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THE EVOLUTION OF FINNISH-RUSSIAN RELATIONS FROM 1917 TO THE PRESENT

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Introduction

The Soviet failure in the *satellisation*[1] of Finland is considered by many scholars as nothing short of miraculous[2]. Cold war-era Finland was seen by observers as the most vulnerable among the countries that encircled the immense soviet territory, and Helsinki and Moscow still share a 1296 kilometres-long border. Moreover, Finland has been a Russian Grand-Duchy for more than a century, until the October Revolution. Considering all this, it might well be asked why Finland has not become Moscow's long-hoped-for gateway to the west, another colony of the Soviet empire, the latest satellite state to export the planned economy to, but managed instead to survive as a small, capitalist state situated on the border of Soviet communism.

Finland developed a winning strategy to maintain their independence and mitigate Soviet influence: the trademark of Finnish *Ostpolitik* after World War II was a radical overturning of their traditional hostility towards Moscow, that has been replaced with a policy of

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[1] According to "L'Œuvre", April 16th, 1941, this term indicates "Un pays soumis dans sa politique à une nation plus puissante". It was also used by F. PERROUX, "*Indépendance" de la Nation*, Paris, Aubier-Montaigne, 1969, p. 115, and by "le Nouvel Observateur", July 29th, 1968.

[2] See for instance P. BOTTICELLI, *Finland's Relations with the Soviet Union, 1940-1986*, in "Loyola University Student Historical Journal", 1986; and E. JUTIKKALA and K. PIRINEN, *A History of Finland*, Dorchester, Dorset Press, 1988.

friendship. Finnish leaders understood that only a real rapprochement between the two countries could ensure the long-term survival of a sovereign and independent Finland. This policy has remained operational for over forty years: during the 1980s it was considered to have become part of Finnish culture and national identity and seemed to have reached its goal.

Yet, "neutrality for the Finns was never an end in itself but merely a means of safeguarding their national existence and security"[3]. In fact, the breakup of the Soviet Union triggered a change of direction in Finnish foreign policy. The conflicts in Georgia (2008) and eastern Ukraine (2014) speeded up this process.

Thus, the recent and seemingly sudden decision of the Finnish leadership to support NATO membership (which was accompanied by a dramatic increase of the proportion of population in favour of joining the alliance) has a deeper origin than it might appear at a first glance. The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine further accelerated the process, and it is safe to say that the outbreak of the war raised an existential question in Finland more than in any other country. Recent events represented an epochal turning point in Finnish-Russian relations which – quite obviously, and as will be seen – have always been at the very core of Helsinki's security doctrine.

This article is thus aimed at tracing the historical parable of the relations between Finland and Russia, in order to emphasize and to better comprehend the extent and magnitude of the recent turn. Moreover, we will try and highlight how this shift has been less sudden that one might think, as its conceptual bases date back to the end of the Soviet era. Specific attention will be given to the outlining of the features of the so-called *Finlandization* process, that now has seemingly come to an end. What is certain, though, is that – when choosing its foreign (and, to some extent, domestic) policy strategies and priorities – Finland will always have to consider the presence and will of its larger neighbour.

[3] I. SUOMINEN, *Finland, the European Union and Russia*, in "The World Today", Vol. 50, No. 1, 1994, p. 12.

1. *Early Foreign Policy Leanings*

During the mid-nineteenth century, Finland (then still a Grand-Duchy under the control of the Tsarist Empire) witnessed, just like much of Europe, a wave of national awakening during which – in similar fashion to what happened in Sweden[4] – nationalism gained mass support. Those autonomist ambitions were fought back by the central authority, especially after Nicholas II ascended to the throne in 1894: a *russification* policy[5] was implemented across the Empire for years, and the population often responded with violent attacks[6].

The October Revolution was a major turning point for Finnish politics: the newly formed non-socialist majority in Parliament[7] was then aiming at complete independence, while socialists looked more and more towards the Soviet Union as an example to follow. On November 15th, 1917, the Bolsheviks declared a general right to self-determination '*for the peoples of Russia*'[8], in a document that even recognized a "*full right to secede*". That same day, the Finnish legislature issued a statement by which it temporarily took control of the country[9].

Germany aimed at swiftly securing peace with Russia in order to concentrate its military effort towards west and strike a decisive blow against the Anglo-Franco-American troops. Hence, they suggested to the Finns to declare independence as soon as it was possible, and to ask the withdrawal of Soviet troops, promising their support in return[10]. On November 6th, a declaration of independence was approved in

4 For further information on Finnish nationalism see R. Alapuro, O. Raggio, *Classi sociali e nazionalismo in Finlandia: uno studio comparativo*, in "Quaderni Storici, nuova serie", vol. 28, n. 84 (3), 1993, "Nazionalismo e mutamento sociale in Europa centro-orientale", pp. 745 and ff.

5 E.C. Thaden, *Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1981.

6 In Finland, the culmination of those attacks was the murder of the Russian governor Nikolaj Ivanovič Bobrikov during 1904.

7 In 1906, despite carrying on its *russification* efforts, the Tsarist government substituted the ancient four-chamber Diet with a new unicameral assembly (*Eduskunta*).

8 The first English translation of this document, signed by Lenin and Stalin and known as *Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia*, (originally *Декларáция прав нарóдов Россúи*), appeared in "The Nation", December 28th, 1919.

9 Not surprisingly, this document is known as *November 15th Declaration*.

10 M. Longo Adorno, *Storia della Finlandia Contemporanea*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2014, pp. 23-24.

Helsinki; Moscow recognized the newly formed country as early as December 28th. Yet, quite obviously, the revolutionary government was hoping for the quick outbreak of a proletarian revolution in Finland[11].

After the brief but bloody Finnish civil war was fought in early 1918 between 'red' and 'white' Finns (the former being mostly communists and social democrats, while the latter were in favour of maintaining the s*tatus quo*), the conservative victory sanctioned the entry of Finland into the German sphere of influence. The weakness of both Germany and Russia in the immediate post-war period allowed the newly born country to pursue a relatively peaceful social and political stabilization[12].

On October 14th, 1920, the normalization of relations with the Soviet Union was achieved through the *Treaty of Tartu*: this agreement determined the Finnish-Russian border and represented a further acknowledgement of the independence of Finland by its troublesome neighbour (Figure 1).

The 1920s were a rather peaceful decade for the new-born republic: the foundations for the neutrality policy that was to characterize the country in the following decades were laid, while Finland gained worthy security guarantees by joining the League of Nations (LON hereafter) in 1920.

In 1926, as part of their response to the Locarno Treaties, the Soviets offered Finland to sign a non-aggression pact. The Finns agreed to sit at the negotiating table, but then laid down some conditions that were completely unacceptable for Moscow. This strategy was successful, as negotiations failed. As Hentilä pointed out, "The only alternative left for Finnish foreign policy in the mid-1920s was non-alignment or 'splendid isolation'[13], and Finland's international relations accordingly became more closely bound to the LON than at any time before"[14].

[11] O. JUSSILA, S. HENTILA, J. NEVAKIVI, *From Grand Duchy to a Modern State: A Political History of Finland Since 1809*, London, Hurst & Company, 1999, pp. 104-105.

[12] For a complete study of the events, see O. JUSSILA, S. HENTILA, J. NEVAKIVI, *From Grand Duchy to a Modern State: A Political History of Finland Since 1809*, cit., pp. 127 and ff.

[13] *Splendid isolation* is a term used to describe the 19th-century British diplomatic practice of avoiding permanent alliances, and it has been used here to emphasize the equidistant position towards great powers assumed by Finland during the first years of its existence as a sovereign State, as well as its non-participation to the first steps of Nordic cooperation.

[14] O. JUSSILA, S. HENTILA, J. NEVAKIVI, *From Grand Duchy to a Modern State: A Political History of Finland Since 1809*, cit., p. 142.

Figure 1 - *Map of the Grand Duchy of Finland, the borders of which were substantially confirmed by the Treaty of Tartu.*

In the early 1930s, Helsinki was forced to abandon its non-aligned position. In 1931, negotiations for a new non-aggression treaty started, and the Finns seemed willing to finalize the agreement, that was signed in January 1932. Foreign trade in Finland was then growing, but less than 1% of it was with the Soviet Union[15].

Meanwhile, after the national socialists seized the power in Germany in 1933, the European security system was starting to lose the equilibrium achieved in Locarno. In 1934, when Germany abandoned the LON, some thirty countries urged the USSR to become a member. This stance aroused consternation and further concern in Helsinki, re-

[15] R. EDWARDS, *White Death: Russia's War on Finland 1939-40*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006, p. 26.

sulting in a closer cooperation between Finland and other Nordic countries[16]. Although those Finnish concerns were, as will be seen, well-founded, Helsinki's diffident, hostile attitude towards Moscow was only going to exacerbate the suspiciousness and hostility of the big neighbour, and full-scale conflict between the two countries broke out in the early years of World War II.

2. *Finland During the Second World Conflict: From War to Peace*

The *Winter War* started in December 1939 with an air, navy, and ground attack from Stalin[17]. This assault on Finland (that was to be part of the Soviet sphere of influence according to the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) led to the expulsion of the Soviet Union from the LON.

The Soviets expected and wished for a quick war. Their primary objective was the Carelian isthmus, the seizure of which should have been followed according to their plan[18] by the occupation of Helsinki. Yet, the Finns had better knowledge of the territory, innovative defensive tactics against tanks, and well-known shooting abilities: they organized a heroic resistance that lasted until March 1940, when a peace treaty was signed in Moscow. The global public opinion supported the Finnish cause – the Soviet aggression was seen as unjustified, aid and volunteers were sent to Finland from all over the world, as much from democratic powers as from fascist Italy and Hungary[19].

During May 1941, the Finns realized that Germany intended to attack the USSR the following month, and deliberately took the decision to join

[16] O. JUSSILA, S. HENTILA, J. NEVAKIVI, *From Grand Duchy to a Modern State: A Political History of Finland Since 1809*, cit., pp. 164-165. In 1933, Finland joined the 1930 Oslo Agreements, while one year later it took part for the first time to the Meeting of the Nordic countries' Foreign Ministers. As claimed by the then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Kivimäki, the aim of this cooperation was to "safeguard the Nordic countries' joint neutrality".

[17] For more information about the War, see M. LONGO ADORNO, *Storia della Finlandia Contemporanea*, cit., pp. 53 and ff.

[18] More on the Soviet strategy and miscalculations during the Winter War in O. MANNINEN, *The Soviet Plans for the North-Western Theatre of Operations in 1939-1944*, Helsinki, National Defense College, 2004, esp. pp. 11-16.

[19] VV. AA., *Enciclopedia dell'Aviazione,* Vol. 7, Novara, EDIPEM, 1978, pp. 210-212.

the German military expedition. For their country to join the war, the Finns imposed the following conditions to Germany: Finnish independence was to be maintained, Germany was to strike first, and Helsinki was not to undertake any military action before the Soviets did[20]. It is important to note that no agreement was signed between the two powers.

The German aggression on the USSR started on June 22nd, 1941. Finland maintained a stance of neutrality that was clearly no more than a façade. We will not discuss here the detail of the military events: for our purposes, it is enough to emphasize how, when the USSR launched its attack on Finland, the Helsinki government had the opportunity to portray itself as the victim of Moscow's latest aggression[21]: this conflict went down in history as *Continuation War*.

The Red Army's advance was halted[22] just after it won back the territories that had become part of the USSR after the Winter War. Finland had once again managed to escape a military defeat and occupation and preserved its independence.

On September 19th, 1944, a peace treaty known as the *Moscow Armistice* was signed between Finland, the Soviet Union, and the United Kingdom, putting an end to Finland's role in World War II[23]. The reasons that led the Soviets to conclude this agreement are still debated among historians. Many believe that the USSR was designing for Finland the same fate as the Baltic states. Anthony Eden, then chief of the Foreign Office, wrote in a report to the British War Cabinet: "Although we shall no doubt hope that Finland will be left some real degree of at least cultural and commercial independence and a parliamentary regime, Russian influence will in any event be predominant in Finland […]"[24] (Figure 2).

[20] O. Jussila, S. Hentila, J. Nevakivi, *From Grand Duchy to a Modern State: A Political History of Finland Since 1809*, cit., p. 189.

[21] Due to its attack to Finland, the Soviet Union was expelled from the LON. See *Expulsion of the U.S.S.R.*., in "League of Nations Official Journal", December 14th, 1939.

[22] This incident, commonly known as the *'miracle of Ihantala'*, is widely discussed in M. Longo Adorno, *Storia della Finlandia Contemporanea*, cit., p. 107.

[23] "*Armistice Agreement between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, on the one hand, and Finland on the other*."

[24] See T. Polvinen, *Between East and West. Finland in International Politics, 1944-1947*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986, pp. 14-15.

Figure 2 - *The areas ceded by Finland to the Soviet Union after the Continuation War. Porkkala was returned to Finland in 1956.*

Helsinki managed to obtain a much more advantageous peace compared to other allies of Germany (such as, for instance, Romania); it was nonetheless forced to surrender 11% of its territory to the Soviets, including the city of Vyborg. Finland also had to demobilize its military, fully pay its war debts, and lease the Porkkala military base to the Soviet Union[25].

The terms of the agreement were tough, but Finland was the only country allowed to maintain its institutions and constitutional mechanisms as they were in 1918. Even so, the experience of the war forced the Finnish political *élite* to acknowledge that, if they wanted to maintain their independence, they should always have considered the power and (most remarkably) the proximity of the Soviet Union[26]. In the following decades, this awareness would mark every single political decision in Helsinki, as will be seen below.

[25] O. Vehvilainen, *Finland in the Second World War: Between Germany and Russia*, New York, Palgrave, 2002, pp. 147-149.

[26] M. Hilson, *The Nordic Model – Scandinavia since 1945*, London, Reaktion Books, 2008, p. 125.

3. *The Paasikivi-Kekkonen Doctrine: Finnish Neutrality During the Cold War*

3.1 *1948: a turning point*

The situation was not of the rosiest for Finland after the Moscow treaty was signed. The concession to the Soviets of the Porkkala peninsula, located less than 20 kilometres west of Helsinki, was not only a humiliation for a sovereign country, but also a major threat for the independence of the young republic. During the immediate post-war period, the relationship with the Soviet Union, altered by the contrasts in the framework of World War II, posed major limitations to Helsinki's freedom of action in the international arena. Tiny Finland had fought against a superpower and managed to remain independent. Still, it seems clear that – had the USSR seen the annexation of Finland as a vital issue for her foreign policy strategy – independence would again become a mere yearning for the Finns[27].

1948 was a key year for the unfolding Cold War: after the coup that allowed the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, with Soviet backing, to assume undisputed control over the country's government, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was founded[28]. According to Nevakivi, "As other Nordic countries became members of the Western military organization, Sweden and Finland were left in the no-man's-land between the two power blocs, Sweden as a neutral country with a Western orientation and Finland oriented towards the East"[29].

The main advocate of this policy of reconciliation with the USSR was *Juho Kusti Paasikivi*: great connoisseur of Russian culture[30], a loy-

[27] E. Solsten, S.W. Meditz, *Finland - a country study,* Washington, D.C., Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1990, p. 52.

[28] See C. Wiebes, B. Zeeman, *The Pentagon Negotiations March 1948: The Launching of the North Atlantic Treaty*, in "International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944)", Vol. 59, No. 3, 1983, p. 353, and L.S. Kaplan, *Origins of NATO: 1948-1949*, in "Emory international Law Review", Vol. 34, No. 11, 2019, p. 21.

[29] O. Jussila, S. Hentila, J. Nevakivi, *From Grand Duchy to a Modern State: A Political History of Finland Since 1809*, cit., p. 245.

[30] Paasikivi (1870-1956) served as President of Finland between 1946 and 1956. He was the leader of the Finnish delegation during the negotiations that led to the Treaty of Tartu; he also served as Finnish ambassador in Stockholm (1936-39), managed the negotiations with the Soviets before the Winter War broke out (October-November 1939), and

alist towards the Tsars up to the October revolution, he held anti-communist political views. However, he was persuaded by his deep knowledge of the historical relationship between the two countries that bilateral relations between Finland and the Soviet Union had to be managed with pragmatism. The antagonistic policy adopted until then had proven itself to be counterproductive and had led Finland very close to the end of its existence as a sovereign state. The turning point imprinted by Paasikivi to his country's foreign policy had such magnitude that some observers described the period following 1944 as the years of the "*Second Finnish Republic*"[31].

The cornerstone of the foreign policy of Finland in the post-war period was the *Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance*, also known as *YYA Treaty*[33], which the USSR and Finland signed in April 1948. The goal of this accord was for the Soviets to deter any attack from Western powers through their western neighbour's territory, while the Finns aimed at mitigating the Soviet political influence on their country, as they were under no formal obligation to subdue their foreign policy to the USSR.

Moscow initially proposed to Finland a treaty modelled on the ones recently sealed with Hungary and Romania[33]; yet, when the Finnish leaders made it clear that they were not willing to venture that far, the leaders of the Party in Moscow accepted the conditions posed by Helsinki, starting from the acknowledgement (included in the treaty's preamble) of the Finnish desire to keep themselves out of the confrontations between great powers. The accord provided for the Finnish armed forces to operate within their national territory exclusively for defensive purposes, which included preventing the passage of opposing armies (article 1), and that – in case of conflict – the political leaderships of the two countries were to take a decision about the Red Army's contribution to the defence of Finland (article 2). The parties also

took part to the ones that brought to the Moscow peace treaty (1940). He then served as ambassador to Moscow.

[31] *The Paasikivi Policy and Foreign-Policy Thinking*, article on www.paasikivi-seura.fi.

[32] This acronym is derived from the Finnish name of the pact, *Sopimus Ystävyydestä, Yhteistoiminnasta ja keskinäisestä Avunannosta.*

[33] O. Jussila, S. Hentila, J. Nevakivi, *From Grand Duchy to a Modern State: A Political History of Finland Since 1809*, cit., p. 247.

pledged not to join any international organization or military agreement that involved powers regarded as enemies by the other signatory. Some 'certification' of Finnish neutrality arrived in 1955, when the Soviets, after the YYA Treaty was renewed for 20 years,[34] decided to return the Porkkala military base to Finland exactly 11 years after the armistice, although the lease had been conceded for 50 years[35].

The key idea of Paasikivi's political project was that – due to its peripheral position with respect to Moscow's key strategic objectives in central Europe – the Soviets would have accepted the existence of an independent Finland[36]: the priority for the USSR was to ensure the security of the Baltic area, that was guaranteed by the YYA treaty, making Finland a sort of buffer state lying on the north-western Soviet border, in continuity with neighbouring, neutral Sweden[37]. For Moscow to maintain this line, Paasikivi did his best to actively demonstrate that Finland would never again be a source of danger for the Soviet Union. This blend between the pursuit of a neutrality policy and the effort to prove itself a friendly partner to the Soviets came to be known as *Paasikivi Line*.

3.2 *The Era of 'National Realism'*

The successor of Paasikivi in the role of Finnish President was *Urho Kalevi Kekkonen*[38]. He cleverly presented himself to domestic public opinion as a man trusted by the Soviets and implemented a foreign policy that was close to the one from his predecessor, going down in history as '*Paasikivi-Kekkonen Line*'. This attitude towards the USSR, as will be seen, has been the basis of the foreign policy of Finland up

[34] W. MUELLER, *The USSR and Permanent Neutrality in the Cold War*, in "Journal of Cold War Studies", Vol. 18, No. 4, 2016, p. 158.

[35] *Soviet Will Return Porkkala Then in Spite of Lease*, in "The New York Times", January 10th, 1956.

[36] E. SOLSTEN, S.W. MEDITZ, *Finland - a country study,* cit., p. 57.

[37] H. HAKOVIRTA, *The Soviet Union and the Varieties of Neutrality in Western Europe*, in "World Politics", Vol. 35, No. 4, 1983, p. 565.

[38] (1900-1986). President of Finland between 1956-1981, former Prime Minister (1950-53 and 1954-56) and Minister of Justice, was the longest running President in the country.

to the disintegration of the Soviet empire. During the second half of the twentieth century, some observers coined the derogatory term '*Finlandization*'[39] to describe the peculiar kind of influence, control, and conditioning pursued by Moscow on Finnish affairs; these observers emphasized the manipulative techniques employed by the Soviets in their relations with small or weak states.

Finnish scholars, on the other hand, started using this expression after the end of the USSR, in a somewhat different sense. *Finlandization,* in their perspective, consisted in avoiding any action and statement that could be seen by Moscow as hostile. This goal was pursued through the practice of an inconspicuous self-censorship[40] (even when not officially required by the Soviets) and resulted in "a general inclination to regard the Paasikivi-Kekkonen Line as the country's second official liturgy"[41].

Still, it must be acknowledged that Finland's status of pluralist and democratic country was never placed in jeopardy over the more than 30 years that Kekkonen stayed in power, and Finlandization never got to modify Finnish national culture and values. On the contrary, it helped foster the climate of relative security and *détente* that marked the relations between the two countries during the Cold War, and that surely helped Finland to achieve a more rapid modernization and industrialization[42].

Even though the great degree of collusion that Kekkonen himself had with the Soviet *nomenklatura*[43] is now certain, and the same can be said for his continuous relations with the KGB, the Finnish civil society was reached by all the ideological and cultural movements that interested Western Europe during the 1960s and 1970s, and the devel-

[39] The term 'Finlandization' was first used by Franz Joseph Strauss, leader of the Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CSU).

[40] For more information on self-censorship in Finland during the Cold War, see D. ARTER, *Kekkonen and the 'Dark Age' of Finlandised Politics?*, in "Irish Studies in International Affairs", Vol. 9, 1998, pp. 43-44.

[41] M. LONGO ADORNO, *Storia della Finlandia Contemporanea*, cit., p. 138.

[42] J. OJALA, J. ELORANTA, J. JALAVA (eds.) *The Road To Prosperity: An Economic History of Finland*, Helsinki, Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2006.

[43] The Finnish statesman was famously in friendly relations with Nikita Khrushchev, then First Secretary of the CPSU. See D. ARTER, *Kekkonen and the 'Dark Age' of Finlandised Politics?*, cit., p. 48.

opment of Finland was very similar to the one in Western European countries, while Helsinki still preserved neutrality and close diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union. It seems thus clear that the process known as *Finlandization* was a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon, which also saw Finnish politicians successfully manipulating the Soviets[44].

3.3 *The Return to the International Community and the 'Nordic Balance'*

Despite the remarkable stability granted to Finnish-Soviet relations by the YYA treaty, certified by the triple renewal of the agreement (in 1955, 1970, and 1983, always well before the designated date), the Finnic country was in a situation of great uncertainty at the end of war, with little room for foreign policy manoeuvre. Helsinki had to refuse the Western economic aid of the *European Recovery Program*[45] and was forced to follow from the outside the earliest steps of the cooperation between Nordic countries. As previously mentioned, the Finns – just like Sweden – had to renounce to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1949[46].

This immobility in the international arena came to an end two years after Stalin's death, in 1955, when, during the first period of Cold War *détente*, the USSR decided to return to Finland the territory of Porkkala many years ahead of the agreed date. This was a necessary condition for the Finns to be considered as *truly* neutral[47]. During that same year, the United States of America (USA) and the USSR reached a compromise for Finland to finally join the United Nations, while the Soviets accepted the Finnish decision to join the *Nordic Council*[48]. This occur-

[44] M. Longo Adorno, *Storia della Finlandia Contemporanea*, cit., p. 141.

[45] M. Jakobson, *Finland in the New Europe*, Westport, Praeger Publishers, 2009, p. 54.

[46] M. Hilson, *The Nordic Model – Scandinavia since 1945*, cit., p. 123.

[47] O. Jussila, S. Hentila, J. Nevakivi, *From Grand Duchy to a Modern State: A Political History of Finland Since 1809*, cit., p. 284.

[48] Formed in 1952, the *Nordic Council* is the official body for formal inter-parliamentary cooperation among the Nordic countries. This forum established, among other things, a common labor market and freedom of movement across borders for the nationals of the Member States.

rence greatly worried the Americans[49], that saw Finland as some sort of '*Soviet trojan horse*'[50] within an intergovernmental forum where some Member States were NATO founding members.

The security configuration that was then delineating, which saw the three members of the Atlantic alliance Denmark, Iceland, and Norway plus Finland and Sweden, both neutral but each one leaning towards one of the two blocs, became known as *Nordic balance*. The word *balance* is not to be intended in its nineteenth century meaning, but in a rather new, more prescriptive, sense: the maintenance of this Nordic equilibrium seemed to reflect the Nordic countries' own strategic interests, as the YYA treaty counterbalanced the three NATO countries[51]. The Soviets were persuaded that neutral countries offered them two main advantages: they were prevented to enter the Western bloc and they were seen as potential supporters of Soviet policies. Khrushchev was particularly convinced by the 'non-neutral consequences' that neutrality could have under certain conditions[52]: Finland was clearly one of the main fields where this theory was tested[53].

Of course, the Soviets continuously monitored the developments in the region, but they were essentially satisfied by the situation that had arisen after the Moscow armistice. Hence, "the Soviet Union has invariably preferred good relations with the Finnish government to the promotion of communism in Finland"[54]. In these circumstances, Finland managed to survive as a sovereign state, and – albeit the undisputable ties with the Soviet Union in matters of defence – to keep its democratic institutions as well as its 'Western country' status.

[49] For more detailed information about the role of Finland in the economic, political and military strategy of the United States and Western Europe, see R. VAYRYNEN, *Finland's Role in Western Policy since the Second World War*, in "Cooperation and Conflict", Vol. 12, 1977, pp. 87-108. The US and their allies have not resorted to conspicuous leverage attempts, but rather tried and apply subtle economic and diplomatic means of influence.

[50] This wording has been used by M. LONGO ADORNO, *Storia della Finlandia Contemporanea*, cit., p. 133.

[51] M. HILSON, *The Nordic Model – Scandinavia since 1945*, cit., p. 128.

[52] W. MUELLER, *The USSR and Permanent Neutrality in the Cold War*, cit., p. 176.

[53] It is still important to remind, that Soviet efforts towards neutralization played only a marginal role in Moscow's foreign policy in Western Europe, that was dominated by the German question. See H. HAKOVIRTA, *The Soviet Union and the Varieties of Neutrality in Western Europe*, cit., p. 577.

[54] H. HAKOVIRTA, *The Soviet Union and the Varieties of Neutrality in Western Europe*, cit., p. 568.

The overlapping Finnish and Soviet strategic objectives (especially regarding international peace issues)[55] increased the acceptability of Finnish neutrality to the USSR in the following years, despite the growing economic ties with the West.

3.4 *The 1958 and 1961 crises*

The *Night Frost Crisis* of 1958 was a watershed in the relations between Helsinki and Moscow, and the first time the Soviets used significant political pressure and economic sanctions against Finland. Following the appointment of a wide coalition including parties that where mistrusted in Moscow, the crisis saw the Soviet ambassador return home and the freezing of Finnish-Soviet commercial negotiations. Kekkonen steadily opposed the nomination of this coalition, that collapsed in late 1958 following the withdrawal of the Agrarians, the president's former party. Kekkonen then appointed a new cabinet, and the crisis was solved. After this incident, Kekkonen was persuaded that domestic policy had to be controlled in order to direct foreign policy, guaranteeing that his country would not step towards West. Moreover, the Soviets began intervening in Finnish politics in Kekkonen's favour, while – in the latter part of his era – Moscow's trust toward the Finnish leader was such that the USSR intervened mainly upon his request[56].

Another major turning point in Finnish-Soviet relations was the so-called *Note Crisis*. Kekkonen successfully handled the political crisis and, following this incident, became the undisputed ruler of the Finnish political scene. Meanwhile, the rest of society realized that each subsequent political decision had to be carefully weighed, as their impact on Soviet interests should have always been taken into consideration.

The crisis broke out in October 1961, while international tension amid the edification of the Berlin wall was at its peak. Following the creation of a broad centre-right coalition, the Soviets began to doubt about the re-election of Kekkonen in the presidential election of 1962[57].

[55] H. MOURITZEN, *Tension between the Strong, and the Strategies of the Weak*, in "Journal of Peace Research", Vol. 28, No. 2, 1991, p. 225.

[56] D. ARTER, *Kekkonen and the 'Dark Age' of Finlandised Politics?*, cit., p. 41.

[57] O. JUSSILA, S. HENTILA, J. NEVAKIVI, *From Grand Duchy to a Modern State: A Political History of Finland Since 1809*, cit., p. 279.

Hence, the Finnish ambassador in Moscow was delivered a tough diplomatic note, that expressed the Soviet concern over the international situation and required Finno-Soviet consultations based on the YYA treaty. The Finns could not avoid those consultations in any way. Kekkonen and Khrushchev then met in Novosibirsk in a summit the content of which is still unknown, and the Soviets accepted to indefinitely "postpone" the consultations. The same day of the Novosibirsk summit, the leader of the opposition coalition forfeited his candidacy. While some historians see this episode as no more than a domestic policy ploy that Kekkonen had shrewdly taken advantage of[58], others emphasize the significant international tensions of that time, primarily gravitating around the German developments[59]. What is certain, though, is that the Finnish president was easily re-elected, and that, especially from the early 1970s on, *Finlandization* passed from being the 'official governmental foreign policy' position to being a stance that "[…] all the major political parties had slavishly avowed support for"[60].

3.5 *Continuity of the Doctrine*

In the years that followed the Note Crisis, Finland tried in every way to promote its image as a neutral country, for instance by not officially recognizing 'divided' states such as the two Koreas, or Germany, a much more sensitive case for the Finns. After Khrushchev was overthrown in 1964, it was natural for Kekkonen to establish a relationship of trust and friendliness with the new Kremlin leaders.

While between 1948 and 1968 the USSR regarded Finland as a display of peaceful coexistence to the West, after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and the delineation of the *Brezhnev Doctrine*, Finland was presented as a negative example to the Warsaw Pact countries, and from 1970 neutrality was removed from Soviet official communiqués[61].

[58] D. ARTER, *Kekkonen and the 'Dark Age' of Finlandised Politics?*, cit., pp. 42 and ff.

[59] The note was delivered on the same day on which a 50-megaton bomb, the most powerful nuclear weapon ever created and tested, was detonated by the USSR on the Arctic Island of Novaya Zemlya.

[60] D. ARTER, *Kekkonen and the 'Dark Age' of Finlandised Politics?*, p. 48. See also M. LONGO ADORNO, *Storia della Finlandia Contemporanea*, cit., p. 152.

[61] W. MUELLER, *The USSR and Permanent Neutrality in the Cold War*, cit., p. 158.

Yet, the country was still able to take advantage of the signs of international *détente* and signed some very valuable economic agreements. Finland became an associate member of the European Free Trade Agreement in 1961, after a first attempt had failed two years earlier due to Soviet opposition, and finally obtained a full membership in 1986.

Since the Soviet Union made it clear in various ways that closer relations with, and increasing commitment to, the West could seriously damage Finnish-Soviet relations, Finland also applied its neutrality in the field of foreign trade. In 1973, Helsinki signed a Free Trade Agreement with the European Economic Community. This Finnish integration into the Western markets was quite obviously not complemented with any political commitment, and before signing the 1973 agreement, Finland sealed accords on the reciprocal removal of obstacles to trade with five East European countries[62].

Along the same lines, Finland attempted to show itself as a western, democratic country, while maintaining good relations with the USSR, that remained its largest trading partner. The Finnish diplomacy strove to reduce the military and political tensions related to the Cold War, and Kekkonen personally committed to the creation of a *nuclear-free zone* that included Nordic countries[63]. During 1972 and 1973, Finland hosted the *Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe*, which led to the sealing of the *Helsinki Accords* (1975) and constituted the basis for the creation of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). However, despite this progress, Finland was proposed multiple times by the Soviet Union to conduct joint military exercises: yet the Nordic country always refused[64].

Even though Kekkonen withdrew from public life in 1982, the new heads of government, while following very different internal political lines, could not deviate from the then-traditional way of managing Eastern relations, making use of trusted men in order to condition Soviet decisions towards Finland: this system continued to work under

[62] I. SUOMINEN, *Finland, the European Union and Russia*, cit., p. 12.

[63] G. MAUDE, *Conflict and Cooperation: the Nordic Nuclear-Free Zone Today*, in "Cooperation and Conflict", Vol. 18, No. 4, 1983.

[64] W. MUELLER, *The USSR and Permanent Neutrality in the Cold War*, in "Journal of Cold War Studies", Vol. 18, No. 4, 2016, p. 172.

the Paasikivi-Kekkonen doctrine. In 1982, the Social-Democrat *Mauno Koivisto* was elected, and pursued the doctrine up to the collapse of the Soviet Union by keeping – at least in official contacts – continuity with the conduct of the former president.

Thus, when the years of the disintegration of the Soviet regime came, the relations between the two countries were still regulated by the YYA treaty, last renewed in 1983 by Koivisto.

4. *Finland after the Cold War: towards European (and Atlantic) Integration*

While during the Cold War the USSR saw the European integration process as an integral part of the Western alliance[65], Finland and Sweden entered European Union (EU) membership negotiations as soon as the Soviet Union had ceased to exist, and by 1992 they already were EEC members. Yet this transition was not free of contradictions: in the 1994 referendum on this issue, many Finns voted for EU membership as they believed that the biggest threat faced by their country was related to its proximity to Russia. Still, in Nevakivi's own words "Finland's motives seemed to be in conflict in so far as the Finns were felt to consider security the main benefit of integration, and yet were not prepared to give up their non-aligned foreign policy and independent defence"[66].

In fact, most observers see EU membership as not compatible with the status of neutrality. Then-Finnish prime minister Matti Vanhanen declared in 2006: "Mr. Pflüger described Finland as neutral. I must correct him on that: Finland is a member of the EU. We were at one time a politically neutral country, during the time of the Iron Curtain. Now we are a member of the Union, part of this community of values, which has a common policy and, moreover, a common foreign policy"[67].

[65] H. HAKOVIRTA, *The Soviet Union and the Varieties of Neutrality in Western Europe*, cit., pp. 563-585.

[66] O. JUSSILA, S. HENTILA, J. NEVAKIVI, *From Grand Duchy to a Modern State: A Political History of Finland Since 1809*, cit., pp. 352-353.

[67] Presentation of the programme of the Finnish presidency (debate) July 5th, 2006, European Parliament, Strasbourg.

In order to emphasize its non-adhesion to the North Atlantic alliance, and remnant of the traditional policy aimed at the avoidance of any direct confrontation with Russia, Finland defined its position as *militarily non-aligned*[68], and still relies to a great extent on the capacity to defend their own territory[69].

Yet even before the start of the Russian invasion of the Ukraine, Finland seemed to be less *finlandized* than ever. In 1994, the country entered the NATO *Partnership For Peace* program, and subsequently joined NATO missions (e.g. Kosovo and Afghanistan). In the wake of the 2014 Ukrainian crisis, Finland, together with Sweden, signed a new cooperation agreement with the Atlantic alliance[70], in a meeting that was defined by high-ranking NATO officials as the "most important since the fall of Berlin wall"[71]. Following this agreement, Helsinki and Stockholm started conducting joint military manoeuvres with NATO, and several NATO ships were moved to the Finnish port of Turku. Of course, Russia reacted to these Finnish initiatives by suggesting Helsinki not to go further[72]. This climate of relative yet consistent tension at Russia's north-western border was clearly much different from what the Finns had experienced over the last decades of existence of the USSR.

Yet the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 resulted in an unprecedented shift in Finnish public opinion, which now shows overwhelming support for NATO membership[73]. The Finnish military capabilities would be a strong asset for the alliance[74], whose leadership seems to be in favour of Finnish (and Swedish?) membership. Only the time will tell us if this once remote perspective will soon become reality. What is certain though, is that the times of Paasikivi, Kekkonen, Finlandization, and of the YYA Treaty now seem as far away as ever.

[68] T, FORSELL, J. ROSENDAHL, *Finland should stay militarily non-aligned: prime minister*, in "Reuters.com", December 4th, 2017.

[69] See R. MILNE, *War with Russia? Finland has a plan for that*, in "Financial Times", March 28th, 2022.

[70] *Finland and Sweden to strengthen ties with Nato*, in "Theguardian.com", Aug 27th, 2014.

[71] K. HJELMGAARD, *NATO summit 'most important' since the fall of Berlin wall*, in "USA Today", August 27th, 2014.

[72] See for instance D. DYOMKIN, T. FORSSELL, *Putin hints Russia will react if Finland joins NATO*, in "Reuters.com", July 1st, 2016.

[73] C. WIENBERG, *Finnish Support for NATO Membership Jumps to 76% in Latest Poll*, in "Bloomberg.com", May 9th, 2022.

[74] E. BRAW, *What Finland Can Offer NATO*, in "Foreign Policy", April 14th, 2022.

Conclusions

Over the previous pages, we have tried and describe how the Finnish attitude toward Russia evolved from the traditional hostility to a more pragmatic policy of friendship during the Cold War. This choice allowed Finland to pursue economic and social progress through a market-based economic system, while still presenting itself to Moscow as a trustworthy party.

Quite ironically, from the 1950s up to the end of the Soviet empire, while Western countries tried in every way to avoid "Finlandization", with its essential reduction of independence and security and its necessary deference to the Soviet Union, the Finns essentially never lost an argument with Moscow over their basic interests[75].

The end of the Soviet Union marked a clear improvement of Finland's relative position in respect of Russia. Yet, after the annexation of Crimea to the Russian Federation, the economic linkages between the two countries have remained strong despite the sanctions implemented by Finland, together with the rest of the EU, in 2014. Nevertheless, we have seen how the breakup of the USSR and the Finnish EU membership have undeniably driven Finland away from the old position of neutrality and equidistance between East and West. Even if it is still too early to assess the magnitude and impact of this shift, the historical journey we have tried and outline in the previous pages may well be useful for interpreting events today.

Riassunto - Questo lavoro mira a ripercorrere l'evoluzione dei rapporti Finno-Russi, muovendo dall'indipendenza della Finlandia (1917) e giungendo fino ad oggi. Particolare attenzione viene riservata al secondo periodo postbellico, durante il quale il paese Finnico, a seguito di un ribaltamento della sua tradizionale politica verso oriente, conobbe la cosiddetta *Finlandizzazione*. Delineare le singolari caratteristiche del rapporto fra i due paesi nel corso del Novecento ci permette di apprezzare meglio il nuovo cambio di rotta che la *leadership* finlandese ha recentemente operato nei confronti di Mosca: difatti, a fronte di un miglioramento della sua posizione relativa rispetto all'ingombrante vicino, ed in seguito al suo ingresso nell'Unione Europea, Helsinki sembra ormai avere abbandonato quella politica di conciliazione che – condivisa da rappresentanti di tutto l'arco parlamentare, e rimasta un assunto fondamentale delle strategie finlandesi di politica estera per oltre quarant'anni – stava ormai entrando a far parte della stessa identità nazionale finnica.

[75] P. BOTTICELLI, *Finland's Relations with the Soviet Union, 1940-1986.*