

FINNISH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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Minister Antti Tanskanen, Chairman of the Board

In Finland, it is seldom that the Parliament founds an institution independent from the organizational structure of the government and other public institutions. However, this was the case on June 1, 2006 when the Parliament founded the Finnish Institute of International Affairs to celebrate its own 100th anniversary as well as that of universal suffrage in Finland. The only truly comparable case is Sitra, the Finnish Innovation Fund, which was founded to honour Finland's 50th day of independence. The ceremonial decision and its preparations reflect the need to strengthen independent research on international and EU affairs, but where did the need for a new institute and its exceptional position come from?

Finland lacked an institution situated between university research and political decision-making, with the ability to analyse international affairs and EU decision-making and with the capability to support the public discussion related to these issues. This was noted in the bill on founding the Institute. In addition, the preamble of the bill noted the rapidly developing and changing world of international cooperation.

The preparations for founding the Institute were completed quickly. The bill on the Institute, which was signed by Parliamentarians from all political parties, was tabled on 30 March 2006. The new Institute was founded two months later. The work on building up the Institute's organization began, and the old Institute, funded by a foundation, provided a firm base for developing the Institute's work.

The bill and its preamble are future-oriented. The Parliament wanted to provide the institution with an independent status, without restricting its field of action. On the contrary, the Institute is to cover fields of academic research as widely as possible. The Parliament also sought to ensure that the research conducted at the Institute be of use. The research is to reflect the need for analysis and accurate information on topical questions, which the Institute's partners, especially the state administration, have. The Institute is to be able to adjust to changing circumstances and to be capable of producing high-quality research even under tight deadlines. In addition to research, its tasks are to include organizing conferences and seminars, publishing reports and other publications, intensifying its international cooperation and maintaining contacts with political decision-makers and the civil society both in Finland and internationally. Key concepts include independent expertise, active participation, in-depth discussion and support for political decision-making.

As preparations for founding the Institute were being made, doubts were expressed as to the Institute's ability to maintain enough independence to guarantee the autonomy and high quality of research under the auspices of the Parliament. While thoughts like these are understandable, the Parliament has emphasized the separation between itself and the Institute and has kept to it excellently. Of course, when making assessments like these, it needs to be remembered that the Institute has functioned for only a year. By necessity, the year has been a transition phase, during which the administration and activities of the Institute have been built up to match the Institute's new position. This has been reflected in the work of the board of the Institute: it has held altogether 12 meetings in the year 2007.

The Institute's board represents various facets of the Finnish society: it consists of academics and officials from administration, leading political parties and other central figures within the state administration. The decision-making powers of the board are complemented by an advisory council, to which members are nominated by the Parliament. The council consists of representatives of all Parliamentary parties and other actors within the field of international affairs.

The board of the Institute represents its nominator, the Parliament, in guiding and controlling the work done at the Institute. My own experiences of the cooperation between the Institute, the officials and shop stewards at the Parliament have been thoroughly positive. The Speaker's Council as well as the chairpersons of the relevant Parliamentary committees have given their full support to the Institute and its work. I would like to thank them all for the good cooperation. The Institute and its board have sought to deepen and widen cooperation within the public administration and society at large; however, a lot of work remains to be done in this sector.

The Institute's research programme, adopted by the board, covers both global and European angles. The position of Europe and Finland within international relations can only be understood by means of a thorough analysis of international power relations and developments in them. This leads to the need to analyse the future positions of the USA and China, but also those of India and Russia – as well as their policies towards the international society. Changes in power relations and the system of international governance are inseparable. The Institute will pay special attention to international climate and energy policy in its analyses of foreign and security policy issues. While the issues of climate and energy policy as such require specialized knowledge, their impact on the international arena is too great to be left aside from the analyses of political questions.

Finland's position and activity in the international context is largely tied to our membership in the EU. The union binds us in matters of foreign, economic and environmental policies, but, in return, provides us with new resources and enhanced possibilities. Political, military and economic developments in Russia are especially important for both Finland and the European Union. In the near future, it is of utmost importance to kindle the spirit of cooperation in the relations between the EU and Russia. Finland is in a good position to further this goal by taking an active approach within the Union and bilaterally with Moscow.

The Finnish Institute of International Affairs has a unique position in analyzing the institutions and policies of the European Union, and its external relations in particular. It cannot be reasonably expected that the limited resources of the Institute are used to analyse each policy sector in detail. Expertise for this task can be found from ministries, other governmental agencies and private companies. However, it is reasonable to expect that the Institute provide reliable and critical research on the development of the European institutions, policies of the main member states and on the EU's relations with other central international actors.

This viewpoint may be widened by emphasizing the need to look into the relations between the cornerstones of the international system. Thus we here in Finland are forced to look at not just Finland's own relations with China, India, Japan, and Northern America, but also the relations between the USA and the Eastern Asian countries in the various fields of international affairs. It is not irrelevant to Finland how the political and economic relations between the USA and China develop or what kind of environmental policy China and India adopt.

The Finnish Institute of International Affairs is now taking its first steps. Expectations, even critical ones, towards its work have their place, as long as it is remembered that the resources of the Institute are very limited by Scandinavian standards. This also leads the Institute into actively seeking for funding from external sources. From a large pool of candidates, the Institute has succeeded in recruiting researchers who are mainly young, but have already shown their skills in the fields of research and other international activities. The board of the Institute is confident in trusting that the Institute has a strong and successful future ahead of it.