PR triumph as the 'world conscience' role during the Cold War, and enhance the countries' own regional prestige. It amounts, if successful, to the **'exporting' of security beyond their own area, not only displaying of the area's own peacefulness to the world around as during the Cold War.**

Admittedly, the countries also tried to export security during the Cold War through UN peace-keeping forces. However, much less prestige was involved in those faraway operations that were (and are) in fact a kind of foreign aid by other means. In the Baltic neighbourhood, by contrast, geopolitical, goeconomic and ideological self-interest is much more obvious and specific. High politics is at stake for each of the three countries. ■

#### NOTES

My analysis is not necessarily representing the view of DUPI, the Danish Institute of International Affairs, and even less any official Danish view. It is based solely on my own analysis as an independent researcher.

1 Karl W. Deutsch, *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area*, Princeton University Press, 1957.

2 The term was coined by the Danish-Californian researcher Gunnar Nielsson, although it is defined and applied differently here.

3 Clive Archer and the present author have dealt with this in a more nuanced way in *Danish Foreign Policy Yearbook 1997* than space allows here.