

SAC Evaluation Team Report on FIIA's 2020-2022 Publications

15 June 2023

The Scientific Advisory Council (SAC) evaluation team examined a selection of publications by FIIA scholars from 2020, 2021, and 2022 chosen by the FIIA research programs. These included a wide range of publications by FIIA scholars in the different FIIA publications series as well as non-FIIA publications (including books, chapters in edited volumes, journal articles, and others).

Feedback

As part of the SAC evaluation of FIIA publications, surveys were sent both to the members of the FIIA Scientific Advisory Council and to a “Stakeholder Panel” chosen by FIIA staff.

The following sums up the feedback from the survey sent to SAC members (though comments on individual publications are not included):

Has FIIA and the individual research programs produced an adequate number of publications each year?

- It seems that the number of works is quite consistent with the research tasks and the existing agenda.
- Yes—very impressive. High quality and ver[y] accessible. Very much appreciate the fine webinars where new research is presented.
- Yes, FIIA as a whole as well as each of the research programs have produced a more than adequate number of publications each year. It is remarkable how productive FIIA scholars are.
- Yes, I consider there to be an adequate number of publications each year. This applied both to FIIA and the individual programs.

Do FIIA publications reflect the Institute's research plan for 2020-2022?

- Yes, plus FIIA was also very reactive when it comes to events that could not be foreseen when the Research Plan was drafted.
- I, for one, am not particularly concerned with whether FIIA publications reflect the research plan. These plans are made in advance of each three year period. But stuff happens and FIIA scholars have to react. In fact, it might be considered a good sign if FIIA scholars do not rigidly stick to the plan, but are flexible enough to break with the plan and address important issues not anticipated in advance as they come up.
- Yes. But also responds to events as they emerge, which is a strength.

Are there new research topics that FIIA should cover in 2023-2025? If so, what are they and why?

- [I]t is important to pay attention to the prospects for the evolution of the authoritarian regime, including Russia after Putin, and the state of Russian society.
- The dynamic situation in Russian foreign and domestic affairs—where FIIA has great engine-power and professional networks. The...NATO membership of Finland and the evolving security situation in the Baltic Sea Region. The further development of EU common foreign and security policies—as well as the development of its tools.
- The war in Ukraine and its aftermath...as well as further work on US elections. Finland and Sweden in NATO will also be of very high relevance.
- I would like to see a study examining the role of Finnish diaspora communities in enhancing or detracting from the achievement of Finnish foreign policy goals.
- Finland's integration into NATO structures will be something that will be important to follow.

How would you evaluate the scientific/analytical level of publications by FIIA researchers?

- As top 10% in Europe.
- Excellent.
- FIIA scholars regularly publish high quality publications. Indeed, I haven't seen anything that isn't of high quality produced by them.
- Excellent across all programs.

How would you evaluate the role of outside publications? Should FIIA researchers be publishing more or less through them? And what type of outside publications should they be focusing on: academic journals, chapters in edited volumes, papers published by other research institutes, or others? If so, why?

- Outside publications are very important to building a positive image of FIIA. Most important are publications in political media (newspapers and magazines), including leading national and international publications.
- I assume that outside publications mainly need to be seen in the context of individual researchers' career plans. Without a permanent contract at FIIA, keeping the "university option" open -- especially in a country with not many other think tanks -- seems like a necessity. This is also why FIIAns should be encouraged to continue their work on outside publications: if FIIA cannot offer them long-term perspectives, they must be able to create such perspectives for themselves.
- When it comes to which outside publications should be pursued, I would focus less on formats but on substance: outside publications should still have some policy relevance. However, knowing that outside publications will most likely not find an audience in policy circles (too cumbersome to read, too much talk about theory and methodology, tedious literature reviews + paywalls), I believe efforts could be made to better "translate" peer reviewed publications into something policy relevant. Very concretely, this could be a short paper (2-4 pages? new format or using existing FIIA formats?), distilling the policy relevant aspects (rather than aiming for a mere summary of the book or article). It could also be a prerequisite for external publication projects that they indeed have enough policy relevance to be "translated" in this way. If they do not because their added value is

entirely academic without any "real world implications," then maybe FIIA is indeed the wrong place for that project.

- This question is difficult to address. Publishing outside of FIIA shows that work by FIIA scholars are valued by others. Still, it stands to reason that the more that FIIA scholars publish outside of FIIA, the less time they have to focus on FIIA publications. This might not be a bad thing, but is it what FIIA wants?
- Outside publications by FIIA scholars presumably occur in response to opportunities that arise for them individually. FIIA benefits if these publications have a high impact. But whether they will or not may not be possible to tell in advance. Being able to publish in non-FIIA outlets is something, I am sure, that FIIA scholars value being able to do. One way to increase the visibility of non-FIIA publications may be for FIIA to issue a short summary of the piece by the author, either when these pieces are published or perhaps in a monthly, quarterly, or some other periodic compendium.
- I like the mix -- researchers who are more conceptually oriented thinkers should publish in academic journals but I doubt it is the right outlet for everyone. Both outside/in house publications are valuable and, to maximize impact and reach different audiences, it often makes sense to spin off an in-house piece of an outside publication.
- It is good for career development of staff for some outside publications to be included, but they do not seem to me to be the core work of FIIA. I would not recommend more work on them.

Do FIIA publications serve Finnish, European and other needs for reliable information and analysis? If not, how to improve the situation?

- Yes, given the high credibility of FIIA publications and the high credibility of the researchers themselves.
- FIIA publications do indeed serve Finnish, European, and others' needs for reliable information and analysis. The one way to improve this situation is to somehow advertise FIIA publications more widely.
- I cannot comment on Finnish needs, but they meet European needs.

How could FIIA publications be improved?

- In terms of their distribution and recognition, publications in the publicly available press are important. The variety of genres and types of publications also gives more freedom to the researcher himself and is convenient for the consumers of analysis.
- The impact of publications could perhaps be improved by more frequent visits and presentations in Nordic sister institutions...
- FIIA publications are very good; I cannot identify any need for improvement.
- FIIA publications could benefit from, where appropriate, the inclusion of more maps and charts.

The following sums up the feedback from the survey sent to the "Stakeholder Panel" chosen by FIIA:

How would you evaluate the value, topicality and relevance of FIIA's research publications during the past 3 years (2020-2022)?

- FIIA publications' subjects tend to be topical and timely. They usually also are relevant and interesting not only from a Finnish perspective, but more broadly. FIIA papers often add value and new perspectives to current foreign policy debates.
- Very good. Of course there is some variation - and "value" is always somewhat subjective and related to what is on the agenda and some of the most topical "publications" could be some timely Twitter threads.
- Very topical. And as always, long-run investment in e.g. understanding Russia has paid off when we really need such analysis.
- They are extremely topical and also relevant.
- Very valuable insight and knowledge for me as a decision-maker.

Do you consider FIIA publications to have been useful for your work. If yes, in what way/if not, why?

- Yes, they are useful for broadening perspective and for giving insight into a small EU MS point of view.
- Yes. But of course they constitute only a small share of the overall literature that is needed for work. Some of the work does not have that much of "lasting value" but that is the purpose and the consequence of some work that has to be timely and accessible.
- Yes. Both quick analysis of topics of the day and more in-depth research on important topics.
- Yes, for example, in teaching.

Are there new research topics that FIIA researchers should cover during the next three years (2023-2025)? If so, what are they and why?

- Global impact of Europe's changing economic, trade and industrial policies. More focus on European affairs and Europe as actor on global arena. Also, role of G7 and G20 as multilateral fora, including a perspective of an EU MS that is not member of them.
- Russia and the war on Ukraine, European security and EU integration, NATO, Nordic cooperation, China, US, rising powers, international political economy and environment as well as Finnish foreign policy etc - that [has] been covered and needs to be covered also in the continuation. But there will also [be] need for some niche work and unforeseen phenomena (such as global health).
- Finland's place and policies in NATO.
- Foreign and security implications of technology (especially space, digitalization, AI, quantum computing).
- Foreign and security implications of climate change and loss of biodiversity (geoengineering as a specific topic).

Can FIIA publications be improved in some way(s)--and if so, how?

- Summaries and presentation allowing for quick read of essentials is paramount for policy makers.
- This question is too general to be answered in a clear-cut way. There might be weaknesses in some publications, or weaknesses that publications on some issues do not exist, but not one easy fix when it comes to the publications overall. Important however is to retain a tight interface between theoretical and policy oriented analysis—not every briefing paper needs to be theoretical but if researchers lose their competence to theorise and think through abstractions, the ideas presented in research tends to repeat themselves or be just empirical mapping and description without any illuminating interpretations.

Can FIIA’s research communication be improved in some way(s)--and if so, how?

- Bring up main conclusion or finding upfront, not just the subject of the research product.
- Communication is good. Difficult to see any major improvements.
- Communication is efficient and various channels are used for disseminating research results. I wish my organization would have such resources and skills.
- Seminars and discussion events are often scheduled so that it [is] difficult for members of parliament to attend.

If you have additional feedback on FIIA’s research activities, please share your views here:

- Reseachers could contribute more to Ulkopolitiikka-lehti in Finnish with more argumentative articles related to Finnish foreign policy and the key changes in the world that could also be footnoted for empirical evidence or further information. It would be nice to go back to the old volumes and see what were the topics of discussion amongst Finnish researchers - now the discussion if any is in the social media rather than more analytically on paper.

Measuring Scholarly Impact

Google Scholar citations are one (but not the only) means of measuring the impact of publications by FIIA scholars. On 10 May 2023, a review was conducted of how many Google Scholar citations each publication on the Suggested Readings list received. What this revealed is that the publications by FIIA scholars in non-FIIA publications often received citations. Nine journal articles by FIIA scholars on the Suggested Readings list received Google Scholar citations, including four above ten apiece (13, 14, 25, and 33). Of the five books on the suggested reading list, one received 13 citations while the others received only one or two citations. Two citations were the most received by any of the five chapters in edited volumes on the list, while a contribution to a publication by another research institute received seven citations and one in a report commissioned by the EU Parliament received eight.

By contrast, most of the FIIA publications on the Suggested Readings list received fewer citations. None of the FIIA Comments or the FIIA Briefing Papers on this list were cited at all. One FIIA Finnish Foreign Policy paper received four citations. One FIIA Report received 16 citations while another received none. Three FIIA Working Papers on the list were not cited at all and another was cited only once. A fifth, “The European Green Deal” by Marco Siddi (FIIA

Working Paper no. 114), received a massive 140 citations—far and away the most citations received by any publication by a FIIA scholar on the Suggested Readings list.

What this analysis indicates is that FIIA scholars' non-FIIA publications—especially journal articles—receive greater attention from the broader scholarly community than do their FIIA publications. But the large number of citations received by Marco Siddi's FIIA Working Paper shows that FIIA publications can also receive significant scholarly attention.

Recommendations for Further Discussion

FIIA Publications: There are now six FIIA publication categories: FIIA Comments, FIIA Briefing Papers, FIIA Working Papers, FIIA Analyses, FIIA Finnish Foreign Policy Papers, and FIIA Reports. As this review has indicated, all FIIA publications are of high quality. Their visibility, though, does not always match their quality. The following suggestions might be considered by FIIA leadership, scholars, and staff in an effort to improve this:

- **FIIA Comments:** These op-ed length pieces would get greater attention if they were syndicated to various news outlets. The International Institute for Strategic Studies has long done this with its “Strategic Comments” series (which resemble the FIIA Comments series).
- **FIIA Working Papers:** FIIA websites introducing them state that a FIIA Working Paper “is a first version of a text that will be developed into a larger publication of an academic or policy-relevant character. The series includes publications aimed at larger audiences as well as expert audiences.” By contrast, the section of the November 2022 FIIA Style Guide for Authors on FIIA Working Papers states, “If the goal is to eventually publish an academic article on the subject, it is important to note that nowadays some academic publications have very strict rules regarding self-plagiarism and may reject a manuscript due to similarities between the manuscript and the FIIA Working Paper” (p. 6). There is a contradiction here between FIIA publicly stating that its Working Papers are a “first version of a text” on the one hand and FIIA giving guidance to FIIA scholars that it might not be possible to publish these as articles or chapters due to “similarities between the manuscript and the FIIA Working Paper.” If FIIA Working Papers seldom, if ever, serve as the basis for non-FIIA publications, then the website description of FIIA Working Papers as being “a first version of a text that will be developed...” should be revised to a more accurate description such as that FIIA Working Papers are “an article-length occasional paper series.”
- **FIIA Analyses:** This category of publication was introduced in response to a desire on the part of FIIA researchers for a FIIA-published peer-reviewed outlet for their work. According to the FIIA publications website, however, only eleven FIIA Analyses have been published since the series was introduced in 2014 (four in 2014, two in 2015, one each in 2016 and 2017, two in 2018, and one in 2021). It appears that FIIA scholars prefer their peer-reviewed papers to be published as journal articles or chapters in edited volumes instead of in the FIIA Analyses series. One way to ameliorate this situation might be to transform this series into a quarterly peer-reviewed journal (perhaps called FIIA Review) which scholars everywhere (including FIIA) could submit articles to. Such

a journal could bring greater attention to the FIIA-authored articles published in them than the FIIA Analyses series has done, and also provide greater attention to FIIA. Managing such a journal, though, would require a substantial amount of time and attention.

- **FIIA Finnish Foreign Policy Papers:** An important topic that should be considered for inclusion in this series is Finland's policy toward migration and refugee policies and how this interacts with those of other EU countries.

Non-FIIA Publications: It is important for FIIA scholars to publish in non-FIIA publications since these often get more scholarly attention than FIIA publications do. But the degree of scholarly attention that different types of non-FIIA publications receive varies considerably. As peer-reviewed journal articles have been cited more often than other types of non-FIIA publication, FIIA scholars should aim to publish more of their research in these outlets.

It would be helpful if abstracts or brief summaries of non-FIIA publications by FIIA scholars were posted on the FIIA website with links to the full versions (even if these full versions are only available by subscription; while an individual reader may not have such a subscription, the institution he or she is associated with may have one).