

**FINNISH FOREIGN POLICY DURING  
EU MEMBERSHIP**

**UNLOCKING THE EU'S SECURITY POTENTIAL**

Matti Pesu / Tuomas Iso-Markku / Juha Jokela



## FINNISH FOREIGN POLICY DURING EU MEMBERSHIP: UNLOCKING THE EU'S SECURITY POTENTIAL

This FIIA Finnish Foreign Policy Paper looks at the evolution of Finnish foreign and security policy during the country's 25 years as an EU member. The paper aims to trace how – and with what kind of consequences – Finnish foreign and security policy has interacted with EU foreign policy during the membership period. More specifically, the study examines the interlinkage between Finnish and EU foreign policy in relation to three different topics: the policy towards and relations with Russia, security and defence, and Finland's broadening international agenda.

The paper argues that the Finnish policy vis-à-vis the three domains is marked by different patterns of continuity and change. However, the rise of a protective agenda in the Finnish policy towards Russia, Finland's increased boldness in advancing the EU's security and defence dimension, and the recent emphasis on the Union's role as a bulwark against geo-economic threats all indicate that the EU's role in enhancing Finnish security has become a top priority. Indeed, Finland is currently endeavouring to unlock the EU's potential as a security community.



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# INTRODUCTION

**FINLAND JOINED THE** European Union (EU) in January 1995. Thus, January 2020 marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Finland's EU membership. In view of this milestone, this FIIA Foreign Policy Paper looks at the evolution of Finnish foreign and security policy during the country's quarter of a century as an EU member. In other words, the paper aims to trace how – and with what kind of consequences – Finnish foreign and security policy has interacted with EU foreign policy over the membership period. This means, on the one hand, analysing the kind of changes that being part of the EU has meant for Finnish foreign and security policy and, on the other, assessing Finland's approach towards the overall development of the EU's foreign policy in its different forms and facets.

Obviously, the area of foreign and security policy forms only one part of Finland's comprehensive activity in, and relationship with, the EU and therefore only one part of Finland's 25-year story as an EU member. At the same time, there are good reasons to focus on this area when looking at Finland's path in the EU. First, the link between EU membership and Finnish foreign and security policy has been very close from the start, as the decision to seek EU membership was primarily a foreign policy decision – part of a conscious effort by Finnish policymakers to strengthen Finland's international position in the quickly unfolding post-Cold War era.<sup>1</sup> Second, applying for membership of, and joining, the EU required Finland to considerably modify the foundations of its foreign policy, which had throughout the Cold War years built on neutrality that set rather strict limits for Finland's engagement with any international or Western institutions. Third, when Finland joined the EU in 1995, the development of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) had only just begun, meaning that Finland jumped onto a moving train. Indeed, the depth and scope of EU foreign policy have increased significantly during Finland's membership of the Union, which has created both new demands and new opportunities for Finnish foreign and security policy. Fourth, foreign policy has always been one of the key areas of EU policy for Finland, as

the EU is – and, as this paper argues, continues to be – Finland's primary framework for international engagement and the country's most significant bulwark against the uncertainties of international politics.

By studying the relationship between Finnish foreign and security policy and EU foreign policy, this study is part of – and builds on – an already well-established and continuously growing branch of research on the interlinkages between the EU member states' national foreign policies and the EU's foreign and security policy activity. A large part of this literature examines the relationship between national and EU-level foreign policy within the conceptual framework of 'Europeanization',<sup>2</sup> which involves studying (at least one of) three inter-related processes: how national foreign policies adapt to the demands of EU membership (often called 'downloading'), how member states seek to use the opportunities arising from EU membership ('uploading'), and how the continuous collaboration with other member states within and beyond the EU changes crucial elements of national foreign policymaking ('crossloading'). The Europeanization literature thus constitutes a point of reference for this paper as well.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the existing scholarly and policy-oriented literature on the relationship between national/Finnish foreign policy and EU foreign policy, this paper draws on available policy documents as well as nine anonymous background interviews that were conducted by the authors. All interviewees were selected on the basis of their prominent position either as executors or observers of Finnish foreign, security and/or broader EU policy at some point during Finland's membership. The authors of this paper wish to express their sincere gratitude to all of the interviewees for their time and their insights. It goes without saying that any errors remain the sole responsibility of the authors.

The paper will proceed as follows. The first part will present a succinct overview of the existing research literature that is relevant for the purposes of this study. This means dissecting existing literature on

1 See Forsberg 2000, 264.

2 For an overview, see Tonra 2015.

3 This policy paper does not, however, aim to conduct a full-fledged analysis based on the Europeanization literature. The literature does, however, underpin the ensuing analysis.

the interaction between EU member states' national foreign policies and EU foreign policy in general, as well as on the relationship between Finnish foreign and security policy and EU foreign policy specifically. By drawing together and summarizing key findings of earlier research on the topic, the first section defines the overall framework within which the evolution of Finnish foreign policy during Finland's EU membership is studied here, informing the nature and focus of the subsequent three sections.

These three sections look at the interlinkage between Finnish and EU foreign policy in relation to three different topics, all of which previous research has shown to be of particular relevance for Finland. These three topics are: 1) the policy towards and relations with Russia, 2) security and defence, and 3) Finland's broadening international agenda and the related external relations portfolios. The three sections have been conceived so as to contribute to the overall aim of the paper, but each of them can also be read separately as concise stand-alone pieces. The paper concludes with a short section that summarizes its main findings.

# 1. FINNISH FOREIGN POLICY AND EU MEMBERSHIP

## The interplay between national foreign policies and EU foreign policy

The relationship between national foreign policies and European foreign policy is a topic of long-standing interest for observers of European affairs.<sup>4</sup> Over time, the topic has gained increasing relevance as the EU's foreign policy structures and instruments have developed and, at the same time, more countries have joined the EU. This has made studying the relationship between national and EU foreign policy both more complex and more compelling, spawning a rich and steadily expanding body of scholarly and policy-oriented literature on the topic. From the very beginning, this branch of literature has been interested in two bigger questions. First, what kind of impact does participation in (the formulation of) European/EU foreign policy have on individual member states and their national foreign policies? Second, and conversely, how do the distinctive traits of national foreign policies affect the participation of individual member states in (the formulation of) European/EU foreign policy? Moreover, from the very start, attention has been paid to whether, how and why the approaches of member states towards EU foreign policy develop over time.<sup>5</sup>

From the early 2000s onwards, the interplay between national and EU foreign policy has mostly been analysed within the conceptual framework of 'Europeanization', whose importance for, and influence on, the study of EU foreign policy has rapidly increased. There are countless definitions of – and ways to use – the concept 'Europeanization', which remains contested as a result.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the different studies building on the idea of 'Europeanization' have undeniably contributed to systematizing research on the interlinkage between national and EU foreign policy. This is especially true of the way in which the Europeanization literature characterizes the processes that are at the heart of the relationship between national and EU foreign policy. In essence, three different – but closely

interrelated – processes<sup>7</sup> have been identified and analysed in the Europeanization research literature:

1. The extent to which member states 'download' different aspects of EU foreign policy into their national foreign policies. In other words, how, and to what extent, do member states adapt (or not adapt) to the demands of EU membership in terms of their national foreign policy agendas, conceptions, objectives, processes and identities?
2. The extent to which member states seek to 'upload' elements of their national foreign policies to the emerging EU foreign policy. In other words, how, and to what extent, do member states use the EU's foreign policy instruments, processes and structures to increase their own influence on EU foreign policy, on the foreign policies of other member states or on international affairs more broadly?
3. The extent to which member states 'crossload' elements of their national foreign policies onto each other through their constant interaction within and beyond the EU. In other words, how, and to what extent, do elements of the national foreign policies of EU member states change due to the member states' continuous interaction with, and learning from, each other?

Different Europeanization studies have often looked at these processes through the lens of either rationalist or sociological theories.<sup>8</sup> In the first case, the extent to which member states become Europeanized is primarily the result of cost-benefit analyses. This means that the member states are assumed to calculate, for example, whether subjecting themselves to collective EU policies or positions outweighs the potential costs this incurs for their national foreign policies, or whether pushing for a common EU position on a given issue is more beneficial for them than pursuing their goals by national means. From a sociological perspective, by contrast, Europeanization is seen to reflect more

4 Hill 1983; Hill 1996; Manners & Whitman 2000; Tonra 2001; Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet 2002.

5 See e.g. Hill 1983, Manners & Whitman 2000.

6 Tonra 2015, 183.

7 See e.g. Tonra 2015, 186–187; Wong & Hill 2011.

8 Tonra 2015.



Finnish Prime Minister Esko Aho (second on the right), together with Pertti Salolainen and Erkki Liikanen, visited the European Commission in Brussels in order to discuss with Hans van den Broek (on the left), Member of the EC in charge of External Political Relations, Common Foreign and Security Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, in January 1994. A year later Finland joined the EU. Source: EC-Audiovisual Service/EC 1994.

profound changes in national foreign policy identities and/or the underlying norms and values of the EU member states.

A central challenge for Europeanization studies has been to determine whether changes in the national foreign policies of EU member states are actually caused by them being members of the EU and participating in the different forms of EU foreign policy, or whether there are other forces at play.<sup>9</sup> Sometimes member states may also adapt their foreign policies because of broader developments in international politics. The task of distinguishing the effects of EU membership from other factors is made all the more difficult by the fact that broader international trends may often affect the EU member states through the EU.<sup>10</sup> In those cases, Europeanization is an intervening rather than an independent variable.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, such cases further highlight the importance of EU membership

as the framework within which national foreign policies operate. Against this backdrop, Europeanization studies have also approached the relationship between the EU and national foreign policies as mutually constitutive.<sup>12</sup> Here a distinction between the EU and national-level foreign policies often serves an analytical purpose of systematic research. Ontologically, these levels are approached as deeply interwoven.

Overall, Europeanization studies acknowledge that while EU membership is a central determinant in shaping member states' foreign policies, it is far from the only one, with different factors at the national, sub-national, European and global level potentially having an impact and intermingling in different ways.<sup>13</sup> This is also the view adopted in this study. While the idea is to look at how Finnish foreign and security policy has changed during Finland's EU membership, the intention is not to limit the analysis only to those changes that can be traced back to the effects

9 Ibid., 187.

10 Hill & Wong 2011, 219.

11 Ibid.

12 Jokela 2011.

13 Wong & Hill 2011, 13.

of the membership. However, to the extent to which the changes in Finnish foreign policy discussed here have their origins at some other level of analysis, the global or the domestic level, the paper seeks to make this explicit.

From the point of view of the present paper, it is also important to stress that the existing literature does not regard Europeanization as a linear process towards more Europeanization. Instead, it is broadly recognized that the relationship between national foreign policies and EU foreign policy is characterized by significant variance, and that member states' Europeanization can often be characterized by contradictory trends.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, it has to be borne in mind that Europeanization is not a process that would advance towards a fixed end state. Instead, what is regarded as 'Europeanized' changes over time, as the member states themselves crucially shape the contours of EU foreign policy.<sup>15</sup>

### **Finnish foreign and security policy during EU membership**

Most of the literature on the Europeanization of national foreign policies tends to either focus on one member state or to compare several – even almost all – member states with one another. After Finland joined the EU in 1995, the Europeanization of Finnish foreign and security policy has been subject to both lengthy in-depth analyses<sup>16</sup> and different cross-country comparisons.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the Europeanization of Finnish foreign and security policy has been studied as a part of broader attempts to analyse Finland's Europeanization across different policy areas.<sup>18</sup> There are also studies that look at the interaction between Finnish and EU foreign policy without making any explicit references to the concept of Europeanization.<sup>19</sup>

While the existing studies on the Europeanization of Finnish foreign and security are different in ambition, nature and scope, concentrate on different aspects of foreign policy, and deal with different periods of Finland's EU membership, it seems justified to argue that they all identify considerable changes in Finnish

foreign and security policy due to – and during – the country's membership.

In essence, the changes concern three bigger areas related to Finnish foreign and security policy: 1) Finland's general foreign policy orientation and outlook, 2) Finland's foreign policy structures and processes, and 3) Finland's approach towards individual sub-fields of foreign and security policy. In the following, some of the main findings of the existing literature on the interplay between Finnish foreign and security policy and EU foreign policy will be presented and discussed. The aim here is not to review all of the existing research on the Europeanization of Finnish foreign and security policy, but to provide an overview of some of its main outcomes.

As far as the first of the three above-mentioned areas is concerned, many analyses have paid attention to Finland's quick transformation from a neutral state into a militarily non-aligned EU member state, an 'ordinary European' (*tavalliseksi eurooppalaiseksi*),<sup>20</sup> or even a state with a place at the core of the EU.<sup>21</sup> As Forsberg notes, this transformation, which took place over the course of the 1990s and 2000s, was both the cause and the consequence of Finland's membership of the EU.<sup>22</sup> After all, a considerable change in Finland's general political orientation (Cold War neutrality) was necessary for the country to even consider, let alone apply for, EU membership, and this initial change was primarily triggered by broader forces in international politics, namely the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. However, while the underlying cause of Finland's changing foreign policy orientation was to be found at the international level, it is unquestionable that accession to the EU in 1995 'accelerated, deepened and broadened' the change.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, Tiilikainen speaks of a complete makeover of Finland's earlier foreign policy line.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, the Finnish foreign policy leadership has often downplayed the change, putting more emphasis on elements of continuity.<sup>25</sup>

Another considerable change in Finland's foreign policy outlook after accession to the EU was the deepening and broadening of the country's relations with

14 Hill & Wong.

15 See Wong & Hill, 14.

16 See e.g. Palosaari 2011.

17 See e.g. Jokela 2011; Haukkala et al. 2017.

18 See e.g. Tiilikainen 2006.

19 See e.g. Luoto & Pesonen 2006; Ranta & Vierros-Villeneuve 2006; Ojanen & Raik 2017.

20 Forsberg 2000.

21 Stubb 2006.

22 Forsberg 2000, 263–264.

23 Ibid., 264.

24 Tiilikainen 2006.

25 Forsberg 2000, 263.

other EU member states, particularly Germany.<sup>26</sup> This was a natural consequence of the steady interaction with these states at multiple levels both within and beyond the EU. This development went hand in hand with a general widening of Finland's foreign policy horizon. As an EU member, Finland started to pay increasing attention to France – due to its status as one of the EU's leading member states – and the Union's Mediterranean member states.<sup>27</sup> Particularly in the early phase of Finland's EU membership, these changes led to questions about whether the reorientation of Finnish foreign policy had come at the cost of its relations to its traditional reference group, the Nordic states.<sup>28</sup> However, while the relative importance of the Nordic states for Finnish foreign policy may have decreased in the early phase of EU membership, Finland's relationship with Sweden in particular was described as being closer than ever.<sup>29</sup>

EU membership also brought notable changes to Finland's foreign and security policymaking structures and processes. In line with the general reorientation of Finnish foreign policy and the widening of Finland's foreign policy horizon, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs was reorganized in 1998, with a geographical division replacing the old issue-based structure.<sup>30</sup> A more profound question concerned the division of competences between the President and the Finnish Government in foreign and EU policy matters. A new constitution came into force in 2000, stating that foreign policy would be directed by the President in cooperation with the Government. At the same time, EU affairs, including the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), were defined as the domain of the Government. On the other hand, the President maintained his/her position as the commander-in-chief of the Finnish Armed Forces.

While the new constitutional arrangement clearly strengthened the position of the Government vis-à-vis the President compared to earlier times, it also left considerable room for interpretation with regard to matters concerning the CFSP and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP),<sup>31</sup> which are clearly

both foreign policy and EU affairs. In the context of the first CSDP operation in particular, the lack of a clear delineation of competences led to disputes – even a 'constitutional crisis'<sup>32</sup> – about who had the authority to decide upon the Finnish participation. This triggered a change in the Finnish legislation, giving the President the right to decide upon Finland's participation on the basis of a proposal by the Government, which has to hear the view of the Finnish Parliament.<sup>33</sup> However, broader questions about the role of the President and the Government in EU foreign policy still remained. Thus, European Council summits frequently saw the President take part alongside the Prime Minister if foreign and security policy issues were on the agenda. This so-called 'policy of two [dinner] plates' ended in practice after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009. The treaty further institutionalized the European Council as an integral body of the EU's institutional structure with only one member from each member state. In 2011, an amendment was made to the Constitution, stating that the Prime Minister would represent Finland at meetings of the European Council. At the same time, the underlying questions and tensions have not disappeared altogether and remain a matter of some controversy and debate.<sup>34</sup>

With regard to individual sub-fields of foreign policy, many studies have – as mentioned above – focused on Finland's participation in, and contribution to, the CSDP. A frequently studied question for scholars of Finnish foreign and security policy has been how Finland's reframed orientation as a non-aligned state has affected Finland's – and the other non-aligned states' – approach towards the development of the EU's CFSP and, even more notably, of the CSDP,<sup>35</sup> which was launched in 1999. Conversely, many studies also analyse how the development of the CFSP and particularly the CSDP has led Finland to adapt its foreign and security policy.<sup>36</sup> Much of the existing literature highlights the extent to which Finland adapted its security and defence policy over the years in order to ensure its compatibility with the needs and demands of the CSDP,<sup>37</sup> and how little Finland's (and Sweden's)

26 Forsberg 2000, 270–271; Tiilikainen 2006, 216–218.

27 Forsberg 2000, 270.

28 Tiilikainen 2006, 216–218; Forsberg 2000, 270–271; Ojanen & Raik 2017, 176.

29 Forsberg 2000, 270.

30 Haukkala & Ojanen 2011, 153.

31 Until the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the CSDP was known as European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). However, for reasons of clarity, the abbreviation CSDP is used here even when referring to the pre-Lisbon period.

32 Palosaari 2011, 197–199.

33 Palosaari 2011, 198.

34 E.g. Himanen 2017.

35 Ferreira-Pereira 2004; Ferreira-Pereira 2005.

36 Palosaari 2011; Palosaari 2013; see also Ferreira-Pereira 2006.

37 Palosaari 2011.

non-aligned status actually affected the overall development of the CSDP.<sup>38</sup>

Another area of considerable interest has been the interplay between Finland's policy towards Russia and the EU's common Russia policy. Early analyses of the Europeanization of Finnish foreign policy in particular argue that the EU quickly established itself as the most important framework for Finland to manage its relations with Russia. In other words, Finland's relationship with Russia became 'multilateral'. On the other hand, the EU's increasing difficulties in agreeing on a common policy towards Russia – which was becoming an ever more difficult partner to work with – towards the end of the 2000s led to mounting frustration in Finland and pushed the country to work more through bilateral channels as well.<sup>39</sup>

The EU's policy towards Russia also provides the single most important example of a Finnish attempt at 'uploading': the Northern Dimension, a framework designed to steer the EU's attention towards its northern areas and to strengthen cooperation with Russia on a number of different issues. While Finland succeeded in establishing the Northern Dimension as a policy of the EU, it was reshaped considerably and eventually lost much of its prominence and significance. It is thus generally regarded as a qualified success at best.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, general analyses of the Europeanization of Finnish foreign policy point to variance over time. Haukkala and Ojanen talk about 'pendulum swings in slow motion', with a period of intensive adaptation ('downloading') in the late 1990s, followed by a slower period in the early 2000s, and a growing emphasis on distinctive national features and promoting Finland's national interests in the latter half of the 2000s, after the EU's Eastern enlargement.<sup>41</sup> Accordingly, Finland was deemed to be an engaged EU member state, but one whose Europeanization was only partial.<sup>42</sup>

In a more recent analysis, Ojanen and Raik distinguish between three different periods in the interplay between Finnish and EU foreign policy: first, Finland's great leap into EU membership and the country's attempt to move to the core of the EU (1995–2002); second, the consolidation of a foreign policy based on EU membership and increased cooperation, but with a stronger emphasis on Finland's national interests and

a less active approach at the EU level (2003–2009); and third, the increasing uncertainty brought about by the crises both within and outside the EU, with Finland's national security as a priority (2010–). In the third phase in particular, Ojanen and Raik point to partly contradictory trends in the interplay between Finnish and EU foreign policy. On the one hand, Finland has increasingly looked towards the EU as a source of security and sought to strengthen the Union as a security provider. On the other hand, Finland's expectations of and trust towards the EU's capacity to deliver security have waned somewhat, leading to a sense of uncertainty.<sup>43</sup>

This paper builds strongly on the previous studies and their findings. Instead of trying to craft one larger narrative of change and continuity in Finnish foreign policy, the paper approaches the relationship between Finnish and EU foreign policy by looking at three different areas of foreign policy, each of which are characterized by some distinctive elements of their own. At the same time, it is clear that the developments in these three areas are also inter-related, as different factors at the national, European and international level tie them together. It is after studying the three topics in independent sections that more general findings regarding change and continuity in Finnish foreign policy will be formulated in the short concluding section of the paper.

The choice of topics to be studied here stems from Finland's long-standing foreign policy priorities as an EU member and is in line with the existing literature. Thus, the paper focuses on Finland's and the EU's policy towards Russia, the area of security and defence, and Finland's broadening international agenda and the related external relations portfolios. The sections on these topics make use of much of the literature reviewed above. At the same time, they seek to provide a contemporary interpretation of the trends of continuity and change in their respective fields of analysis.

38 Ojanen 2002.

39 Haukkala & Ojanen 2011.

40 Ibid., 164.

41 Ibid.

42 Hill & Wong 2011.

43 Ojanen and Raik 2017.

## 2. FINLAND'S RUSSIA POLICY AND THE EU: FROM TRANSFORMATIVE TO PROTECTIVE AGENDA

**THIS SECTION EXAMINES** the effects of Finnish EU membership on Finland's relations with Russia. It also analyses how Finland has aimed to shape the EU's evolving Russia policy. The key argument is that throughout its membership of the EU Finland has cherished two different agendas regarding its big neighbour. First, from the outset, Helsinki has seen EU membership as a national security choice. In other words, Finland has perceived the EU as a security community, offering protection against potential security threats, including a possible menace from Russia. The second, more optimistic agenda is related to the EU's role as a supporter of the positive transformation of Russia's domestic policies and, more broadly, its role in the Euro-Atlantic community.

The Finnish aspiration to reconcile its EU membership and relations with Russia has not existed in a vacuum. In other words, the overall state of the EU-Russia relationship determines the context in which Finland manages its relationship with Russia. In particular, the prospects of the transformative agenda have always hinged on the state of broader EU-Russia relations. In other words, the more EU-Russia relations have been characterized by tensions, the slimmer the chances have been to pursue a progressive agenda. Due to the deterioration of the security environment caused by Russian actions in Ukraine and elsewhere since 2014, the protective agenda has understandably gained more ground in Finland's policy as of late.

### **The years of (fading) optimism: the primacy of the transformative agenda**

The end of the Cold War profoundly shaped Finnish foreign policy priorities. During the Cold War the primacy of the bilateral relationship with the Soviet Union outweighed all other dimensions of Finnish foreign policy. The goals related to integration policy and defence policy were subordinate to sustaining a cordial relationship with the giant across the Eastern border. Although relations with Moscow remained highly important in the post-Cold War environment, Finnish policymakers now saw a broader horizon in which

Finland could fulfill its aspirations as an EU member without compromising its crucial relationship with the East.<sup>44</sup> Finland became a member without any reservations regarding its foreign policy.

EU membership anchored Finland's policy towards Russia in a larger framework. In fact, Finnish policymakers already recognized this prior to membership. President Mauno Koivisto acknowledged in 1993 – almost two years before Finland's accession – that Finland's Russia policy could not deviate from the general Western Russia policy, and that Finland must be ready to seek external support for its security if necessary.<sup>45</sup> Some commentators argued that EU membership actually constrained Finland's leeway towards Russia.<sup>46</sup> In terms of nurturing cordial relations with Russia, a majority of Finnish decision-makers viewed EU membership as rather unproblematic. A crucial underlying factor of this reasoning was the judgment that the EU had no hostile intentions towards Russia. Thus, Finland's and the EU's interests were clearly aligned. In fact, many Finnish policymakers viewed the EU as a useful vehicle to promote political change in Russia.<sup>47</sup> However, and interestingly, even the most proactive advocates of Finland's EU membership saw certain limits as to what Finland could decide as an EU member. For some, agreeing on EU sanctions would have been a bridge too far, for example.<sup>48</sup>

Comments by key decision-makers made in the early post-Cold War era reveal that both the transformative agenda and the security agenda were integral to Finnish thinking even before the country's EU membership. For instance, in 1993, Under-Secretary of State Jaakko Blomberg highlighted that Finnish membership of the EU improved Finland's chances of influencing the direction of Russia's domestic transformation. However, he also said that in the event of EU-Russia relations turning sour, membership of the community would enhance the preconditions of

44 Pesu 2019.

45 Koivisto 1995, 615–616.

46 Rytövuori-Apunen 2007, 45.

47 Blomberg 2012, 580–582.

48 Pesu 2017b.



Finland's second presidency in 2006 provided a new opportunity to strengthen the foundations of the EU–Russia relationship. Heads of State or Government and President of the European Commission took part in a working dinner with President Vladimir Putin in Lahti, Finland. Source: EC–Audiovisual Service/EC 2006.

Finnish security and welfare.<sup>49</sup> However, the security aspect was something that Finns did not want to trumpet because of the implications that an unsuccessful bid to join the EU could have had.

As said, Finland has not managed its relationship with Russia in a vacuum. According to Forsberg and Haukkala's grand narrative of post–Cold War EU–Russia relations, the EU–Russia relationship has oscillated between more optimistic and more turbulent times, but with the general trend pointing in a negative direction.<sup>50</sup> The early post–Cold War years and the turn of the millennium were characterized by more optimism, which was reflected in Finland's own ambitions. The transformative agenda was more significant.

A notable Finnish concern in the early Post–Cold War years was Russia's role in European security. Finnish policymakers repeatedly called for Russia's integration into the emerging European security architecture. President Martti Ahtisaari's words in his speech at the

Paasikivi Society in November 1995 reflected the aims of the transformative agenda:<sup>51</sup>

*Russia's internal transition will take a long time. Nevertheless it is possible to influence, at least indirectly, the psychology of change in Russia. Overreaction must be avoided: the mistakes of the past must not be repeated. On the other hand, gradual integration into Western systems should produce visible steps forward. Positive experience of cooperation encourages new cooperative steps.*<sup>52</sup>

Although Finland had limited means for drawing Russia into European systems, it did its fair share. A concrete example of binding Russia to European political structures was reflected in Finland's Northern Dimension initiative. The sole purpose of the initiative did not boil down to the relationship with Russia, but it 'was [nevertheless] meant for the whole European Union as a tool to increase stability in northern Europe

49 Blomberg 2012, 580–581.

50 Forsberg & Haukkala 2016, 10–43.

51 The aim of integrating Russia into the Euro–Atlantic structures was widely shared in the West. See e.g. Hill 2018.

52 Ahtisaari 1995.

and to build more concrete and functional co-operation with the Russian Federation'.<sup>53</sup> President Ahtisaari commented on the underlying motivation behind the initiative as follows:

*A key observation at this stage is that the only way to respond to the challenges and opportunities of Northern Europe is through close and systematic cooperation between the enlarging EU and the partner countries, including Russia. One key objective is to deepen partnership between the enlarging Union and Russia in a way which can also withstand cyclic changes.*<sup>54</sup>

Although the trajectory of Russia's domestic and foreign policies aroused increasing concern, particularly in the 2000s, the transformative agenda kept dominating Finland's – and more broadly the EU's – thinking vis-à-vis Russia. The outbreak of the Second Chechen War coincided with the Finnish EU presidency in 1999. Owing to the presidency, Finland played a prominent role in EU decision-making. The EU mainstream was in favour of a pragmatic policy line that would not jeopardize the long-term goal of integrating Russia more closely into the EU. Unsurprisingly, Finland, too, advocated a pragmatic approach by withholding sanctions, for example, and tried to salvage the future of the progressive agenda. Helsinki was satisfied that the war did not cause a permanent breach between the EU and Russia.<sup>55</sup>

Finland's second presidency in 2006 provided a new opportunity to strengthen the foundations of the EU–Russia relationship. One of Finland's objectives was to launch a new round of negotiations with the aim of renewing the existing treaty base of EU–Russia relations. The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) was about to expire in 2007, and Finland saw a need for a more extensive agreement.<sup>56</sup> However, the overall relationship between the EU and Russia was undergoing difficulties, as Russia had imposed an import ban on Polish meat in November 2005. A year later, due to Russia's reluctance to lift the ban, Poland refused to adopt the negotiation directives for the new agreement, and the Finnish initiative to kick off the negotiations failed.<sup>57</sup> Despite this disappoint-

ment, the reform of the Northern Dimension during the Finnish 2006 presidency can be counted at least as a moderate accomplishment. The reform established an equal partnership between the EU, Russia, Iceland and Norway.<sup>58</sup>

Russia's war in Georgia in 2008 did not cause a permanent rupture in EU–Russia relations. Rather, the EU was eager to revert to normal terms with Russia, and under the French presidency, it acted as a mediator during the war. Finland, in turn, was holding the OSCE presidency during the conflict, putting its energy into promoting the OSCE's agency vis-à-vis the stabilization of the crisis. However, in his well-known '080808' speech, delivered less than three weeks after the outbreak of the war, Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb noted how Russia was increasingly willing to use military force as an instrument of its foreign policy and how, in view of this fact, Finland ought to strongly advocate the reinforcement of the CSDP.<sup>59</sup> The protective agenda duly began to gain prominence.

### **The conflict years: Seeking protection from the EU**

Russia's illegal actions against Ukraine in 2014 changed the nature of EU–Russia relations and caused a profound rupture in West–Russia relations more broadly.<sup>60</sup> As 'the strategic partnership' between the EU and Russia effectively collapsed, the preconditions for pursuing a transformative agenda also practically evaporated, as the principles of the EU's current Russia policy testify. More specifically, the policy, agreed by EU foreign ministers in March 2016, is based on five principles.<sup>61</sup> Martin Russell has presented the principles as follows:

1. insisting on full implementation of the Minsk agreements before economic sanctions against Russia are lifted;
2. pursuing closer relations with the former Soviet republics in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood (including Ukraine) and central Asia;
3. becoming more resilient to Russian threats such as energy security, hybrid threats, and disinformation;

53 Heinenen 2001, 26.

54 Ahtisaari 1999.

55 Lintonen 2003, 275–283; Ojanen 2018, 7.

56 Ojanen 2018, 8.

57 Forsberg & Haukkala 2016.

58 Ojanen 2018.

59 Stubb 2008.

60 Forsberg & Haukkala 2016, 33–40.

61 The principles were first expressed in the remarks by High Representative Federica Mogherini following the Foreign Affairs Council in March 2016.

4. despite tensions, engaging selectively with Russia on a range of foreign-policy issues, among them cooperation on the Middle East, counter-terrorism and climate change;
5. increasing support for Russian civil society and promoting people-to-people contacts, given that sanctions target the regime rather than the Russian people.<sup>62</sup>

Remnants of the progressive agenda can be identified in the fourth and fifth principle but, overall, constraining Russia's assertive behaviour has become the dominant element of the EU's agenda. Today, EU-Russia relations are characterized by initially reciprocal restrictive measures.<sup>63</sup> The EU, for its part, has adopted coercive measures to influence Russia's behaviour. The most notable instruments have been the restrictive measures adopted in response to the crisis in Ukraine, particularly economic sanctions. The EU sanctions policy has multiple objectives. The measures imposed on Russia due to its actions in Ukraine are not only meant to signal the EU's disapproval of Russia's actions, but also to persuade Russia to alter or reverse its policy vis-à-vis Ukraine. Furthermore, and most importantly from the viewpoint of the protective agenda, the sanctions also act as a deterrent against further Russian adventurism in Ukraine in particular.<sup>64</sup>

Despite a brief period of adaptation and domestic disagreements in 2014–2015, Finland has consistently supported the EU's restrictive measures. Although Finnish policymakers have only depicted sanctions as a tool to compel Russia to reverse its actions in Ukraine, Finland has highlighted the Ukrainian crisis as a serious security policy issue.<sup>65</sup> It is therefore unlikely that the deterrence or punishment aspects of the restrictive measures have not crossed the minds of Finnish decision-makers.

There are also a number of indirect signs indicating that Finland has adopted a more protective approach to Russia. As this paper will demonstrate, Finland has stepped up its activity regarding EU defence cooperation, calling for more ambitious EU action in this field. The Finnish discourse on the EU as a security community underscores mutual solidarity within the

Union, the desire to tap into the full potential of Article 42.7, and Finland's urge to improve the EU's ability to protect its member states from hybrid threats, which all stem from Finnish threat perceptions. Obviously, Russia features prominently in these perceptions, and Finland wants to maximize the protection rendered by EU membership and mutual solidarity among the Union's member states. Assuming a prominent role in the efforts to strengthen the EU's expertise in and response to hybrid threats is a particularly noteworthy endeavour in this respect.

Thus, the protective agenda has clearly outweighed the transformative one in the Finnish Russia policy. Finland's programme for its 2019 presidency of the Council of the European Union attested to this fact. The English version of the programme mentioned Russia once, calling for consistency in the EU's Russia policy, including the restrictive measures. Moreover, it highlighted the importance of selective engagement, but without envisaging how such engagement could best be pursued. The programme did mention the Northern Dimension, but public awareness of this former source of pride has gradually diminished.<sup>66</sup>

Moreover, it has recently become increasingly evident how the Finnish bilateral relationship with Russia is relational to, as well as conditioned by, the EU's common Russia policy in the post-2014 environment. However, Finland, along with a handful of other member states, decided that, despite the EU Council's decision to suspend regular bilateral summits between the EU and Russia, it would sustain high-level dialogue with Moscow. Presidents Sauli Niinistö and Vladimir Putin have been meeting biannually, and regular interaction takes place at the ministerial level as well, excluding meetings between defence ministers. However, the intensity of ministerial meetings is lower than before. Moreover, in the vicinity of presidential meetings, President Niinistö has often made phone calls to (or stopovers in) important EU capitals such as Berlin to highlight that Finland manages its Russia relations as an EU member. Furthermore, Finland has consistently denied that it seeks to act as a mediator or a bridge-builder between the EU and Russia. Rather, Finnish policymakers have underscored that Finland is an active EU member and as such fully committed to the EU's Russia policy, including sanctions that have been adopted by the EU Council and the European Council.

62 Russell 2018.

63 Russian import restrictions on EU foodstuffs in 2014 were initially launched as "counter-measures" to the EU's restrictive measures, yet they have been argued to reflect Russian import substitution policy more broadly. See Korhonen, Simola and Solanko 2018.

64 More et al. 2016.

65 Sjursen and Rosen 2017.

66 Finland's Presidency Programme 2019, 12.

Lastly, Finland's policy in the aftermath of the nerve agent attack in Salisbury also demonstrated its readiness to anchor its foreign policy in a broader European or Western framework. Although there was no united EU response per se, Finland expelled one Russian intelligence officer and, perhaps more notably, publicly announced that it had consulted its closest EU partners, Germany and Sweden, before taking the decision. Considering these recent developments, it is intriguing how precise and far-sighted Koivisto's 1993 comment about the influence of the general Western Russia policy, and the need for Finland to uphold it, actually was.

### 3. FINLAND AND THE EU'S SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY: FROM RESERVED TO BOLD PROACTIVITY

**THE FIELD OF** security and defence has constituted one of the most important areas of activity for Finland within – and most recently, beyond – the broader CFSP framework. From the early years of Finnish EU membership until today, Finland has endeavoured to shape the EU's security and defence efforts with varying aims, and different degrees of energy and success. Furthermore, and equally importantly, the developments in the EU's security and defence agenda have forced Finland to adapt its own security and defence policy considerably during its membership.<sup>67</sup>

Finnish priorities regarding the EU's security and defence policy have varied over time. Most importantly, Finland's own readiness to promote, and take part in, different policies has changed, as this section will point out. However, irrespective of these changes, Finland's overall goal has remained the same: to strengthen the EU's contribution to, and capacity to act in, foreign, security and defence policy matters.<sup>68</sup>

This section progresses chronologically and is divided into three parts. The first part deals with the period from the first years of Finnish EU membership to 2004 when the member states signed the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe. The second part covers the late 2000s and early 2010s, followed by the third part starting from 2014 and the deterioration of the security environment. The primary focus of the section is on the final part, presenting the most recent developments and putting the well-documented earlier phases into a contemporary context.

#### **The formative years in the late 1990s and early 2000s: Reserved proactivity**

Finland's initial approach towards the nascent CSDP was a curious mixture of proactivity on the one hand, and hesitation and reservation on the other. Briefly put, Finnish policymakers maintained that developing the EU's security and defence agenda was in Finnish interests as long as it did not touch upon mutual defence. Consequently, the Finns were of the opinion that the

EU should focus on crisis management, although they had also reconciled themselves to the possibility that the EU could eventually establish a common defence.<sup>69</sup> Finland's ambivalence towards the security and defence agenda was observable particularly in the late 1990s when the CSDP was crafted, and its hesitancy also showed in the European Convention and the subsequent Intergovernmental Conference in 2003–2004.

Finland's accession to the European Union coincided with a period when European integration was taking new steps. Security and defence were incrementally moving up the EU agenda. Ahead of the intergovernmental negotiations that eventually led to the Treaty of Amsterdam, Finland and Sweden drafted a joint proposal, which called for the integration of the Western European Union's (WEU) Petersberg Tasks into the amended EU Treaty that was under negotiation. Finland and Sweden were successful insofar as the Petersberg Tasks were incorporated into the Treaty of Amsterdam. However, the provisions of the Treaty became more ambitious than Finland and Sweden had envisioned, extending to high-end peace enforcement tasks. Finland and Sweden would not have gone this far.<sup>70</sup>

The amendment of crisis management tasks provided further impetus for the development of the EU's security and defence dimension. Following the Franco-British St Malo agreement in 1998, the CSDP was formally established in 1999 – the same year that Finland assumed its first EU presidency. During the presidency, Finland's activity revolved primarily around implementing the new security and defence provisions of the Treaty of Amsterdam. At the Helsinki summit in December 1999, the EU leaders also agreed on the Union's military capability target, which became known as the 'Helsinki Headline Goal'. As the presidency country, Finland led the negotiations based on preparations made during the previous German Council presidency.<sup>71</sup>

67 Haukkala & Ojanen 2011; Jokela 2011; Palosaari 2013.

68 Background discussion January 16, 2020.

69 Blomberg 2012, 480.

70 Palosaari 2013, 14.

71 Store 2014, 165.

There were interesting underlying motivations behind Helsinki's vigour in pushing the EU's security and defence agenda forward. Firstly, by means of its proactive policy, Finland wanted to demonstrate commitment and alleviate residual fears regarding its status as a militarily non-aligned state, which still existed in some member states.<sup>72</sup> At the same time, however, Finland's constructive and proactive role was also an attempt to steer the development of the EU's security and defence policy in a direction that would not conflict with its own security and defence policy orientation. Hence, activism was also a pre-emptive measure. Although the EU was not realistically moving towards common defence in any foreseeable future, the cultivation of the crisis management agenda by Finland (and Sweden) served both to highlight their commitment *and* to keep territorial and mutual defence off the EU agenda. Certain member states, most notably France, were already suggesting the incorporation of the whole Western European Union, including its mutual defence provisions, into the EU. There were also hopes that the forthcoming Amsterdam Treaty would include a reference to the objective of common defence already stated in the Maastricht Treaty. This unnerved the Finns, who still cherished their military non-alignment.<sup>73</sup> This is the background against which the Finnish-Swedish initiative regarding the Petersberg Tasks needs to be seen.

Finland's reservations regarding some aspects of the security and defence agenda were also observable in the early 2000s, translating into a sceptical attitude towards the idea of a mutual assistance clause and the possibility of permanent structured cooperation, both of which emerged from the European Convention in 2003–2004. Hanna Ojanen has argued that Finland had two problems regarding the CSDP in general and the Constitutional Treaty in particular: the possible emergence of core groups and 'too much defence'.<sup>74</sup> In other words, the Finns feared that the mutual assistance clause and the proposal for structured cooperation would give rise to an exclusive core group of member states committed to mutual defence, duly dividing the EU and leaving some member states, potentially including Finland, outside. Moreover, the Finns were unhappy with the wording of the proposed mutual assistance clause, which included direct references to

military aid and to the unconditional nature of possible assistance.<sup>75</sup> This conflicted with Finland's aim of preserving territorial defence as a purely national prerogative and avoiding any automaticity regarding the form of mutual assistance.

In order to change the wording of the clause, Finland along with Sweden, Ireland and Austria – a unique reference group for Finland despite the respective non-alignment doctrines of the four countries<sup>76</sup> – pointed to the alleged problems of the proposals in their joint letter sent to the Intergovernmental Conference, albeit with little success at first. Eventually, a compromise was reached and the wording of the clause was adapted. The assistance clause covered all member states and gave them more leeway in terms of the nature of their assistance.

Domestically, after a short spell of hesitation, a virtual consensus supporting the mutual assistance clause emerged in Finland. The majority of the Finnish parties lent their support to the article. The Finnish Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, for example, fully endorsed the clause and demanded that the Finnish Government should examine its implications for Finland.<sup>77</sup>

However, what actually happened at the intergovernmental conference remains a political bone of contention. The heart of the matter concerns the appearance of the insertion regarding the mutual assistance clause, which states that the article 'shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States'. The statement was meant to alleviate the concerns of non-aligned states and to ensure that they could reconcile their national doctrines with the EU treaty obligations. Some Finnish commentators have curiously blamed Finland for the emergence of the insertion – which originated in the presidency country, Italy – and claimed that Helsinki watered down the clause.<sup>78</sup> However, there is little proof of such activity. More likely factors behind the provision were actually Austria's legal and Ireland's political needs, as both countries enshrined a rather strict interpretation of their respective neutrality.<sup>79</sup> Even Sweden was more hesitant than Finland.<sup>80</sup> As long as there were no core groups and the provision

72 Ranta & Vierros-Villeneuve 2006, 301–302.

73 Background discussion January 27, 2020.

74 Ojanen 2008, 72–73.

75 See e.g. Store 2014, 226.

76 Ojanen & Raik 2017, 180.

77 Foreign Affairs Committee 2006.

78 See e.g. Tarkka 2015, 204.

79 Background discussion February 5, 2020.

80 Background discussion February 10, 2020.

of military assistance was not automatic, Finland's position concerning mutual assistance was in fact positive. Moreover, from the very beginning, the Finnish interpretation has been that Finland is obliged by the clause and, additionally, enjoys the benefits it provides.<sup>81</sup> Thus, the idea of Finland as 'the disruptor' of the article does not fit into the big picture.

### **The years of implementation and eclipse in the 2000s and early 2010s**

The active years were followed by a less eventful period in terms of Finland's activity.<sup>82</sup> Whereas the late 1990s were a period of growing pains vis-à-vis the internationalization of Finnish defence policy,<sup>83</sup> the late 2000s and early 2010s were a less formative time, even though a latent transformation of Finnish policy was underway.

With regard to the overall trajectory of the CSDP, the early 2000s saw the EU focus on implementing the new policies and structures that had recently been created. The Treaty of Nice (2000) had reinforced the EU's security and defence structures, and the CSDP was experiencing its (first) heyday. In 2003, the Union launched its first crisis management operations (e.g. Concordia and Althea) and produced its first security strategy. Moreover, the EU battlegroups (EU BG), which had been created in 2004, reached full operational capacity in 2007. Overall, the early years of the CSDP were characterized by optimism, and some scholars presented bold visions of the coming European century.<sup>84</sup> However, the latter part of the decade and the early 2010s marked a period of increasing turbulence, as the EU first wrestled with the fallout from the failure of the Constitutional Treaty and was then confronted with the worsening Eurozone crisis. Moreover, the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in December 2009 and the subsequent establishment of the European External Action Service and the concomitant foreign policy structures drained much of the energy of the member states and the Union's new High Representative, Catherine Ashton. These fundamental challenges overshadowed the security and defence field.

In terms of Finland and the CSDP, some areas of activity are noteworthy, however. First, Finland threw

itself into the EU's nascent crisis management activity. It deployed 200 peacekeepers to Operation Althea in Bosnia-Herzegovina and acted as a framework nation for the Task Force North. Second, the introduction of the EU BG forced Finland to undertake legislative modifications, which broadened the scope of activity in which the country could participate. The new Act on Military Crisis Management – enacted in 2006 – enabled participation in operations not mandated by the United Nations. Moreover, the Act also increased the individual soldiers' authority regarding the rules of engagement in operations, which was intended to increase interoperability between Finland and fellow Battlegroup participants.

Thirdly and interrelatedly, Finnish participation in two different groups – the Nordic Battlegroup and the Dutch-German-Finnish Battlegroup – increased cooperation among the participants and duly improved the Finnish Defence Force's interoperability with its Western partners.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, the associated legislative changes illustrated Finland's readiness to reconsider the parameters within which a militarily non-aligned state can operate. In retrospect, such latent changes in the ideational environment of Finnish foreign policy should not be overlooked due to their being crucial enablers of more recent decisions like the strong enhancement of defence cooperation in the post-2014 security environment.<sup>86</sup>

At the same time, some CSDP-related questions did not advance – namely the question of bringing Finnish legislation into accord with the EU treaty obligations.

As early as 2006, the Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee pointed out that the Government should decipher the practical implications of the pending Constitutional Treaty. In 2008, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs published a report that examined the Lisbon Treaty's implications for Finland. The report noted that Finland was obliged to give military assistance in the event of a member state becoming a victim of aggression.<sup>87</sup> The snag was that – in terms of giving military assistance through combat forces – Finnish legislation was not up-to-date. In recognition of the problem, the Government's 2009 security and defence report pointed out that the Finnish legislation was not in line with the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty, declaring that Finland would establish the readiness to

81 Background discussion January 16 & February 10, 2020.

82 Ojanen & Raik 2017, 170.

83 Pesu 2017a.

84 See e.g. Leonard 2005.

85 Background discussion January 27, 2020.

86 Pesu 2019.

87 Tiilikainen 2008.

provide military assistance.<sup>88</sup> No immediate measures were taken, however. The 2012 report, in turn, stated that the Government had the intention of looking into the question of giving and receiving assistance during its term in office.<sup>89</sup> Consequently, a special working group was designated to evaluate the need for legislative changes, starting its work in 2013.

What, then, was the reason for the slow progress in the late 2000s and early 2010s? The issue of military assistance – both the provision and the reception thereof – was and remains a sensitive political question in the country, interwoven with the very nature of Finnish military non-alignment. Domestic resistance was to be expected, and there was simply not enough international stimuli to push such legal reforms forward. Some Finnish politicians, particularly those on the left and in the Centre Party, were afraid that Finland would become entangled in all sorts of conflicts around the globe. Some policymakers in turn were concerned that activity regarding the Lisbon Treaty would overshadow Finland's possible NATO membership.<sup>90</sup> These impediments practically vanished when the security environment changed for the worse in 2014.

### **The years of progress and advocacy in the new security environment**

The last half decade has witnessed increased Finnish advocacy for the EU's security and defence agenda. This time, the country has far fewer – if any – reservations about how to develop EU defence cooperation and Finland is no longer concerned about there being 'too much defence'. In fact, it is one of the few countries keen to see the EU play a more active role in defending Europe.

Much ink has been spilled about the deterioration of the security environment and increasing international uncertainty in the last half decade or so. The illegal annexation of Crimea, the war in Eastern Ukraine, the result of the Brexit referendum and the subsequent UK withdrawal from the EU, the election of Donald Trump, and jihadi terrorism stemming from the volatile southern neighbourhood have shaken the foundations of European security and detracted from the post-Cold War comfort experienced by Europeans. This series of events has changed the EU defence agenda,

demonstrating 'the relevance...of the EU defence policy in addressing the ensuing situation'.<sup>91</sup>

In fact, the defence agenda had shown signs of re-energisation even in late 2013, when the European Council addressed security and defence matters for the first time since the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon. Finland worked hard behind the scenes with like-minded states, pushing security and defence policy onto the Council's agenda.<sup>92</sup> Another milestone was the new Global Strategy released in 2016, directly after the Brexit referendum. The Strategy, combined with Franco-German cooperation and leadership,<sup>93</sup> propelled defence cooperation to the forefront of the EU's efforts at post-Brexit renewal. In quick succession, new initiatives began mushrooming. A new Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) was set up, Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) – 'the sleeping beauty' of the Lisbon Treaty – was activated, the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) was launched, and the Commission proposed the European Defence Fund (EDF) as a part of the 2021–2027 multiannual financial framework.

Finnish policymakers have welcomed the new enthusiasm for moving the EU's security and defence agenda forward, with some even feeling vindicated that the long-awaited development is finally taking place. Furthermore, EU defence cooperation enjoys strong support among Finnish policymakers and citizens. Even Eurosceptic political forces have recognized the utility of the EU's security and defence agenda.<sup>94</sup>

In terms of Finland's approach towards EU defence cooperation, the most notable characteristic is the 'security community discourse' highlighting the EU's role as a security community underpinned by mutual solidarity.<sup>95</sup> The guiding principle of the Finnish thinking is captured in President Niinistö's catchphrase: 'The EU is hardly a true union if it does not play its part in ensuring the security of its own citizens.'<sup>96</sup> Although the security community discourse is not entirely new – Finnish policymakers briefly entertained it in the mid-2000s<sup>97</sup> and ideas of the EU as a community of mutual solidarity have been present since the 1990s – it represents a broadened interpretation of the EU's role in

88 Prime Minister's Office 2009, 65.

89 Prime Minister's Office 2012, 84–85.

90 Background discussion February 5, 2020.

91 Tardy 2018, 6.

92 Background discussion January 16, 2020.

93 Iso-Markku & Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet 2019.

94 Luotonen 2017.

95 See e.g. Heinikoski 2019; Iso-Markku, Pesu & Jokela 2018.

96 Niinistö 2017.

97 Ojanen 2008, 58–59.



Finland has started to pay increasing attention to France. The countries published two joint statements – in 2016 and 2018 – which, among other things, called for EU defence policy to be strengthened. President Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister Juha Sipilä met in August 2018. Source: Flickr/FinnishGovernment/Lauri Heikkinen.

security and defence policy. An integral part of the Finnish security community concept is the ‘42.7 activism’, calling for the clarification and consolidation of the mutual assistance clause of the Lisbon Treaty. In fact, according to President Niinistö, 42.7 constitutes ‘the true core of European defence’.<sup>98</sup> Reportedly, Finland has demanded that the principle of mutual assistance must be mentioned in key EU security documents such as the Global Strategy.

Although Finland’s basic approach to the mutual assistance clause has been positive since the mid-2000s, such an active promotion of the article is a new phenomenon. Some policymakers underscore the role of President Niinistö as the source of activism.<sup>99</sup> However, a broader societal reconsideration has also taken place. More specifically, Finnish policymakers have re-evaluated Finland’s own willingness to commit to mutual assistance. Russia’s actions in Ukraine, the submarine hunt in the Stockholm archipelago in 2014, and the invocation of 42.7 following the Paris terrorist attacks in 2015 were all important catalysts for amending Finnish legislation concerning the provision of military assistance. As said, the process of

changing relevant legal provision had been slow and incremental. However, the aforementioned events provided strong stimuli for speeding up the domestic law-making process. Based on a memorandum produced by a special working group, the Finnish Government presented new bills amending the existing legislation concerning the tasks of the Finnish Defence Forces and the decision-making process regarding providing and receiving assistance by combat forces. In June 2017, the Finnish Parliament accepted the bills, broadening the tools of Finnish security and defence policy considerably. This landmark decision brought the Finnish legislation into line with the obligations of its EU membership, and also allows for providing and receiving military assistance more broadly, both multi- and bilaterally. In doing so, it established a more credible basis for Finland’s security and defence policy based on independent defence and deeper defence collaboration within and beyond the EU. Consequently, Finnish military non-alignment had undergone yet another re-evaluation, in which the policies of the EU were a key driver.<sup>100</sup>

The transformed security landscape added further nuances to the Finnish approach towards EU defence

98 Niinistö 2018b.

99 Background discussion January 16, 2020.

100 Pesu 2019.

cooperation. The more enthusiastic advocacy for EU defence has moved Finland close to France in terms of the weight that Helsinki is putting on the policy area. Interestingly, the countries published two joint statements – in 2016 and 2018 – which, among other things, called for EU defence policy to be strengthened. Moreover, President Niinistö defended the French-advocated concept of strategic autonomy in Washington D.C., which further attests to Finland’s proximity to France in European defence matters.<sup>101</sup> Teaming up with France in defence is an interesting development, since Germany and the UK have traditionally been viewed as Finland’s main big member state interlocutors within the EU.

The launch of new defence initiatives – PESCO, CARD and EDF – was clearly in Finnish interests. In fact, Finland had already called for the launch of PESCO in 2012.<sup>102</sup> However, the actual PESCO projects have thus far generated only moderate interest in the country. Finland is currently participating in five PESCO projects and observing seven, but does not act as the coordinator in any of them. However, the new EU initiatives and their importance for Finland should be viewed in the broader context of Finland’s evolving defence cooperation. During the last half decade, Finland has intensified old defence partnerships and forged new ones, with the aim of supporting its own territorial defence and tying it into larger European and Western defence networks. Participation in PESCO and pushing forward European defence cooperation more broadly serve the latter goal. Moreover, some of the projects such as Military Mobility and Timely Warning and Interception With Space-Based Theatre Surveillance (TWISTER) clearly have the potential to enhance the credibility of Finland’s territorial defence.

Finland’s EU presidency in the latter half of 2019 presented an opportunity to promote the security and defence agenda. The priorities of the Finnish presidency were indicative of Finland’s increased advocacy for EU defence cooperation. Most notably, protecting the security of EU citizens was one of the four major priorities of the presidency. This broader priority included three ‘sub-goals’, namely security and defence, the EU’s global role, and countering hybrid threats. However, the security and defence-related goals were limited in their ambition, as they were more or less about maintaining the prominence of the defence agenda

and implementing the existing initiatives rather than putting forward new ones.<sup>103</sup>

The fact that countering hybrid threats was one of the themes of the presidency illustrates how Finland has recently built up a profile as a ‘hybrid-savvy’ country. It played an active role in setting up the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats in Helsinki in 2017 together with eight other founding states, and the Centre has attracted ample international attention. Furthermore, during the presidency, Finnish Defence Minister Antti Kaikkonen suggested that Article 42.7 could in fact cover hybrid threats.<sup>104</sup> Given Finland’s comprehensive security model based on intensive cross-authority cooperation to secure the vital functions of society, it is well placed to assume such a profile.

Despite the recent progress made in EU defence cooperation and the increased Finnish advocacy, there has been a paradoxical development worth noting. Owing to Finland’s rapidly evolved defence cooperation with different partner countries as well as with NATO, the EU’s role in the tapestry of Finnish defence cooperation formats has lost some of its *relative* importance. In terms of concretely enhancing Finland’s territorial defence, Finnish-Swedish and Finnish-US cooperation and Finland’s NATO partnership are simply more central. This is not to suggest that the EU does not play a significant role. However, the EU is, rather, a solidarity framework supporting Finland’s relationships with focal European countries and a capability development platform potentially strengthening Finnish defence capabilities in the long term. In terms of operational collaboration to enhance territorial defence in the short term, the importance of the EU is somewhat more limited. However, the EU’s role in the defence field is not fixed. Thus, mounting tension in the transatlantic relationship could eventually trigger more profound changes in the way European defence is organized – with the Treaty on European Union giving the European Council the power to decide about moving to a common defence.<sup>105</sup>

To conclude, during its 25 years as an EU member, Finland has actively cultivated the CSDP and the EU’s security and defence agenda more broadly. When circumstances have allowed or demanded it, Finland has proactively tried to shape the policy. Proactivity in EU

101 Niinistö 2018a.

102 Prime Minister’s Office 2012, 76.

103 The priorities can be found at: <https://eu2019.fi/en/priorities/programme>.

104 European Daily Bulletin 2019.

105 Möttölä 2019, 73.

defence matters is a clear continuation from the early years of Finland's EU journey. What is perhaps an even more important observation is that membership of the European Union has regularly forced Finland to re-evaluate its own doctrinal standpoints. In other words, during its membership, Finland's boldness and readiness to cooperate in all aspects of defence has increased. Finnish policymakers have adapted the Finnish policy line in order to maintain the country as a relevant player in the EU. Finland's current aspirations stand in striking contrast to the circumspection that characterized the country's approach in the mid-1990s when it had only recently given up neutrality. As far as Finland is concerned, it seems that there cannot be 'too much defence' in the EU anymore.

## 4. EXTERNAL RELATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL AGENDA: FROM THEMATICAL WIDENING TO RESPONDING TO GLOBAL COMPETITION

**ONE OF THE** key implications of Finland's EU accession in 1995 was the rapid broadening of the country's foreign policy agenda in terms of both its general contours and its geographical coverage. New Finnish diplomats are still taught that due to EU membership in 1995, people needed to order atlases from the ministry library and learn that Great Lakes were also to be found in Africa. The same applied to many topics and processes of international relations, which were previously seen to be outside the key scope of Finnish foreign policy due to neutrality policy or geographical distance.

This section will focus on the key implications of EU membership with regard to developments in Finland's external relations and the country's broadening international agenda. It will firstly outline and discuss the development of Finland's foreign policy agenda, describing and analysing how Finland discovered, and established, an international agenda during its first 10 years as an EU member. Starting in the late 2000s, lack of progress in streamlining and strengthening the EU's external relations and foreign policy led Finland to pursue this agenda also through other institutional frameworks, with both Nordic cooperation and the United Nations gaining in importance. However, more recently, the sense of growing global competition has again strongly underlined the role of the EU as Finland's key channel for influencing global affairs.

**The broadening of Finland's foreign policy agenda** EU membership was an important part of the more global reorientation of Finland's foreign policy. Firstly, Finland fully embraced the so-called broader security thinking of the post-Cold War environment with an emphasis on human and societal security. The key risks and threats in the rapidly changing world were understood to be related to 'political instability, regional and internal disputes, uncontrollable migratory movements, nationality disputes and other problems'.<sup>106</sup> Secondly, these risks and threats did not emerge merely from Finland's neighbourhood undergoing profound

social, political and economic transformation, but also more broadly from Europe and beyond with ramifications for Finland. Thirdly, active participation in the EU's foreign policymaking required a significantly broader scope for Finnish foreign policy planning and policymaking. Moreover, while addressing the risks and threats of the post-Cold War environment was seen to require broad cooperation in various multilateral settings and institutions, the EU quickly became Finland's main channel for influencing regional and global developments. Finland's international agenda revolved primarily around 1) the UN system in general and the millennium goals and climate governance in particular; 2) the setting up of the WTO and the liberalization of trade through the EU's external trade policy; 3) the steering of economic and financial matters via the Bretton Woods institutions; and 4) the emerging inter-regional relations between the EU and other regional organizations, most notably ASEAN and AU. Importantly, the country aspired to emerge as a security provider rather than a consumer. This implied an increasingly active role in peace mediation and the EU's military and civilian crisis management.

The EU also became a key framework for Finland's development policy. Importantly, development policy is an area where Finland later emerged as a 'leader' in the EU context, as indicated by consecutive European Foreign Policy Scorecards. Achieving this status required the member state in question to provide policy initiatives and build coalitions in support of these, as well as to dedicate substantial resources in relation to its size.<sup>107</sup> However, Finland lost its leadership role in 2015, as the government of the time introduced severe cuts to Finnish development aid.

The increasing importance of human rights since the 1990s serves as a good example of the rather profound substantive change in Finnish foreign policy that was punctuated by EU membership, even though the initial trigger for this change was the end of the Cold War. During the Cold War, the contested nature of human rights issues – with deep-seated East-West disagreement – translated into a cautious Finnish approach.

106 Council of State 1995, 18.

107 Rantanen 2014; ECFR 2014.

While human rights constituted an important part of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) – one of the flagship initiatives of Finland’s post-war foreign policy – Finland itself assumed the position of a bridge-builder rather than pursuing an active human rights policy internationally. Starting in 1991, a more vocal Finnish position emerged, however, partly linked to developments in the EU.<sup>108</sup>

While strong personalities played a key role, they also utilized the EU as a new reference point in their efforts. Former President Tarja Halonen (in office 2000–2012) has noted that during her time as foreign minister (1995–2000), she defended her decision to form a human rights unit within the MFA by arguing that Finland was the only country in the EU – with the exception of small Luxembourg – without such a unit in its MFA.<sup>109</sup> Importantly, Finland also aimed at influencing the EU’s human rights policy, which led to active promotion of this policy area during Finland’s first EU Council presidency in 1999.<sup>110</sup> Increasing activism in human rights was also visible in the Finnish emphasis on the EU’s role in civilian crisis management within the framework of the CSDP, with the aim of promoting democracy, the rule of law, gender equality and minority rights. More recently, Finland has strongly highlighted the need to address the rule of law challenges in some EU member states. While this has been seen as important for the internal functioning of the EU, Helsinki has also been concerned about the external implications of these challenges. They could harm the EU’s credibility as a promoter of democracy in its neighbourhoods and beyond. During its last EU Council presidency in 2019, Finland did not shy away from advancing proposals to strengthen the EU’s rule of law safeguards, even if this led to strong reactions from Hungary and Poland, for instance.

EU membership has also framed the discussion on Finland’s commitment to international norms and rules, of which the Ottawa Convention, which prohibits the use, stockpiling, production, and transfer of anti-personnel landmines, serves as a notable example. Finland ratified the ban in 2011 even though the Ministry of Defence opposed it. The pressures for change in Finnish policy started to rise in 1996 when EU members decided to commit themselves to the ban. The rapid advancement of the Ottawa process and its

broad international coverage was not fully anticipated by the Finnish officials, and the country’s lukewarm approach became difficult to defend for other EU members and the broader international community.<sup>111</sup>

Secondly, and in terms of the geographical scope of Finnish foreign policy, a notable change took place right after Finland joined the EU. Before accession, Finland’s foreign policy clearly focused on the country’s immediate neighbourhood; that is, on relations with Russia and the Nordic countries, as well as the Baltic states after they regained their independence. However, EU membership broadened the focus of Finnish foreign policy in several ways.<sup>112</sup> First, it put the spotlight on other EU member states, particularly Germany. Second, it widened the scope of Finnish foreign policy by bringing in new states and territories that had largely been ignored previously.

In terms of the re-orientation towards other EU member states, Finland attempted to understand the key strategic interests of the fourteen other EU members in order to actively participate in the EU’s foreign policy decision-making and enhance Finnish interests. ‘When Finland joined the EU, it did not join to assume a passive role in the EU’s foreign policymaking.’<sup>113</sup> In terms of the institutional development of the CFSP, Finland moved close to the members states that pushed for more efficiency though deeper foreign policy integration. Thus, during its first EU Council presidency, Finland attempted to implement some of the innovations of the Amsterdam Treaty, enabling the Council to act by qualified majority on matters where the European Council had agreed on a common strategy, or the Council had adopted a joint position or action by unanimity rule.

The EU’s Mediterranean policy highlighted the importance of the Middle East and North Africa for Helsinki. Moreover, the colonial legacy of many member states brought new countries and areas onto the Finnish agenda. Helsinki’s focus on the EU’s southern neighbourhood has been seen to result from a true vocation to play an active role in the making of EU foreign policy. However, by paying increasing attention to Mediterranean issues, Finland also aimed to secure support for its own foreign policy interest in the north, including its Northern Dimension initiative.<sup>114</sup>

108 Haukkala and Ojanen 2011, 152–153.

109 Lehtilä 2012, 81.

110 Raunio and Tiilikainen 2003, 140.

111 Koivula 2004, 175–183.

112 Raunio and Tiilikainen 2003, 136.

113 Background interview on 23 January 2020 (author’s translation).

114 Background interview on 23 January 2020.



During its last EU Council presidency in 2019, Finland did not shy away from advancing proposals to strengthen the EU's rule of law safeguards. Pekka Haavisto, Minister for Foreign Affairs, discussed with Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the Union, in a high-level informal meeting in Helsinki. Source: EC-Audiovisual Service/EU 2020 Atte Kajova.

Importantly, EU policymaking also led to a shift in Finland's positioning in the Middle East. The Israel-Palestine peace process serves as a good example. Before joining the EU, Finland had approached this process via the UN and from a strict neutral policy position. This approach was replaced by an emphasis on the EU's position, with Finland playing an active part in its formulation. However, in light of its foreign policy tradition, Finland did highlight dialogue and reconciliation between the conflict parties. In a similar way, Finland did not participate in the US-led military action against Iraq in 2003 – which proved to be highly divisive for EU members – but did provide humanitarian assistance. Similarly, Finland also decided to stay out of the controversial air mission imposing the no-fly zone over Libya in 2011.<sup>115</sup>

However, Finland has not shied away from taking positions in disputes. Moreover, it has fully committed itself to those positions arrived at in the EU's Foreign Affairs Council. Indeed, Finland has aimed to contribute to the emergence of EU consensus, of which

Finland's second Council presidency in 2006 serves as a good example. It has been argued that the military hostilities between Israel and Lebanon constituted a notable test case for a previously neutral and northern smaller member state, which happened to be at the helm of the enlarged EU when the conflict erupted.<sup>116</sup> Despite the difficult conditions, Finland managed to ensure the unity and prominence of the EU in the resolution of a situation with conflicting interests among member states. Even if Finland arguably assumed the role of conciliator, reflecting its position as president of the Council, it also issued a number of statements criticising Israel for disproportionate action.<sup>117</sup>

Finland's EU foreign policy activism has not been limited to the EU's immediate neighbourhood. The role played by President Ahtisaari in the mediation of Kosovo's status between 2005 and 2007 coincided with another mediation process in which the EU and Finland played a key role, namely the Aceh peace process in Indonesia. Furthermore, the sixth Asia-Europe

<sup>116</sup> Tiilikainen 2015, 154.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>115</sup> Doerer 2017.

Meeting in Helsinki during the Finnish Council presidency in 2006 thrust the increasing economic and political importance of Asia to the top of the Finnish foreign policy agenda. Importantly, Finland did not merely aim to host this largest ever gathering of heads of state and government in Helsinki, but was argued to become a notable stakeholder in Asia-Europe relations.<sup>118</sup> First, Finland aimed to reinvigorate and streamline the ASEM process. Second, it strove for an agenda reflecting the global challenges that were high on the EU's list of priorities. Thus Finland promoted and secured objectives related to sustainable development, climate change and energy security as key fields of joint action. Third, Finland supported a stronger involvement of European and Asian civil societies in the process, an objective clearly reflecting Finland's own experience of having a well-organized civil society with a functioning relationship with the government. In addition to the inter-regional relations, Finland has also paid close attention to China and India as the EU's strategic partners.<sup>119</sup> In terms of the former, close trade relations have also played a significant role.<sup>120</sup>

### **Looking for alternative avenues: The return of UN and Nordic cooperation?**

Several severe EU crises during the past decade, which have largely originated from external developments, have had implications for Finnish foreign policy. On the one hand, the slow development of the EU's foreign policy and related efficacy challenges have led to some discussion concerning alternative avenues for Finland's influence. On the other hand, recent regional and global developments have once again highlighted the role of the EU for Finland also in terms of the broader foreign policy agenda.

As Finland has invested substantively in the EU's foreign and security policy and external relations in general, the EU's continuing lack of coherence and efficacy has led to some frustration in Helsinki. This became more discernible in the Finnish policy discussions during the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty, which included several key reforms that aimed to streamline and strengthen EU external relations. The resulting inter-institutional disputes in Brussels and the deepening divisions among member states – with

some pointing to trends of a re-nationalization of foreign policy – were duly noted in Finland. Moreover, the Eastern enlargement had increased the variation in the values underpinning member states' approaches to international human rights matters, in particular regarding gender and LGBT rights. For Finnish policy planners, this pointed to a lowering of the level of ambition of the EU's human rights policy.

Against this backdrop, the importance of alternative avenues for Finnish international influencing made a gradual comeback in policy discussions in Helsinki towards the latter part of the 2000s. In terms of policy, Finland attempted to raise its profile in the UN and also emphasized the importance of Nordic foreign and security policy cooperation.

The attempt to intensify Nordic cooperation in relation to the broader foreign policy agenda can be seen as the most promising and at least partly successful endeavour in terms of establishing alternative avenues for Finnish influencing. This was set in motion by changes in the Nordic states' strategic environment: the gradual weakening of formal multilateral institutions, the deepening of the economic and financial crisis in Europe, and the growing strategic importance of the Nordic-Baltic and the Arctic region.<sup>121</sup> The Stoltenberg Report, commissioned by the Nordic foreign ministers in 2008 and published in 2009, represented an early milestone, putting forward concrete proposals on deepening Nordic foreign, security and defence policy cooperation. In this context, the informal constellation of five Nordic states (N5) gained importance in regional but also in global matters. It has extended to some institutional platforms, most notably to the UN, where Nordic cooperation is more extensive and concrete than in many other formats.

Norway also called for a joint Nordic seat in the Group of Twenty (G20), which was rapidly becoming a major informal global institution in conjunction with the global financial crisis, which started in 2008. In 2009, the G20 started to convene at the level of heads of state and governments, duly becoming the key forum in responding to the financial crisis. Moreover, its agenda quickly broadened beyond financial and economic matters to include other topics such as climate change and development. However, the idea of a Nordic seat was at odds with the views of the emerging economies, which argued that Europe was already over-represented in the G20 with five seats (France,

118 Gaens 2008, 149–150.

119 Gaens, Jokela and Linnell 2009.

120 Haukkala and Ojanen 2011, 154.

121 Iso-Markku et al. 2018.

Germany, Italy, the UK and the EU). Consequently, Finland centred its efforts on the joint positioning and representation of the EU in the G20.<sup>122</sup> In addition to deepening Nordic collaboration in the UN, Finland successfully campaigned to become a member of the new UN Human Rights Council in 2006, yet failed to secure a seat in the UN Security Council for 2013–2014. Assessments of the unsuccessful campaign pointed to the need to clarify the country's international posture, make full use of its substantial diplomatic network, and link its Official Development Aid to its foreign policy objectives more explicitly.<sup>123</sup>

Against this background, Finnish policy planners have at times critically pondered whether the resources (re)directed to EU policymaking produce a maximal impact, and if striving to work towards and advance the EU's interests is always complementary to the Finnish interests.<sup>124</sup> These domestic discussions have not, however, led to a turn in Finnish foreign and EU policies, and the focus on alternative avenues has been understood as complementary to Finland's efforts to work for an effective EU in global affairs.<sup>125</sup> In this discussion, EU membership has been described as a marriage – after the honeymoon period, everyday life with its ups and downs kicks in. Yet the influence gains of the EU marriage, and related (re)allocation of resources, withstand critical scrutiny when compared to influencing via other channels.<sup>126</sup>

### **Responding to increasing global competition**

While the changing global and regional power relations and the turn towards a multipolar world have been noted and discussed for quite some time in Finland and the EU, the recent forceful manifestations of these developments have once again underlined the role of the EU in providing smaller states like Finland with a fast anchor and bulwark against the instability of international politics. This is only natural for a relatively small state like Finland, as one of the key drivers of the EU's foreign policy has always been member states' aspiration to use the EU as a power multiplier in international relations.<sup>127</sup> Moreover, the recent (re)theorization of small states and alliance formation have

again highlighted the aspiration of smaller states to seek economic, political and societal shelter from larger states and/or international organizations.<sup>128</sup>

In this regard, the calls for a more robust EU in global affairs have again grown stronger in Finland as the shift towards geopolitical and geo-economic competition marked by great-power rivalry has intensified. While the bilateral relations with major powers are seen as important in Helsinki, the EU constitutes the backbone of Finnish aspirations to influence the global agenda and the related external relations portfolios. This also applies to the remarkable emergence of China. When it comes to the latter, Finland has traditionally leaned towards a softer approach than some of its EU partners. This is partly due to Finland's notable trading relationship with China.<sup>129</sup> However, the increasingly influential and at times assertive China is currently also recognized as a potential challenge and as a competitor for Europe, calling for a stronger policy at the EU level. The emerging EU approach towards China, which is based on strong bilateral and multilateral cooperation on portfolios where the two sides share interests – from trade to connectivity, from the JCPOA to climate change – and on more robust EU responses where policies differ or interests collide, is increasingly accepted in Helsinki.

In economic relations and trade, Finland has seen the EU as pivotal in upholding the rules-based global trading system. While the EU's move to highlight trade defence might appear at first glance to run counter to the interests of an export-oriented open economy, swift EU action is largely seen as necessary in order to defend the rules-based system and to respond to the current US administration's trade policy. Finland is, however, concerned about the implications of the UK withdrawal for the intra-EU political dynamics in general and for trade matters in particular. Relatedly, Helsinki has recently aimed to advance and uphold the strict EU competition rules of the single market via a group of like-minded EU members. Moreover, the emergence of the so-called New Hanseatic League – a group of eight northern EU member states, which have taken a strong position with regard to EMU reforms – can be seen as a broader response to Brexit, reflecting the concerns of northern free traders. The group also includes two non-euro members, Denmark and Sweden.

122 Background interviews on 21 January and 5 February 2020.

123 International Peace Institute 2013.

124 Background interview on 21 January 2020.

125 Jokela 2013, 43.

126 Background interview on 5 February 2020.

127 Raik 2015, 445.

128 Baldur Thorhallsson (ed.) 2018, *Small States and Shelter Theory: Iceland's External Affairs*, 1st Edition.

129 Haukkala and Ojanen 2011, 154.

Arguably, the turn towards a more geopolitical and geo-economic global landscape has been anticipated in Finland. The Department for Trade Policy in the MFA was renamed the Department for External Economic Relations in 2013. The rationale for this move was provided by changes in the world economy, Finland's position in it, and the role that the foreign ministry plays in economic relations.<sup>130</sup> On the one hand, the turn towards a multipolar world and the increasing relevance of emerging markets have underlined economic diplomacy and export promotion through Finland's diplomatic network and high-level visits. On the other hand, the geo-economic instruments have become increasingly important in the EU's external relations and foreign policy. These include the EU's trade agreements and sanctions policy, for instance.

Helsinki accepts that in a multipolar but deeply interdependent world, foreign policy and economic affairs are closely connected. This means that the EU's main power resources, such as the single market and the related global regulatory clout, need to be supplemented by stronger EU foreign, security and defence policies. The argument of the current President of the European Commission and High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy that the EU must learn to speak in the language of power seems to resonate well in Helsinki. President Niinistö has for quite some time called for a stronger role for the EU in the field of security and defence. Moreover, he has argued that the current development trends suggest a notable turn in which world politics is increasingly shaped by the capitals of great powers, most notably Washington, Beijing and Moscow. Accordingly, the EU should strive to become one of the poles of the emerging world order or it will run the risk of becoming a playground for other great powers. Against this background, Finland has also signalled its readiness to consider the expansion of qualified majority voting in the CFSP to improve its efficacy.

In terms of the broader global agenda, the Finnish foreign policy agenda displays both change and continuity. The key elements of change relate to full political alignment with the EU, yet the legacy of neutrality can also be discerned in Finland's action to build consensus at the EU tables and beyond. As Finland has invested a lot in the EU's foreign policy and external relations in general, it has at times shown some dissatisfaction with the slow development of the EU in this area and

the disunity among the member states of the enlarged Union. As a result, alternative avenues for Finnish influence have been discussed and explored with some tangible outcomes related largely to Nordic cooperation. However, the forceful manifestations of the shift towards geopolitical and geo-economic competition and great-power rivalry have again underlined the importance of the EU for a relatively small member state with an export-oriented economy.

130 MFA 2013. Background interview on 5 February 2020.

## CONCLUSIONS: UNLOCKING THE EU'S SECURITY POTENTIAL

**THIS PAPER HAS** examined the relationship between Finnish foreign and security policy and EU foreign policy during Finland's 25-year journey as an EU member. More specifically, it has studied the interlinkage between Finnish and EU foreign policy in relation to three more specific topics: the policy towards and relations with Russia; security and defence; and Finland's broadening international agenda and the related external relations portfolios.

The paper has argued that, in the framework of the EU, Finland's policy towards Russia has had two agendas: the transformative and the protective agenda. Whereas the transformative agenda has aimed at supporting Russia's domestic (democratic) change and Russia's closer integration into European economic and political structures in particular, the protective agenda has sought to maximize the protection rendered by EU membership against a potential threat from Russia. The transformative agenda enjoyed primacy until the early 2010s, but the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014 resulted in an effective collapse of any transformative ambitions. Finland's support for the EU's restrictive measures against Russia and advocacy of deepening EU defence cooperation and countering hybrid threats attest to the current domination of the protective agenda. Moreover, it has become clearer that Finland's bilateral relationship with Russia is increasingly formulated within and conditioned by the EU's Russia policy.

Finland's approach to the EU's security and defence agenda is characterized by both continuity and change. Throughout its membership, Finland has been an active and consistent proponent of enhancing the EU's role in the area of security and defence. The latest manifestations of this advocacy are the Finnish security community discourse and Finland's proactivity regarding Article 42.7 of the Lisbon Treaty. At the same time, Finland's views on the nature and role of the EU's security and defence policy have changed considerably – even dramatically – over the course of the country's membership. In the early years of Finland's EU membership, Helsinki was allergic to matters related to territorial and joint defence. However, over the last decade or so, Finland's reservations about the

ambition of EU defence have waned. Currently, Finland has very few – if any – such reservations. In fact, the primary goal of Finland's defence cooperation efforts – including the CSDP and the EU more broadly – is to improve its national defence capabilities and anchor the national defence more deeply into European and Western defence structures. However, despite the progress achieved in EU defence cooperation in recent years, the EU framework has lost some of its relative importance in the tapestry of Finland's defence cooperation initiatives. Bilateral cooperation with Sweden and the US, for example, currently has more to offer in terms of boosting national defence.

In terms of the broader international agenda, Finnish foreign policy has also displayed trends of both change and continuity over the membership period. The key elements of change relate to Finland's full political alignment with the EU, but the legacy of neutrality can also be discerned in Finland's propensity for building consensus at the EU tables and beyond. As Finland has invested a great deal of trust and effort in the EU's foreign policy and external relations, it has at times shown some frustration with the slow development of EU integration in this area as well as the disunity among the member states of the enlarged Union. Consequently, alternative avenues for Finnish influence, such as Nordic cooperation, have been explored in Helsinki from the early 2010s onwards.

However, most recently, the forceful manifestations of the shift towards geopolitical and geo-economic competition and great-power rivalry have again underlined the importance of the EU for Finland as a relatively small member state with an export-oriented economy.

Taking into account the distinct developments and dynamics with regard to the three topics studied here, it is worth asking whether they allow for drawing any general conclusions about the relationship between Finnish foreign and security policy and EU foreign policy. At least three such broader points can be made. First, the analysis here confirms the finding of earlier literature that the interplay between national and EU foreign policy does not follow any preset path or advance in a linear fashion. Instead, the Europeanization

of foreign policy is underpinned by specific conditions in each member state. Relatedly, different foreign policy areas and time periods have an important impact on the way that member states – in this case Finland – adapt to and seek to shape EU foreign policy.

Second, and also in line with previous research, it is possible for member states to display partly contradictory tendencies in their relationship with EU foreign policy. For example, Finland's current take on EU foreign policy is partly characterized by the country's dissatisfaction with the persistent difficulties in advancing towards stronger EU foreign, security and defence policies. To some extent, this has led Finland to look for other frameworks in which to accomplish different foreign and security policy-related tasks. At the same time, the EU continues to be seen in Finland as an indispensable safeguard against the uncertainties of international politics. This view translates into continued willingness on the part of Finland to invest in EU foreign, security and defence policy.

This leads to the third general conclusion to be drawn from the study at hand, which is that in relation to all three topics discussed here, the EU's role in enhancing Finnish security has become the top priority. This can be seen in the rise of the protective Russia agenda, the increased and more open-minded approach towards EU defence cooperation, and the recent emphasis on the EU's role as a bulwark against geo-economic threats, all of which point to Finland's wish for more robust EU action in security matters broadly defined. This is not an entirely new development. Indeed, Finnish policymakers have treated Finland's EU membership as a security policy choice from the outset. However, as the world is moving into a less benevolent and more competitive age, the EU's capability to generate security and protection for Finland and all member states will be increasingly put to the test in practice as well. Thus, while the EU's potential for furthering Finland's security has been acknowledged in Finland from very early on, the country is currently endeavouring to make full use of the EU's possibilities to do so. /

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