

Martti Ahtisaari, The Nordic countries in the changing international community

Caption: On 18 October 1994, Martti Ahtisaari, President of the Republic of Finland, delivers an address at the University of Oslo on the role of the Nordic countries in the rapidly evolving international community.

Source: State visit by the President of the Republic to Norway, October 18-20, 1994; Speech at the University of Oslo 19.10.1994. [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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The end of the Cold War has transformed our conception of the world. It is no longer dominated by an all-pervasive struggle between political ideologies. Democracy, free enterprise and respect for human rights have been accepted as the basis for the development of societies throughout Europe and beyond. Nordic values have assumed worldwide significance.

Viewed from the Nordic countries, the greatest change has been the end to the political division of Europe. In the process, the environment of the Nordic countries has also been transformed. Our neighbours are now a Russia, which is seeking to establish a democratic order; Baltic States, having regained their independence; and a Central Europe no longer split by front lines.

Processes aimed at peace and conciliation have been initiated on other continents as well. Many apparently unsolvable conflicts have been brought to a peaceful end.

By virtue of its diplomatic skills, Norway has taken a place in the front rank of peacemakers. The example of Norway in the area of preventive diplomacy and global issues is also a source of pride for the other Nordic countries. It shows what the Nordic countries, small as they are, can achieve through bold effort.

We in Finland cherish the great work of Johan Jørgen Holst, making a durable peace accessible in the Middle East. Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland has made a valuable contribution to the solution of global environmental and social problems. The work done by Thornvald Stoltenberg for peace in the Ex-Yugoslavia conflict deserves everyone's support.

Belonging to the Nordic family has provided us Finns with the strength to endure difficult periods in our history. By force of circumstance, the Nordic countries pursued divergent security policies after the Second World War. Then too, Finland and Norway understood and respected each other's policies. A practical approach to co-operation produced results.

There are no longer issues which our countries cannot discuss openly and freely. Political transformation in Europe has also contributed to joint assessment of issues of security policy. Finland considers it important to preserve open channels of discussion between the Nordic countries.

The positive image we Finns have of Norway and its inhabitants has been further enhanced. Your country is blessed with unique natural beauty and abundant resources. We associate these assets with steady economic development and a rich cultural life. All Finns are aware of Norway's achievements in sports.

Regardless of our respective decisions regarding the EU, Finland shall work to maintain and increase mutual agreement between the Nordic countries. No other approach would be accepted by our peoples.

Being Nordic for Finns is a value in itself - as it surely is for Norwegians as well. It is like family tie, which is not for sale.

We share the common dream of a Nordic welfare society based on democracy, the rule of law, a benign market economy, equality and a profound commitment to social responsibility.

As members of the EU, the Nordic countries will also have to play an active role in many important issues. I believe that it is natural for us to work for common goals in many areas.

Under changing circumstances, Nordic cooperation should continue to be based on its traditional strengths: practical attitudes and flexible methods. I would add one further component: no one Nordic country should feel left out. In view of relations between the Nordic countries throughout their history, I do not state this lightly.

I would like to comment briefly on the decision to join the EU made by the Finnish people in last Sunday's

referendum. I am convinced that the Finnish Parliament will respect the will of the people and approve the Treaty of Accession.

For decades, economic facts have provided the incentive for Finland's decisions regarding free trade and integration. Our free trade agreement with the EU countries forms the backbone of our foreign trade. Our economic recovery is based on exports, most of which are directed to the EU area.

We would like to take part in decisions on economic and political developments which will in any case concern us.

The membership process has lasted nearly three years. Adjustment may take even longer. It is vital that we, on the basis of national consensus, support those for whom adjustment is most difficult.

Finland continues to pursue its long-term foreign policy, which is equally affected by a desire for co-operation and realism. Here, too, continuity in foreign policy is the dominant factor, and one which we need not compromise.

After the end of the Cold War, Finland pursues a foreign policy which consists of military non-alliance and an independent, credible defence.

In her foreign policy, Finland has tried to strengthen European cooperation. We have participated in the development of the CSCE process. Finland is an observer in the North Atlantic Cooperation Council NACC and participates in the NATO Partnership for Peace programme. When joining the European Union Finland could on good grounds apply for an observer status in the Western European Council, WEU. The decision would be founded on the national interests of Finland, and it would also be in harmony with the policy we are pursuing.

It must be admitted that Europe is not the haven of peace and harmony which we hoped it would become at the end of the Cold War. The outbreak of a number of conflicts on our continent at virtually the same time has been a shock. It is especially tragic that it has not been possible to extinguish the flames of war in the former Yugoslavia.

At present, there is no general agreement in Europe regarding security issues. A half decade has passed since the end of the Cold War. If the inhabitants of Europe do not perceive an increase in their security, there is a danger that our continent will once again divide.

Some noteworthy initiatives have already been made. NATO's partnership for peace offers flexible opportunities for co-operation, and many countries have expressed an interest in them. The proposal for a European Stability Pact seeks to settle problematic regional interests on general European premises.

Development of institutions is an essential means to increase security. More fundamental, concrete means of reducing conflicts are needed. Contacts across borders reduce prejudice. There are many areas in Europe where normal contacts have not been possible. Neighbouring peoples, who have been isolated from one another for decades, must be brought together as friends so that they do not confront each other as enemies.

Lively contacts between the Nordic countries and the Baltic states have been resumed on the basis of their geographical and historical proximity. The sovereignty of the Baltic states has been strengthened and the outlook for development is promising. Contacts among citizens have been made at an unprecedented rate. In Finland probably no other area of foreign policy has enjoyed such unreserved support on the part of citizens as improvement of relations with the Baltic states.

The Nordic countries are expected to play a key role in anchoring the Baltic states to Europe. The Baltic states should have the same opportunities as the rest of Europe in resolving issues of significance for the future. Likewise, the Baltic states are expected to observe European standards in building their societies. We already have positive experience of collaboration.

The international community is now richer since Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have assumed their rightful places as independent European nations. I am convinced that all support for their development will remain a high goal of the Nordic countries.

It is said that developments in Russia constitute the major question mark in Europe. Finland and Norway have shared common frontiers with Russia for centuries. Economic progress and alleviation of social and environmental problems in Russia, especially in its northwestern region, would also be of great benefit to neighbouring countries. Stability would increase, trade would expand, contacts between people across frontiers would be an everyday occurrence. This would also apply particularly to Russia's neighbours in northern Europe. Russia must feel welcome in the European and regional community.

Economically, nearby areas of Russia will become growth centres, at least in the long term. They have abundant natural resources that will require international collaboration for exploitation. The partnership and co-operation agreement signed by the European Union and Russia may prove to be the document that stakes out the course for co-operation on our Continent into the distant future. The promotion of broadly based security deserves everyone's support.

Geographically, Finland and Norway meet near the Arctic Ocean. The inhabitants of the North Cap region have traditionally moved about in response to natural conditions and to the dictates of their livelihoods with scant regard for national frontiers. The Finns who originally moved from northern Finland to the Finnmark district of Norway are an example of such migration.

Thus far, the North Cap view has been unfamiliar to most Europeans. Arctic co-operation has indeed picked up momentum only since the end of the Cold War. Several countries in Europe and North America have recently become interested in the economic development of the Arctic and in alleviating its acute environmental problems.

The Nordic countries should - together with other countries - work to assure that problems in the area receive the attention they deserve from the international community. The Barents Euroarctic Council and the Rovaniemi Process offer good prospects for dealing with Arctic issues.

The consequences of environmental neglect in Arctic areas now require urgent action. On a local scale, air pollution in some areas has seriously impaired the quality of human life itself. Careless treatment of nuclear wastes poses a threat to people now living in the area and generations to come.

Co-operation among the nations around the Baltic Sea has developed rapidly. Political change has resulted in a decisive improvement in the prospects for collaboration among all countries in the region, as in the Council of Baltic Sea States. The reopening of old trade routes is helping to revive traditional solidarity between the nations and peoples of the Baltic Sea region. Repair of the destruction of recent decades is also an issue in this region.

We must narrow the economic gap opening up on the eastern frontier of the Nordic countries. Ensuring the overall stability of northern Europe is vital to other development. Here the Nordic countries themselves bear considerable responsibility. Use of our own limited resources for this purpose is in order, but they alone will not be enough.

Transatlantic ties are important to the maritime regions of northern Europe. They are of great significance both to Norway, with its Atlantic coast, to the other Nordic countries and to the rest of Europe.

Finland values Norway's initiative in increasing co-operation within northern Europe. In a short time the Barents Council has become a significant regional forum. Norway has also been quick to undertake cooperation with Russia to resolve problems affecting the development of Northern Norway and northwestern Russia. Initiatives of this kind are a positive signal on a European scale.

"Were it only possible for the rest of humanity to share this simple peace and freedom of the Norwegian mountains, how much happier the world's millions would be!"

These beautiful words of Trygve Lie, picture the wish of Norway and of all Nordic countries to live in peace and freedom. This is the ground from which Norway's faith in the future and her endeavours for conciliation are growing and for which the international community gives its recognition.