

Finland Goes West: The Tortuous Road from Neutrality to the EU and NATO, 1989-1992

“The Finnish policy of restraint is often taken to reveal a limitation of sovereignty, an abdication from the pursuit of national interest. It is, of course, the very opposite: an expression of the sacro-egoism of the nation, a rejection of the claims of ideological solidarity... Those who complain about Finland's lack of engagement in promoting freedom and human rights in the Soviet Union fail to understand that the Finns have strong reasons of their own to adhere to the strict classical interpretation of the principle of non-interference in internal affairs of other states.”

Max Jakobson, former Finnish Ambassador to the United Nations, 1989¹

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Introduction

In 1989-1991, the Cold War divide between “Western” and “Eastern” Europe broke down. It did so in ways that reflected distinctive post-World War II national trajectories. Finland was a case in point. Its slow and circuitous postwar road toward the institutional West – culminating in EU membership in 1995 and NATO accession only much later in 2023 – exposed idiosyncratic features of its recent national history.

Elsewhere on the continent’s former East-West frontier, other states took different paths out of the Cold War. There were the former Soviet satellites, who, as soon as their Communist regimes had been toppled, almost immediately turned westward, although this was not always a smooth process, as evidenced by the ruptures caused through the re-establishment of Germany’s unity and Czechoslovakia’s velvet divorce. Then there were those Baltic territories of the former Tsarist empire – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – which, having first gained independence after World War I, had been forcefully incorporated into the Soviet Union as a consequence of the Hitler-Stalin-Pact of 1939. These countries pushed hard to win back their lost statehood in 1991, before urgently seeking entry into EU and NATO.

Finland – historically a pawn of its great-power neighbours – followed a different course. For nearly five centuries from 1323, Finns lived under Swedish rule until in 1809 the Swedes were forced to cede what became the autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland to the throne of the Russian Tsar. After the Bolshevik revolution in 1917, Finland declared independence from Russia. But while this act occurred peacefully, Finland slid into civil war in early 1918, with Whites aided by Germany fighting the revolutionary Reds, who were supported by Soviet Russia. In the event the White forces (of the first Finnish government) won and the Red rebellion was suppressed. In the next World War, the Soviet Union invaded Finland in 1939 and annexed a significant chunk of the country.² Largely abandoned by the Western powers, the Finns joined forces with National Socialist Germany against the USSR in 1941.³

¹ Max Jakobson cited in William Echikson, “Why Eastern Europe Should Aspire to Finlandization - Eastern Europe: Living on the Brink,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 Sept. 1989, <https://www.csmonitor.com/1989/1110/eech.html>.

² The Finns considered the conditions of March 1940 Moscow Peace Treaty to be extremely harsh. It forced Finland to cede some 11% of its territory (including the city of Vyborg), to lease the peninsula of Hanko to the Soviet Union for 30 years, and to resettle over 400,000 displaced persons from the towns and farmsteads of lost lands (Karelia and Salla).

³ On the nature of Finland’s cooperation with Nazi Germany, its own war aims, and specifically its role in the siege of Leningrad, see, for example, Mauno Jokipii, *Jatkosodan synty* (Helsinki: Otava, 1987); Ohto Manninen,

For this they would pay a heavy price – territorially, politically, and economically. In the aftermath of the Allied victory, Finland had to develop a new *modus vivendi* with the Soviet superpower.

Finland's cautious balancing act between “East” and “West” – a feature of its Cold War diplomacy – continued well into the twenty-first century. It persisted after the country had freed itself in 1990/92 from the externally imposed postwar geostrategic constraints and legal restrictions. It even lingered after the Finns joined Maastricht Europe. Finnish leaders chose not to pursue the option of seeking NATO membership. Then came Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which ended Finland’s long and effortful balancing act in the name of “neutrality” and “military non-alignment.”

This article uses recently opened archives from Finland, Britain, Germany, and Russia to trace the unique story of Finland’s long road to the “West.” Other works have tended to explore this process more parochially, based principally on Finnish primary sources.⁴ These studies focus on both Finnish “neutrality” policies and Fenno-Soviet relations.⁵ Or, when exploring Finland’s exit from the Cold War, they concentrate on Finnish decision-making

Suur-Suomen ääriiviivat (Helsinki: Kirjayhtymä, 1980); Jukka Tarkka, *Neither Stalin nor Hitler* (Helsinki: Otava, 1991); Markku Jokisipilä, *Aseveljiä vai liittolaisia? Suomi, Saksan liittosopimusvaatimukset ja Rytin-Ribbentropin-sopimus* (Helsinki: SKS, 2004); Timo Vihavainen and Gabriele Schrey-Vasaram, “Opfer, Täter, Betrachter: Finnland und die Leningrader Blockade,” *Osteuropa*, Vol. 61, No. 8/9 [Die Leningrader Blockade: Der Krieg, die Stadt und der Tod] (Aug./Sept. 2011), pp. 48-63, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44936431>. On war responsibility, see Jukka Tarkka, “Tuomio, syyllisyys ja kunnia,” in Jukka-Pekka Pietiäinen, ed., *Sota ja tuomio* (Helsinki: Edita 2002); Immi Tallgren, “The Finnish War-Responsibility Trial in 1945–6: The Limits of Ad Hoc Criminal Justice?,” in Kevin Heller and Gerry Simpson, eds., *The Hidden Histories of War Crimes Trials* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), ch. 21.

⁴ There exist several relevant Finnish memoirs or other shorter personal recollections or reflections on Finland’s foreign affairs that are all referenced in this essay, namely by Mauno Koivisto (Finland’s ninth President, 1982-1994; Social Democratic Party), Paavo Väyrynen (Foreign Minister, 1977-1982, 1983-87, 1991-1993; Centre Party), Jaakko Bloomberg (MFA, Political Department Head, 1988-92 & Political Undersecretary Secretary, 1992-2001), René Nyberg (MFA, Security Policy Department Head, 1986-91), Heikki Talvitie (Finland’s ambassador to Moscow, 1988-92), Max Jakobson (Finland’s ambassador to the UN, 1965-71; to Sweden, 1971-74; political commentator), Klaus Törnudd (MFA, Political Department Head, 1977-81 & Political Under-Secretary, 1983-88), and Risto E.J. Penttilä (FP expert/public intellectual; founder of the party *Nuorsuomalainen puolue*, 1994 & MP 1995-99).

⁵ On Finland’s geo-political position, Fenno-Soviet relations, and “neutrality” policies after 1945, see, for example, Jukka Nevakivi, ed., *Finnish-Soviet Relations 1944-1948* (Helsinki: The University of Helsinki, Political History, 1994); Jukka Tarkka, *Karhun kainalossa: Suomen kylmä sota 1947-1990* (Helsinki: Otava, 2012); Johanna Rainio-Niemi, *The Ideological Cold War: The Politics of Neutrality in Austria and Finland* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Kari Möttölä, “From Aspiration to Consummation and Transition: Finnish Neutrality as Strategy in the Cold War,” in Mark Kramer et al., eds., *The Soviet Union and Cold War Neutrality and Nonalignment in Europe* [The Harvard Cold War Studies Book Series] (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021), pp. 210-32, <https://helda.helsinki.fi/server/api/core/bitstreams/0af5c71b-f9db-4110-ba0a-95f0730eb051/content>; Juhana Aunesluoma and Johanna Rainio-Niemi, “Neutrality as Identity? Finland’s Quest for Security in the Cold War,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (2016), pp. 51-87, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26925640>; Max Jakobson, *Finnish Neutrality: A Study in Finnish Foreign Policy since the Second World War* (London: Hugh Evelyn Limited, 1968). On the German factor, see Seppo Hentilä, *Maintaining Neutrality between the Two German States: Finland and Divided Germany until 1973*, *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (2006), pp. 473-93; Idem, *Kaksi Saksaa ja Suomi: Saksan kysymys Suomen puolueettomuuspolitiikan haasteena* (Helsinki: SKS, 2003); Dörte Putensen, *Im Konfliktfeld zwischen Ost und West: Finnland der Kalte Krieg und die deutsche Frage, 1947-1973* (Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 2000); cf. Marjo Uutela, “Closer to Germany than Sweden: Finland’s Way towards the Membership Application for the EC 1990–1992,” *The International History Review (THIR)*, Vol. 42, No. 5 (2020), pp. 1067-80, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2019.1680414>; eadem, “‘The End of Finlandization’: Finland’s Foreign Policy in the Eyes of the Two German States 1985–1990,” *TIHR*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (2020), pp. 410-23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2019.1577286>.

processes and the interplay between president, foreign ministry, and public opinion in the face of a volatile Soviet neighbour.⁶

The analysis here, by contrast, places Helsinki's policymaking in a wider international context. Doing so reveals that Finland's post-Wall institutional Western integration was the culmination of numerous small steps on a long and difficult path out of the postwar Anglo-Soviet-German forcefield. As the bipolar stability of the world order gave way and Soviet systemic weakness transformed the European security landscape, new avenues opened up for Helsinki. But little would have changed if the Finns had been passive spectators. That Finland was able to shed all the postwar limitations on its sovereignty and subsequently turn to the "West" was ultimately due to its deft pursuit of national interests in a rapidly changing environment. Nothing, however, was pre-determined; indeed, there were many contingencies – domestic and international – on the way.

1 Finnish Neutrality in the Soviet-German Forcefield, 1947-89

Finnish foreign and defence policy after 1945 carried the imprint of both recent history and political geography. Lacking support from the Western powers during the "Winter War" of 1939-40⁷ and determined to make good the territorial losses of March 1940, the Finns fought alongside the Wehrmacht during the Continuation War of 1941-44. In the siege of Leningrad, the Finnish army's presence on the Karelian isthmus helped the Germans who sought to seal up this city. But Finland's war aims were much more limited and ultimately very different from those of the Germans. As part of their own offensive, the Finns advanced North of Lake Ladoga into Eastern Karelia up to the shores of Lake Onega. A stationary Fenno-Soviet war ensued that would last two and a half years, before in 1944 the Soviet Union started a major strategic operation, the Vyborg–Petrozavodsk counter-offensive, with the aim of occupying all of Finland. In the battles fought during that summer the Finnish army fell back to near the 1940 borders where it managed to stop the Soviet onslaught.⁸ The Soviets now no longer

⁶ Pekka Visuri and Heikki Talvitie, *Kylmän sodan päätös: Dramaa Helsingissä, Moskovassa ja Berliinissä* (Helsinki: Into, 2023); Juha-Matti Ritvanen, *Mureneva kulmakivi: Suomi Neuvostoliiton hajoaminen ja YYA-sopimuksen loppuvaiheet 1989-1992* (Helsinki: Siltala, 2021); Marjo Uutela, "Operaatio Pax: Pariisin rauhansopimuksen tulkinat ja Saksan kysymys Suomen ulkopoliitikassa 1987–1990," Ph.D.-Dissertation, University of Helsinki, 2018, p. 146, <https://helda.helsinki.fi/server/api/core/bitstreams/1d5cd63a-52c8-4080-aa2c-c6322fd7ace9/content>. See also Suvi Kansikas, "Dismantling the Soviet Security System: Soviet-Finnish Negotiations on Ending Their Friendship Agreement, 1989-91," *TIHR*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (2019), pp. 83-104, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2017.1398177>.

⁷ Sweden notably did show solidarity with Finland. It did not stay "neutral" but declared itself a "non-belligerent." As well as being painfully aware of their own military weakness, the anti-Communist Swedes sought to stay out of a conflict with the Soviet Union for ideological reasons. They did, however, offer *informal* support. This included sending not only a vital supply of munitions but also some 8000 volunteer soldiers who arrived in Finland in January 1940. Sweden subsequently played a central role in mediating the peace between Finland and the Soviet Union in March 1940. See Arash H. Pashakhanlou and Felix Berenskötter, "Friends in war: Sweden between solidarity and self-help, 1939–1945," *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (2001), pp. 83-100, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836720904389>.

⁸ The significance of Finland's ability to stop the Red Army in 1944 must not be underestimated. Faced with the Finns' strong defense in what were bloody and bitter battles, Stalin came to the conclusion that the price of conquering Finland was just too high at a time when the Soviet Union needed all the troops it could get to push to Berlin. For example, at the Battle of Tali-Ihantala (from 25 June to 9 July 1944), 50,000 Finns repelled 150,000 Russians backed by 600 tanks, while inflicting more than three times as many casualties as they suffered themselves. And during the Battle of Ilomantsi (from 16 July to 13 August 1944), the last major engagement on the Finnish front, two attacking Red Army divisions were effectively decimated. In 1948, the

demanded unconditional surrender. However, the armistice agreement of September 1944 stipulated that the Finns expel all German forces from their territory into Norway. As a result, Finland had to fight the Wehrmacht in the Lapland War of 1944-45. After VE Day, Finland was highly exposed. Although not under formal occupation, it shared a 1300-kilometer border with the victorious Soviet Union.⁹

Finland navigated this challenging situation in virtual isolation, with only quiet Swedish support, as Stockholm chose postwar neutrality over overt Western alignment. To the south, the Baltic states had been annexed by the USSR, while Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Romania were turned into “people’s republics” with little autonomy. Even worse from Helsinki’s perspective, Moscow believed Finland’s role as a Nazi co-belligerent implied special obligation. Stalin expected reparations, limitations on Finnish armed forces, and the Finns’ full cooperation in preventing any revival of the German threat.¹⁰

If this combination of wartime record and post-war isolation left Finland weak, it sought to compensate by carving out a safe niche amidst the ideological antagonism crystallising between the Eastern and Western blocs. Finnish post-war neutrality was conditioned by two “historically and genetically related” treaties: The Paris Peace Treaty of 10 February 1947 concluded between Finland and the UK and USSR as principal signatories, and the bilateral Finno-Soviet Treaty on “Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance” (FCMA) signed in Moscow on 6 April 1948.¹¹

The 1947 Treaty defined Finland’s borders, codifying as irrevocable the Finnish territorial losses of Karelia, Salla, and Petsamo, and the leasing of the Porkkala naval base near Helsinki for 50 years to the Soviets. It required Finland to acknowledge that it had been a German ally¹² and to accept partial responsibility for the war. Finland had to pay US \$300 million in reparations at 1938 prices (equivalent of US \$5.8bn today) to the USSR. Under the military, naval and air clauses of chapter III, Finland’s armed forces were limited in size, shape, and quality. Finland was also forbidden from purchasing German military equipment,

Soviet “generalissimus” would come back to the experiences of 1939/40 and 1944. After the signing ceremony of the FCMA Treaty, Stalin said: “Although I am not exactly a soldier, I can say that we soldiers in peacetime are easily forgotten, but in times of war everything depends on us. A country with a bad army is not respected by anybody, but a country with a good army is respected by all.” And this was not mere flattery. Quote from U.E. Moisala and Pertti Alanen, *Kun hyökkääjän tie suljettiin: Neuvostoliiton suurhyökkäys kesällä 1944 Karjalan kannaksella veteraanitutkimuksen ja neuvostolähteiden valossa* (Helsinki: Otava, 1988), pp. 159-60 – a study based on Finnish and Soviet archival sources. See also Pasi Tuunainen, “The Battle of Encirclement at Ilomantsi in July-August 1944—An Example of the Application of the Idea of Cannae in the Finnish Art of War,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2006), pp. 107-22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13518040500544766>.

⁹ See fn. 3; and Pasi Tuunainen, “Finland in World War II,” Oxford Bibliographies, DOI: 10.1093/OBO/9780199791279-0208.

¹⁰ Juhana Aunesluoma and Marjo Uutela, “In Germany’s Footsteps: German Reunification and Finland, 1987-1994,” in Michael Gehler and Maximilian Graf, ed., *Europa und die deutsche Einheit: Beobachtungen, Entscheidungen und Folgen* (Göttingen: V&R, 2017), pp. 415-17; Aunesluoma and Rainio-Niemi, “Neutrality as Identity?,” pp. 53-6. See also Maxim Korobochkin, “Soviet Policy toward Finland and Norway, 1947–1949,” *Scandinavian Journal of History*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (1995), pp. 185-207, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03468759508579304>.

¹¹ See “Letter by Dixon to Buchanan, ‘1947 Paris Treaty: Ratford’s Talks, Helsinki, 10 Feb. 1989’,” 29 March 1989, in The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA), FCO 33-10471. The FCMA Treaty was initially signed ten years and to be subsequently extended automatically every five years, unless one party notified the other one year before expiry of its wish to terminate its validity.

¹² It must be noted that although Finland was aligned with the Germans between 1941 and 1944, it was never formally an Axis member.

acquiring civilian aircraft of German and Japanese design, or importing industrial equipment from Germany or Japan. It was obliged to cooperate in ensuring that Germany did not “take steps outside German territory towards rearmament.”¹³

Significantly, Britain had pushed hard for the constraints on Finnish armed forces. Unlike the United States, it had formally declared war on Finland (on the day before Pearl Harbor). Churchill had bowed to Stalin’s pressure at a moment when it looked like Moscow might fall. In the different strategic context after 1945, his successors believed that the USSR would benefit from Finnish military strength in a future war. While Moscow therefore remained fixated on the revival of a possible German-Finnish threat, London fretted about the possibility of a Soviet-Finnish combination. Both thus found common ground on curbing Finnish military power. The United States notably played *no* role in the peace treaty negotiations. America had never been at war with Finland. And once East-West bipolarisation set in, Washington simply concentrated on supporting Helsinki’s strict Cold War neutrality policies and maintenance of Western ties. It had no stake in the treaty and the fulfilment of its clauses.¹⁴

Like the Peace Treaty, the FCMA agreement of 1948 focused primarily on Germany.¹⁵ Article 1 stipulated that Finland must remain “true to its obligations as an independent state” by “fight[ing] to repel” any “armed attack by Germany or any state allied with [her].” If “Finland, or the Soviet Union through Finnish territory,” should become the object “of such an act of aggression,” Finland was to “use all its available forces for *defending its territorial integrity* by land, sea and air.” It would do so “*if necessary*, with the *assistance* of, or *jointly* with the Soviet Union.” Moreover, under article 4 Finland was prohibited from joining any international organisation deemed hostile to the USSR.¹⁶

The FCMA Treaty, signed initially for 10 years, differed significantly from the bilateral “mutual assistance” pacts the USSR had concluded with the East European socialist regimes in recent months. Whereas the latter became the contractual platform for Soviet hegemony in the East (later cemented through the formation of the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance in 1949 and the creation of the Warsaw Pact in 1955), the Finno-Soviet treaty reflected the limits of Soviet influence in Finland. Helsinki benefited from the “in-built

¹³ “Treaty of Peace with Finland, 1947,” *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 42, No. 3 [Supplement: Official Documents] (July 1948), pp. 203-23, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2213959>.

¹⁴ Pauli Järvenpää, “Finland: Peace Treaty of 1947,” in Fred Tanner, ed., *From Versailles to Baghdad: Post-War Armament Control of Defeated States* (New York: United Nations Publications, 1992), pp. 55-70, <https://unidir.org/sites/default/files/publication/pdfs/from-versailles-to-baghdad-post-war-armament-control-of-defeated-states-en-430.pdf>. See also Visuri and Talvitie, *Kylmän sodan päätös*, p. 125. Interestingly, the British in 1989 were still puzzled why the contemporary Western assumption that “Finland would be drawn much more closely into the Soviet orbit” had not “in fact occurred” and why Stalin had not driven a “much harder bargain.” See also, “MFA – Finnish Features, Helsinki 13/1990 – article by Dr Pekka Visuri ‘Die militärischen Artikel des Pariser Friedensvertrags; Die Vorgeschichte der militärischen Beschränkungen für Finnland und Probleme bei der Auslegung’,” in Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin (PAAA), Zwischenarchiv (ZA) 178331.

¹⁵ “Sopimus ystävydestä, yhteistoiminnasta ja keskinäisestä avunannosta Suomen Tasavallan ja Sosialististen Neuvostotasavaltain Liiton välillä” (YYA-sopimus/FCMA Treaty), Moscow, 6 April 1948, https://www.finlex.fi/fi/sopimukset/sopsteksti/1948/19480017/19480017_2. See also Jussi M. Hanhimäki, *Containing Coexistence: America, Russia, and the “Finnish Solution,” 1945–1956* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1997), pp. 26–8; and John Vloyantes, “Finland,” in S. Victor Papacosma and Mark R. Rubin, eds., *Europe’s Neutral and Nonaligned States: Between NATO and the Warsaw Pact* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1989), pp. 141–5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* Emphases are this author’s.

safeguards governing Finland's future military, political and international status" contained in the Paris Peace Treaty. More fundamentally, Stalin's Finland-policy was driven less by expansionist, geo-ideological designs than by the pragmatic pursuit of a security glacis on his Western frontier. The Soviet leader's greatest fear was a revitalised Germany that would ally itself with anti-Soviet (Western) powers. He was, therefore, also determined to thwart any Finnish Western institutional integration.¹⁷

Neither the Paris Peace Treaty nor the FCMA made any direct reference to Finland's "neutrality." Yet, at the Finns' insistence, the preamble to the FCMA gave expression to Finland's wish and intention "to remain outside the conflicting interests of the Great Powers." For Finland, non-alignment and the concomitant policy of neutrality were important. Nevertheless, the question of whether Finland was a "neutral" state and what exactly its "neutrality" might entail, remained a bone of contention in Finno-Soviet relations throughout the Cold War. More fundamentally, there was a tension between Finland's politico-cultural orientation (towards the democratic and free-market West) and the reality of its geopolitical vulnerability to Moscow. For all the talk of good-neighbourly relations, the fact remained that Finland's primary security threat came from the USSR.¹⁸

Crucially, unlike the Soviet bloc allies who were required under the Warsaw Pact to defend each other, Finland had no obligations under the FCMA treaty to participate in military actions beyond its own territory. The Finns were merely expected to protect their own lands. And there was no mechanism automatically triggering Soviet military assistance in the event of a crisis. Still, the threat always loomed large that the Kremlin, by manufacturing a crisis, might actualise the consultations foreseen in the text of the treaty to establish "mutual agreement" on the "help" Finns "required" from USSR. The determination to avoid at all costs such a consultation helps to explain the Finnish efforts throughout the Cold War to stave off any situation that might provide a pretext for a Soviet intervention. The Kremlin's never-ending efforts to pull Finland into its sphere left Finns cautious and wary.¹⁹

Despite their inevitable focus on the USSR, resolving the meaning of their neutrality also required developing a new relationship with "Germany." The unresolved legal status of post-war Germany, sundered into two states from 1949, together with the fluctuations in Moscow's policies vis-à-vis the defeated nation, had direct consequences for Finland. On the one hand, Moscow saw its East German client as, in principle at least, a "friend." On the other, the Western Federal Republic of Germany – the self-proclaimed successor of the German Reich (*Reichsnachfolgestaat* reflected also in the juridical reading of *Deutschlands Fortbestand als völkerrechtliches Subjekt*) – represented the old "German" foe identified in the FCMA and Paris Peace Treaties. The swift emergence of the FRG as a prosperous and influential international player merely heightened this polarity.

¹⁷ Suvi Kansikas, "Dismantling the Soviet Security System," pp. 86-8; Jussi Hanhimäki, "'Containment' in a Borderland: The United States and Finland, 1948-49," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Summer 1994), pp. 353-74, esp. p. 360, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24912510>.

¹⁸ See fn. 15; Wolfgang Mueller, "The USSR and Permanent Neutrality in the Cold War," *JCWS*, Vol. 18, No. 4 [Neutrality and Nonalignment in World Politics during the Cold War] (Fall 2016), pp. 148-79, here esp. pp. 148-54, 158-9, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26925643>. Cf. Vladislav Zubok, "The Soviet Attitude towards European Neutrals during the Cold War," in Michael Gehler and Rolf Steininger, eds., *The Neutrals and the European Integration, 1945–1995* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2000), pp. 29–43. See also; Arto Nokkala, "It Is about Protection: Defence in Finland's Steps to NATO," *Studia Europejskie – Studies in European Affairs*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (2022), pp. 39-72, here pp. 43-4, <https://doi.org/10.33067/SE.4.2022.2>.

¹⁹ Kansikas, "Dismantling the Soviet Security System," pp. 86-7; Uutela, "The End of Finlandization," pp. 410-11.

Finland's dealings with the two Germanies were circumspect, even-handed and marked by absolute neutrality – Helsinki refused to recognise either state. Yet these interactions were viewed with intense suspicion, by both the Kremlin and the western powers until 1972-73, when the FRG and GDR concluded their Basic Treaty (*Grundlagenvertrag*). Both German states subsequently secured seats at the UN. Only then could Finland establish full diplomatic relations with both. Only then could Helsinki begin cautiously to pursue closer contacts with Bonn.²⁰

As the relationship between the two Germanies and the Soviets improved, so did Finland's position. Not just in this triangle²¹ but also on the international plane more generally. The Finns even experienced some limited emancipation from the constraints codified in the Paris Peace Treaty, beginning with the so-called “re-interpretation by agreement” of 1961. Into the 1980s, to be sure, the treaty text and the quantity and quality of restrictions remained unchanged. “What was altered,” as Pauli Järvenpää has explained, “was the mutual understanding of the language, in light of the changed military and political circumstances, and that allowed for a more permissive interpretation.” In the wake of these adjustments, the Finns – with the approval of the UK and the USSR – were first able to acquire “defensive missiles,” and subsequently mines and aircraft containing West German parts.²² Even so, the FCMA Treaty's stipulations regarding “Germany” were a constant reminder that any crisis might tempt the Soviet Union to try to pull Finland into its forcefield.

If question marks remained over Finland's navigation of the complex Finnish-Soviet-German triangle, serious scepticism also existed about its neutrality.

The small European states in the grey zone between the two blocs, specifically Finland and Austria, appeared to both superpowers to be vulnerable to external pressure and manipulation.²³ In the late 1960s, West German conservatives began to use the pejorative term “Finlandization” (*Finnlandisierung*) to criticise Social-Democrat chancellor Willy Brandt's policies of rapprochement with the East. The term had been coined a decade earlier by Austrians who disparaged Finnish submissiveness to Moscow as a negative model of neutrality. In 1955, Finland had acquiesced in the Soviets' request for early renewal of the FCMA Treaty to last twenty years. With Khrushchev returning the Porkkala naval base to the Finns and offering to recognise Finnish “neutrality” in 1956, Western references to

²⁰ Seppo Hentilä, *Maintaining Neutrality between the Two German States*; Aunesluoma and Uutela, “In Germany's Footsteps,” pp. 417-19. See also Yrjö Väänänen, *Finlandia-Bonn* (Helsinki/München: DFG, 1996), https://www.aue-stiftung.org/wp-content/uploads/julkaisuja7_finlandia-bonnt.pdf.

²¹ Cf. “Trebesch/HEL emb. to AA, DB 327, ‘Betr.: Gorbatschow-Besuch vom 25.-27.10.1989 in Finnland; hier: Vorschau aus finn. Sicht,’ 20 Oct. 1989,” in PAAA, ZA 178331. On these dynamics, the West German embassy's (in Helsinki) report noted for example in 1989: “Veränderungen der finnisch-sowjetischen Beziehung ergeben sich aus finnischer Sicht nicht zuletzt aus der ‘spürbaren Verbesserung des deutsch-sowjetischen Verhältnisses’”

²² See Pauli Järvenpää, “Finland: Peace Treaty of 1947,” pp. 65-6, who explains that at stake were air-to-air, anti-tank, and surface-to-air missiles. In the event Finns managed to achieve an Anglo-Soviet compromise over this thorny issue, with Finland procuring Soviet MiG-21 fighter jets with air-to-air missiles and British Vigilant anti-tank missiles. See also “Record of Conversation at the Finnish MFA on 10 Feb. 1989,” in TNA, FCO 33-10471.

²³ For obvious geo-political and geo-ideological reasons Sweden and Switzerland were not eyed with similar suspicions. See Aunesluoma and Rainio-Niemi, “Neutrality as Identity?,” p. 55. Cf. Klaus Törnudd, “Finnish Neutrality Policy during the Cold War,” *The SAIS Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Summer-Fall 2005), pp. 43-52, here esp. p. 46, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26999271>.

Finlandization invariably suggested a country that was formally independent, but in practice behaved subserviently towards its powerful communist neighbour.²⁴

Some critics even suggested that Finland by the 1960s suffered from “Sovietisation the soft way”²⁵, given the USSR’s constant efforts to interfere in Finnish domestic politics. Others alluded to Urho Kekkonen, president from 1956-82, as the Kremlin’s “hired assistant.” Kekkonen was certainly an easy target. An incredibly dominant personality, he preferred a highly personalised leadership style epitomised in his Fenno-Soviet “sauna summitry.” Sometimes, the Finns themselves wondered what Kekkonen’s so-called “preventative diplomacy” – that is, his overriding concern to avoid all negative Kremlin reactions to his foreign policy course – really entailed.²⁶ Was it Finnish “adaptive acquiescence”²⁷ to the USSR? Or about quietly pushing against the exogenous constraints in order to ultimately safeguard its independence as a state? The term “Finlandization” pointed precisely to this ambivalence. But the Finns found the way that Austrians, Germans, and Americans imbued the word with negative connotations to be deeply insulting. Most important, was this a true description of the Finnish case?²⁸

Despite constant Soviet pressure, Finland used every opportunity of exposure on the global stage to assert itself, both as a distinctly Nordic (if not Western) capitalist democracy and generally as an independent state that enjoyed the right to sovereign equality. The growth of regional and global institutions helped. Finland became a member of the Nordic Council 1953, the United Nations in 1956, and an associate of EFTA in 1961. The UN enabled European neutrals to play an active role in international conflict mediation from the 1960s.²⁹

²⁴ For contemporary views, see Ulrich H.E. Wagner, “Finnland und die UdSSR (II): Das sogenannte Finnlandisierungsproblem,” *Osteuropa*, Vol. 25, No. 7 (Juli 1975), pp. 463-76, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44907294>. Cf. Walter Z. Lacquer, “Europe: The Specter of Finlandization,” *Commentary*, Dec. 1977, <https://www.commentary.org/articles/walter-laqueur/europe-the-specter-of-finlandization/>. See also Brian S. Faloon, “The Dimensions of Independence: The Case of Finland,” *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1980), pp. 3-10, here esp. 8-9, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30001710>; David Arter, “From Finlandisation and post-Finlandisation to the End of Finlandisation? Finland’s Road to a NATO Application,” *European Security*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (2023), pp. 171-89, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2022.2113062>. On Krushchev’s peace offensive and “neutrality,” Mueller, “The USSR and Permanent Neutrality in the Cold War,” pp. 155-9; Kimmo Rentola, “Soviet Attitudes to Finnish Neutrality, 1947–1989,” in Kramer et al., eds., *The Soviet Union and Cold War Neutrality and Nonalignment in Europe*, p. 139.

²⁵ George Maude, *The Finnish Dilemma: Neutrality in the Shadow of Power* (London/Oxford: OUP for RIIA, 1976).

²⁶ There was also intra-Finnish debate over the extent to which in the 1970s, the era of détente, ordinary Finns (not merely their political leadership) tended to acquiesce to the Soviets; or whether the people were much more realist and sceptical vis-a-vis their big Eastern neighbour (than some of the political elites). For the former view, see Timo Vihavainen’s provocative book *Kansakunta rähmällään: suomettumisen lyhyt historia* (Helsinki: Otava, 1991); and Max Jakobson’s counter-argument in his essay “Suomettumisen lyhyt historia: Kansakunta ei ollut rähmällään itään – Sitä olivat vain sen poliittiset valiot,” *Helsingin Sanomat (HS)*, 4 Sept. 1991.

²⁷ Hans Mouritzen, *Finlandization: Towards a General Theory of Adaptive Politics* (Aldershot: Gower/Avebury, 1988).

²⁸ David Arter, “Kekkonen and the ‘Dark Age’ of Finlandised Politics?,” *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, Vol. 9 (1998), pp. 39-49, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30001871>. On Kekkonen, see also “Kekkonen’s Role Divides Finland: Politically Adroit President Evokes Bitter Criticism and Strong Loyalties,” *New York Times (NYT)*, 20 Dec. 1959, <https://www.nytimes.com/1959/12/20/archives/kekkonens-role-divides-finland-politically-adroit-president-evokes.html>.

²⁹ Aunesluoma and Rainio-Niemi, “Neutrality as Identity?,” p. 56. Thomas Fischer, Juhana Aunesluoma, and Aryo Makko, “Introduction: Neutrality and Nonalignment in World Politics during the Cold War,” *JCWS*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Fall 2016), pp. 4-11, here esp. p. 10, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26925637>. As a comparison

Then, with the advent of détente, “neutral” Finland became a coveted location of East-West rapprochement, hosting US-Soviet strategic arms limitation talks (SALT) and summit parleys, most notably, the pan-European Conference on Security and Cooperation (CSCE), when the capital became synonymous with the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 – a cornerstone of the European order even as we know it today (or at least knew it until Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022).³⁰

Throughout the Cold War, in short, the meaning of Finnish “neutrality” evolved. It began as a post-war and early Cold War “necessity,” and neither entailed inviolable rights nor the freedom to operate independently. In this period, Finland’s freedom of manoeuvre was strictly limited. Over time, however, the Finns came to associate neutrality with the preservation of peace and their rise from a poor, backward, and largely rural society to a highly developed, prosperous, and socially egalitarian welfare state. Against this backdrop, neutrality became a “virtue” and an integral part of Finland’s national identity, as well as a central element of the state ideology underpinning its independence. This new meaning persisted even as the Cold War began to thaw. For geopolitical bipolarity and the need for stable relations with Moscow through the FCMA remained the basic assumption behind Finnish foreign policy throughout the 1970s and 1980s.³¹

2 Soviet Unequivocal Recognition of Finland’s Neutrality: The Gorbachev-Koivisto Helsinki Summit, 1989

The arrival of Mikhail Gorbachev at the helm in the Kremlin in 1985 and the ascendancy of his “New Thinking” in domestic and foreign policy would have a massive transformative effect. Gorbachev’s vision of a “common European home,” his ideas of “peaceful co-development,” combined with his abolition in 1988 of the “Brezhnev doctrine” and his concomitant promotion of “freedom of choice,” served as catalysts if not triggers for revolutionary change in Eastern Europe – politically, economically, and culturally. They also

Swedish neutrality evolved, too. Initially, it meant avoiding a devastating exchange of nuclear weapons; from the mid-1960s onwards it became an article of faith, if not a foreign policy identity, especially for the Social Democrats. This change has been pithily dubbed moving from a policy of “small state realism” to “small state idealism.” See Robert Dalsjö, “The Hidden Rationality of Sweden’s Policy of Neutrality during the Cold War,” *Cold War History*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (May 2014), pp. 175-94, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2013.765865>.

³⁰ Finland only became a full EFTA member in 1986. On SALT talks, see “World: Smiles and Suspicion at SALT,” *TIME*-magazine, 28 Nov. 1969. On the CSCE, Tomas Fischer, *Neutral Power in CSCE: The N + N States and the Making of the Helsinki Accords* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2009); Janie Lee Leatherman, *Engaging East and West beyond the Bloc Divisions: Active Neutrality and the Dual Role Strategy of Finland and Sweden in the CSCE* (University of Denver ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1991),

[https://www.proquest.com/openview/b29031fc6d208157362140f411eba660/1?pq-](https://www.proquest.com/openview/b29031fc6d208157362140f411eba660/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y)

[origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y](https://www.proquest.com/openview/b29031fc6d208157362140f411eba660/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y). See also Timo Vilén, “Where East Met West: Helsinki and the Staging of the 1975 Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe,” *Urban History*, Vol. 42, Nov. 4 (November 2015), pp. 603-21, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26398642>; Niklas Pollard and Jussi Rosendahl, “In East-West Diplomatic Drama, Helsinki Punches above its Weight,” *Reuters*, 11 July 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-russia-summit-helsinki-factbox-idUSKBN1K11UM/>.

³¹ Aunesluoma and Rainio-Niemi, “Neutrality as Identity?.” Cf. Mark Kramer who, while conceding that internally “Finland had the attributes of a Western democracy,” speaks of Finnish “deference to the USSR” and successive Finnish governments’ high “attentive[ness] to Soviet preferences.” Idem, “The USSR and Cold War Neutrality and Nonalignment in Europe,” in idem et al., eds., *The Soviet Union and Cold War Neutrality and Nonalignment in Europe*, pp. 546-7. See also “Ivey/ HEL emb. to Buchanan/FCO, ‘Visit of Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev to Finland, 11-14 Sept. 1989’, 22 Sept. 1989,” in TNA, FCO 33-10471; “Helsinki to FCO, Telno 123, ‘Nato Summit: Proposed Borders Declaration; Bonn Telno 493 to FCO,’ 11 May 1989,” in TNA, FCO 33-10471.

opened up a new space for political manoeuvre for Finland. As the Soviet “empire by imposition” began to dissolve through spring and summer 1989, with Poles and Hungarians turning their back on Communism, East Germans fleeing to the West via the opened Austro-Hungarian border and protesting ever more loudly at home, Gorbachev abstained from the application of Soviet military force in the satellite states. The Kremlin’s policy towards Finland also entered a state of flux. Finnish-Soviet relations were never an insulated bilateral affair, but always deeply enmeshed with the wider European developments and especially those at the East-West interface.³²

All this became evident during the long-awaited Finnish-Soviet summit talks of 25-28 October 1989 in Helsinki,³³ which culminated in Soviet Secretary General Gorbachev and Finnish President Mauno Koivisto signing a joint declaration entitled “New Thinking Action.” In it they pledged their commitment to “active participation” in the creation of a “conflict-free and economically integrated world.” They underlined their governments’ “absolute respect for the principle of the freedom of social and political choice, de-ideologization and the humanisation of relations between states, adherence to international law in foreign policy activities, and the priority of human interests and values.” And they declared their intention to “advance towards a unified Europe.”³⁴ Most strikingly, during the summit, Gorbachev unreservedly endorsed Finland’s neutrality.³⁵

This was a point he publicly highlighted from the start: first in his speech at the initial reception where he produced the headline “I want to greet a *neutral* Finland;” and then, during his address at the Finlandia Hall where he referred to the “small neutral state in Northern Europe” that had made a “sizeable contribution to building ‘bridges of accord’ between East and West.” It was Finland, so the Soviet leader argued, that had served peace in the North and on the European continent at large through its “effective and benevolent” policies. Indeed, Gorbachev went on to say, if “Europe” – the “many different countries” that lived together there – had become an historical example for “fostering” an unprecedented “peaceful period” for nearly 45 years, this was very much due to the “common European process” that had begun in Helsinki in 1975. The venue of the “constituent” Conference of Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), the Soviet leader now hoped, would soon host leaders at a “Helsinki-2”-summit. In similar vein, he hailed the “revival” of the United Nations and advocated the establishment of a “world-wide legal order.”³⁶

³² See Kristina Spohr, *Post Wall, Post Square: Rebuilding the World after 1989* (London: WilliamCollins, 2019), chs. 1-3.

³³ See “Staples/HEL emb. to FCO, Telno 324, ‘State Visit to Finland by President Gorbachev, 25-27 Oct. 1989,’ 23 Oct. 1989,” in TNA, FCO 33-10471; “Noss/HEL emb. to Telno 333, ‘My Telnos 324 and 325 (not to all): State visit to Finland by President Gorbachev, 25-27 Oct. 1989,’ 30 Oct. 1989,” in TNA, FCO 33-10471. Cf. Mauno Koivisto, *Historian tekijät: Kaksi kautta II* (Helsinki: Kirjayhtymä OY, 1995), pp. 304-6.

³⁴ For the declarations’ text, see “Gorbachev and Koivisto Discuss Soviet-Finnish Relations,” *Soviet News (SN)*, 1 Nov. 1989, p. 372, https://www.marxists.org/history/ussr/publications/soviet-news/1989/sovietnews_6499_1189.pdf. See also “Noss/HEL emb. to Telno 333, ‘My Telnos 324 and 325 (not to all): State Visit to Finland by President Gorbachev, 25-27 Oct. 1989,’ 30 Oct. 1989,” in TNA, FCO 33-10471. Note: the Finnish-Soviet *Joint Declaration*, which was “much shorter” than a traditional, “old-style” communiqué, was modelled on the recent “Bonn Declaration” made by Chancellor Helmut Kohl and SG Mikhail Gorbachev in June 1989.

³⁵ M.S. Gorbachev, *Sobranie Sochenenii, t. 16* (Moscow: ves mir, 2010), p. 305.

³⁶ Emphases are this author’s. *Ibid.*, pp. 309-10. “Noss/HEL emb. to Telno 333, ‘My Telnos 324 and 325 (not to all): State Visit to Finland by President Gorbachev, 25-27 Oct. 1989,’ 30 Oct. 1989,” in TNA, FCO 33-10471. “Mikhail Gorbachev’s Speech at Finlandia Palace” [on 26 October], *SN*, 1 Nov. 1989, p. 369.

Zooming in on the Soviet-Finnish relationship, Gorbachev stressed that if peace was based on “moral norms,” charters, and agreements that guided relations between “civilised people,” then the FCMA as the framework of postwar Finno-Soviet relations served as a “symbol of honesty in international affairs, of respect and loyalty to promises.” This was not to say that Finnish-Soviet history had always been easy. There had been the “tragedy of 1939-1944,” Gorbachev remarked. He did not go as far as to admit Soviet guilt in the outbreak of the Winter War in 1939. But many of those present must have known that he had only recently tolerated the Baltic Way protest of 23 August 1989, in which approximately two million people formed a human chain spanning 690 kilometres across Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in commemoration of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, which had led to their annexation by the Soviet Union fifty years earlier. Instead of dwelling on the war, Gorbachev went on to praise the Finno-Soviet FCMA Treaty of 1948 as “the crucial turn” in their mutual relations because the “trust” built between Finland and the USSR since the War rested on it.³⁷

Quoting from an earlier speech by President Mauno Koivisto, Gorbachev declared that there was “not a word that should be changed in this treaty.”³⁸ Koivisto, a social democrat, was a keen supporter of Gorbachev and his reform-course; and his words were of major significance because under Finland’s constitution the president was ultimately responsible for the direction and conduct of the country’s foreign affairs. It therefore mattered that Koivisto was convinced of the continued centrality of the FCMA Treaty to Finno-Soviet relations. For the Finnish president, the key issue in security policy was predictability. Any moves to reinterpret the Treaty’s meaning, even as it pertained to the issue of the “German” threat, had to be avoided.³⁹

Gorbachev could not have agreed more. The FMCA Treaty, he declared, “corresponds with the realities of our time; it allows us to act fully and equally now and in the future for our own advantage and for the advantage of Europe and the world. It is an inseparable part of the security of Northern Europe. The 1948 Treaty and neutrality complement rather than contradict each other.” Of course, each “neutrality” has its “peculiar features,” he continued, but the “Soviet Union unconditionally recognises Finland’s neutral status and will continue to observe it in full measure.”⁴⁰

These statements used the language of continuity, but in their import they were revolutionary. They indicated a major shift in the Soviet leadership’s public stance vis-a vis its small neighbour. Ever since the crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968 by Soviet-led Warsaw Pact forces under cover of the Brezhnev doctrine, successive Kremlin leaders had withheld the unconditional recognition of Finland’s neutrality that Khrushchev had first granted in 1956. This Russian reluctance had long been resented by the Finns, as it implied that they somehow owed special deference to Moscow.⁴¹ Now, however, with Gorbachev announcing the compatibility of FCMA and neutrality, a Soviet leader was at last conceding the legitimacy of Finland’s policy of neutrality in world politics. And while this novel neutrality conception did not nullify the unloved Friendship Treaty, its value appeared significantly diminished.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 370.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ See “Mauno Koivisto (interview),” *HS*, 24 Sept. 1989.

⁴⁰ “Mikhail Gorbachev’s Speech at Finlandia Palace” [on 26 October], *SN*, 1 Nov. 1989, pp. 370, 374.

⁴¹ Bill Keller, “Gorbachev, in Finland, Disavows any Right of Regional Intervention,” *NYT*, 26 Oct. 1989, <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/10/26/world/gorbachev-in-finland-disavows-any-right-of-regional-intervention.html>. “Confederation of Finnish Industries, by Max Jakobson, Helsinki, 15 Nov. 1989,” in TNA, FCO 33-10471.

There was a sense that Finland could now “draw a line under the past” and act more freely and more independently, without having to always look over its shoulder. All the more so, as Gorbachev kept underscoring his determination to demilitarise Soviet Foreign policy while stressing his firm commitment to his “peace project” – the “common European home,” to which, as he concluded in his Finlandia Hall speech, Finns and Soviets together were contributing the “Northern wall” and the “Northern roof.”⁴²

On the surface then, Gorbachev’s new reading and re-contextualisation of the 1948 Treaty gave Finland exactly what it had always wanted – full acceptance by the USSR of its position as a *neutral, Nordic* country, without any strings attached. But beyond the bilateral relationship and Gorbachev’s aspirations to be seen as global peacemaker, there was a further – perhaps more negative – dimension to his words. This was duly noted by the *New York Times* which quoted Gorbachev as saying: “To me, Finland is a model of relations between a big country and a small country, a model of relations between states with different social systems, a model of relations between neighbours.”⁴³ Herein lay a hidden message to the deserting former satellites, one that was also likely to stir unease among the Finns.

In October 1989, when Gorbachev delivered his speech, the transforming states of East-Central Europe and their new, post-Communist leaders were already beginning to look to the West for aid, expertise, and institutional affiliation.⁴⁴ This caused some concern among the men in the Kremlin, especially if turning West meant walking into the embrace of the United States. Gorbachev’s reformist advisors recognised this risk and took steps to avoid it. In a report on the “Changes in Eastern Europe and the Impact on the USSR” drawn up some 9 months earlier, they had therefore suggested that “a mid-way position” or what they called a simple policy of “Finlandization” might bind the East Europeans more closely to Moscow’s orbit. This, they believed, would augment the “European factor” in “world politics and economics,” forcing the United States to “seriously correct” their approach to that region. The hope was that if the USSR prevented an “anti-Soviet consolidation of the Western world,” this would favour “Soviet efforts” to developing the “common European home.” And if the Soviet leadership remained in control of events and successfully managed a foreign policy “revolution from above,” the deepening European (EC) “Common Market” need not be seen as a problem. Viewed from this perspective, an association linking the East Europeans with an eventual European Economic Union might even be a boon for Moscow. It would “allow the [present] benefits” received from “our cooperation with Finland and Austria” and their links to Western markets “to multiply.”⁴⁵

Reverting to October, it becomes clear, that in Gorbachev’s eyes the value of spelling out the neutrality of Finland lay in the fact that it prevented the county from slipping via NATO into

⁴² “Hand/HEL emb. to Buchanan/FCO, Teleletter 027/5, ‘State Visit to Finland by President Gorbachev,’ 10 Nov. 1989,” in TNA, FCO 33-10471; “Braithwaite/ MOS emb. to FCO, Telno 1939, ‘My Telno 1936: Soviet Foreign Policy: Shevardnadze’s Speech – Western Europe and CSCE,’ 20 Nov. 1989,” in TNA, FCO 33-10471. “Mikhail Gorbachev’s Speech at Finlandia Palace” [on 26 October], *SN*, 1.11.1989, p. 374.

⁴³ Keller, “Gorbachev, in Finland, Disavows any Right of Regional Intervention.”

⁴⁴ Spohr, *Post Wall*, ch. 5.

⁴⁵ “Doc. 42: Memorandum from the Bogomolov Institute: ‘Changes in Eastern Europe and Their Impact on the USSR’,” in Svetlana Savranskaya, Thomas Blanton, and Vladislav Zubok, eds., *Masterpieces of History: The Peaceful End of the Cold War in Europe, 1989* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2011 pbk), p. 377-9. Note: Here we see again the significance of the differences between various small, neutral European states, both in terms of geography and their politics, and how this affected the Soviets’ assessment of the uses of these countries’ neutral position for itself. Indeed, as is evident, the Kremlin was not particularly interested in Switzerland and Sweden.

the US' arms. In this way, by showcasing Finland' status to the world and by effectively advertising neutrality *à la finlandaise* to the Eastern Europeans as a future security-political option and an exemplar of "good-neighbourliness," the Kremlin exposed its own ambitions. It clearly wanted to maintain some kind of Soviet hold on what it considered its immediate neighbourhood,⁴⁶ while reaping the "benefits" that came with an incremental opening out to the West. This latter calculation became visible in the USSR's growing interest in intensifying contacts between "Russia's hinterland areas" – Karelia, Komi Republic and the Baltic Republics" – and Finland; but it also became clearer over the question of potential Finnish steps towards closer integration with the European Community – considering Austria had applied to the EC two months earlier. At the Helsinki Press conference, when asked about Finland's possible entry, Gorbachev conceded that every country had the right to decide the matter on its own.⁴⁷

Given the context of the summit discussions, the Finnish foreign ministry played down the significance of the reference. They understood this as a straightforward Soviet approval of Finland's current integration policies. Closer *economic* ties through "EFTA-EC cooperation" and a future "European Economic space" were acceptable, while for *political* reasons (such as the constraints stipulated in the FCMA and Finland's supposedly "unchanged" status of neutrality) full EC membership was not. Still, the international environment had undoubtedly become an "easier and more favourable" setting in which to pursue Finnish objectives.⁴⁸

Even if after the summit Finland seemed to have finally reached a more satisfactory position than previously, Finnish President Koivisto continued on his cautious path of seeking to avoid all provocation of the USSR, be it over Baltic aspirations to independence⁴⁹ or over the burgeoning question over Finnish EC interests. The fact, that US Vice President Dan Quayle warned of Europe's "Finlandization" by the Soviets, did not sit well with the Finns.⁵⁰ It was not just that they loathed the connotations of servility and subordination that went with the word. It was also that they liked to think of their relationship with the USSR as well-managed, as "special" or even unique. They therefore were very resistant to any turn of

⁴⁶ See also Günter Gaus, "Gespräche in Moskau: Neugierig auf neue Antworten – Die Kreml-Führung sucht die Architektur des gemeinsamen Hauses Europa," *Die Zeit*, 12 May 1989. While Gorbachev's chief foreign policy advisor Aleksandr Yakovlev imagined a time when the Eastern rooms in the Common European Home might have "Finnish furnishings," it is noteworthy that Henry Kissinger in turn proposed the Finnish experience as a "model for Eastern Europe." See "Suomesta malli Itä-Euroopalle?," *Suomen Kuvalehti*, 16 Feb. 1990.

⁴⁷ "Confederation of Finnish Industries, by Max Jakobson, Helsinki, 15 Nov/ 1989," in TNA, FCO 33-10471; "Noss/HEL emb. to Telno 333, 'My Telnos 324 and 325 (not to all): State Visit to Finland by President Gorbachev, 25-27 Oct. 1989,' 30 Oct. 1989," in TNA, FCO 33-10471. See also Ritvanen, *Mureneva kulmakivi*, pp. 45-7.

⁴⁸ Ibid. "Noss/HEL emb. to FCO, Telno 335, 'My Telno 333: Gorbachev State Visit,' 31 Oct. 1989," in TNA, FCO 33-10471. "Trebesch/HEL emb. to AA, DB 341, 'Betr.: Gorbatschow-Besuch vom 25.-27.10.1989 in Finnland; hier: Briefing der EG-Botschafter durch finn. AM am 30.10.89,' 31 Oct. 1989," in PAAA, ZA 178331.

⁴⁹ Koivisto, *Historian tekijät*, pp. 305-6. See also Visuri and Talvitie, *Kylmän sodan päätös*, p. 108.

⁵⁰ Quayle quoted on "WAS emb. to POL-10/UM, Nro WAS 1379, 'Gorbatschovin puhe ja suomettuminen; varapresidentti Quaylen haastattelu,' 28 Oct. 1989," in Ulkoministeriön Arkisto [Finnish MFA archive], Helsinki (UMA), 18.60 NLO [Neuvostoliiton kommunistisen puolueen pääsihteeri Mihail Gorbatschovin vierailu Suomeen 25.-17.10.1989, yleistä]. Interestingly Quayle suggested that with their efforts to "Finlandize" Europe, the Soviets behaved "as if [the USSR] was a European power", even though "historically it had always been more Asian". Cf. Jaakko Blomberg, *Vakauden kaipuu: Kylmän sodan loppu ja Suomi* (Helsinki: WSOY, 2011), pp. 134-40.

phrase that threatened to lump them together with the newly self-emancipating Soviet satellites.⁵¹

Within weeks of Gorbachev's Helsinki visit and his momentous words, the international context changed more profoundly than anybody could have anticipated, rendering debates over the precise meaning of Gorbachev's proclamations obsolete. From 9 November 1989, when the Berlin wall fell, the German question was back near the top of the international agenda. Before long it dawned on the Finns that with German re-unification imminent, the German clauses of the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty and the 1948 FCMA Treaty would need updating. And the transformative impact of German unity on the continent's security architecture also had far-reaching implications for Finland's position in a rapidly evolving Europe. In order to break free from the constraints of the Cold War era, leave behind its old role as "bridge-builder and broker" of "East-West dialogue," and embrace its new political freedoms, Finland would have to adapt again.⁵²

3 "Operation Pax 1990" and the Anglo-Soviet-German Triangle: Adapting to the Post-Wall Realities

For Finland, much depended on how the wartime victor powers – USSR, US, UK, and France – would react to events in Germany. President Koivisto at first took the view that "the general configuration that has prevailed in Europe for decades" was unlikely to "change particularly rapidly."⁵³ This seemed a reasonable appraisal at the time: even Chancellor Helmut Kohl initially believed that unification might take several years. In his Ten Point programme for German Unity of 28 November, Kohl presented the rapprochement between the two German states as embedded in an all-European process under CSCE auspices. At the same time, he lobbied for an enlarged European Community that would come to include Germany's neighbours to the East. All of this could be slotted neatly into the Finnish agenda.⁵⁴ Since the 1970s, after all, Finland had framed both its *Deutschlandpolitik* and the promotion of its neutrality in terms of the 1975 principles of the CSCE. Gorbachev and Koivisto had discussed the idea of a "Helsinki-2" summit only two months earlier. If the Big Four could reach an understanding on Germany's future in a post-Wall Europe through the CSCE, this would surely work to Finland's advantage too. As Koivisto underlined, for Finns it remained imperative to "stay out of any great-power conflicts of interest."⁵⁵

This dream of a frictionless all-power adjustment to new realities was short-lived. By Christmas 1989, the communist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe – from Warsaw to Bucharest – had been toppled. As they began their road to multiparty elections and market

⁵¹ Aunesluoma and Rainio-Niemi, "In Germany's Footsteps," p. 422.

⁵² On the Finnish-Soviet special relationship ("*Sonderverhältnis*"), see "Trebesch/HEL emb. to AA, DB 327, 'Betr.: Gorbatschow-Besuch vom 25.-27.10.1989 in Finnland; hier: Vorschau aus finn. Sicht,' 20 Oct. 1989," in PAAA, ZA 178331. On the need for Finnish emancipation, "Bazing/HEL emb. to AA, DB 1, 'Betr.: Finnische Aussen- und Sicherheitspolitik; hier: Reaktion auf den Wandel in Osteuropa,' 4 Jan. 1990," in PAAA, ZA 178331.

⁵³ Koivisto's speech of 27.11.1989 discussed in "Bazing/HEL emb. to AA, DB 375, 'Betr.: Finnische Aussen- und Sicherheitspolitik; hier: 1. Rede von Staatspräsident Koivisto am 28.11.89; 2. Äusserungen AM Paasios zur dt. Entwicklung,' 29 Nov. 1989," in PAAA, ZA 178331.

⁵⁴ Helmut Kohl, *Ich wollte Deutschlands Einheit* (Berlin: Propyläen, 1996), pp. 159-70.

⁵⁵ Koivisto quoted in Visuri and Talvitie, *Kylmän sodan päätös*, p. 111. "Letter from Trebesch/HEL emb. to AA/Ref 205, 'Betr.: Deutschland-Klausel im FZB-Vertrag; hier: Finn. Diskussion,' 18 Oct. 1989," in PAAA, ZA 178331. See also fn. 53.

economics, the former satellite states also rethought their bi- and multilateral ties with the Soviet Union. Moscow had to come to terms with the helter-skelter loss of its outer empire. Meanwhile East Germany lurched towards economic collapse. Its people demanded the German Mark and political unity, while thousands continued to cross the border to the West. Kohl abandoned the idea of a gradual move towards confederative structures with the leaders in East Berlin. With the first free GDR elections imminent, he instead advocated the accession of the Eastern *Länder* to the FRG and a rapid economic and currency union.⁵⁶

Under these rapidly changing conditions, the plausibility of the irenic collaborative visions of 1989 waned fast, raising questions about how a final settlement of the German question could be reached, and about how it would be possible to accommodate a fully sovereign and united Germany with a future European security architecture.

For the Finnish government, the chief concern at this juncture was not the resurgence of a “Fourth Reich,” but the possible side effects of a botched German unification process. Any chaos that might trigger an intervention by Soviet troops on German soil represented a worst-case scenario for the Finns, since under FCMA provisions they might get drawn into consultation with the Soviets. Finns also wondered about how reunification would affect their future bilateral relations with Germany. With East-West tensions easing and a solution to the post-war German question coming into sight, the limitations on the acquisition of (West) German military materiel and on high tech trade as outlined in the military clauses of the Paris Peace Treaty appeared redundant. Then, there was the striking improvement in the Kremlin’s relations with Bonn. Keen to draw a line under the conflicts of the past, Gorbachev and Kohl cultivated a demonstrative political friendship. The references in the FCMA to the need for a joint Finno-Soviet response to “German” aggression appeared increasingly obsolete. Popular debate on this had briefly flared during the summer of 1989. By the winter of 1990, further discussion arose, when the veteran diplomat and publicist Max Jakobson and Risto E. J. Penttilä, a researcher at the Finnish MoD, called for revision of the two post-war treaties, now seen as the fruit of a bygone historical moment. But there was as yet little enthusiasm amongst the political elite – notably President Koivisto, Premier Harri Holkeri and Foreign Minister Pertti Paasio – for a reformulation, let alone termination, of the treaties.⁵⁷

For now, there were still two Germanies and the Kremlin still had its security demands. The Finnish leadership was reluctant to push Gorbachev into measures that might open him up to domestic criticism in a Union already struggling with rising nationalist and secessionist voices and an economy in freefall. Finland had no wish to be associated with the ex-satellites that had begun renegotiating their treaty-relations with Moscow and sought Soviet troop withdrawals from their terrains. The FCMA Treaty had functioned for decades as the cornerstone of Finnish foreign policy. For all its ambiguities, it was also a symbol of relative stability. To tamper with its wording in a way that might invite the USSR in turn to impose an unwelcome interpretation of its substance seemed unwise. The policy of caution and incrementalism prevailed. And yet, as the Soviet hold over Finland loosened, Finnish

⁵⁶ Spohr, *Post Wall*, ch. 3.

⁵⁷ Aunesluoma and Rainio Niemi, “In Germany’s Footsteps,” pp. 424, 429. “Letter by Dixon to Buchanan, ‘1947 Paris Peace Treaty,’ 22 March 1989,” in TNA, FCO 33-10471. Risto E. J. Penttilä and Jyrki Karvinen, *Pitkä tie NATOon* (Helsinki: Otava, 2022), pp. 27-8. See also “Trebesch/HEL emb. to AA, DB 327, ‘Betr.: Gorbatschow-Besuch vom 25.-27.10.1989 in Finnland; hier: Vorschau aus finn. Sicht,’ 20 Oct. 1989,” in PAAA, ZA 178331; “Bazing/HEL emb. to AA, Ber.-Nr: 0092/90, ‘Betr: Deutschlandklausel im FZB-Vertrag, hier: Finn. Diskussion,’ 12 Feb. 1990,” in PAAA, ZA 178331.

diplomats began to quietly explore how to move beyond the limitations imposed by the post-war treaties.⁵⁸

For Helsinki, Germany's attainment of full sovereignty and unity and the international agreements reached over its military status within the 2+4 negotiations were a new point of departure. Indeed, the resolution of these two issues would create new international circumstances, on the basis of which, so the Finns believed, they could push for full political emancipation.

The outcome of the East German elections in March 1990, a win for the Christian Democrat dominated *Allianz für Deutschland* under Prime Minister Lothar de Maizière, effectively put chancellor Kohl in the driving seat. It offered the West German leader *carte blanche* to pursue his favoured unification strategy – a fast and smooth absorption of the GDR into the state structures of the FRG, and a rapid, small-circle, and relatively informal so-called 2 (Germanies) + 4 (victor powers) negotiation mechanism to settle Germany's international status *without* a peace conference or formal peace treaty. Thanks to this acceleration and simplification of the processes in the domain of international diplomacy, it was clear: the process of uniting Germany had acquired an autonomous momentum; it was not going to unfold under the auspices of the EC or the CSCE.

The quickening pace of German unification from late March galvanised Finland's foreign ministry. The Finnish leadership now intensified its pursuit of the nullification of the limitations on Finnish sovereignty set out in the military clauses of the Paris Peace Treaty – with the single exception of the ban on nuclear weapons. Yet for all the work behind closed doors on what came to be called “Operation Pax,” Helsinki took pains to avoid any public speculation until the German question had been fully resolved. Within the government, differences of opinion persisted: President Koivisto remained notably more sceptical than his foreign ministry officials about the prospects of a swift and problem-free unification.⁵⁹

The mood of détente that gained ground in 1990 helped to mute anxieties in Helsinki. In its London declaration of July 1990, NATO announced a process of self-transformation. The Allies declared their willingness to “extend” the “hand of friendship” to the East, and to start building “new partnerships with all nations of Europe” for a more “united continent.” In fact, all the Warsaw Pact countries *including the Soviet Union* were invited to “establish regular diplomatic liaison” with NATO as part of the effort to foster collaborative thinking on how best to manage this historic period of change.⁶⁰ Helsinki was also reassured by the positive outcomes of the May/June Washington superpower summit and the Soviet-(West)German

⁵⁸ Kansikas, “Dismantling the Soviet Security System,” pp. 89-90; Uutela, “The End of Finlandization,” pp. 417-19; Blomberg, *Vakauden kaipuu*, pp. 252-4. See also “Memcon, René Nyberg w/Graham Hand, ‘salainen: poliittisen osaston virkamiesten keskustelut ulkovaltojen edustajien kanssa: YYA-sopimus’, 6 Feb. 1990,” in UMA, NLO 18.41 [YYA-sopimus Suomi–Neuvostoliitto 1990/I, 1.1.-20.9.1990]. And cf. “Bazing/HEL emb. to AA, Ber.-Nr: 0092/90, ‘Betr: Deutschlandklausel im FZB-Vertrag, hier: Finn. Diskussion,’ 12 Feb. 1990,” in PAAA, ZA 178331; “Letter by Leutrum/Ref205/AA to BM, ‘Betr.: Finnische reaction auf deutsche Vereinigung,’ 27 Sept. 1990,” in PAAA, ZA 178331.

⁵⁹ “Operation Pax” was conceived by René Nyberg of the Finnish MFA, who also later penned his recollection of the process in article form. See “Olette kajonneet yya-sopimukseen,” *Kanava*, No. 1 (2008), <https://anselm.fi/olette-kajonneet-yya-sopimukseen/>. See also “‘Komissarov olisi kääntynyt haudassaan’: Neuvostoliitto, Iso-Britannia ja Suomen Operaatio Pax 1989-1990,” *Historiallinen Aikakauslehti*, No. 1 (2017), pp. 74-86, esp. p. 77; *ibid.*, *Mureneva kulmakivi*, pp. 100-2; Uutela, “Operaatio Pax,” p. 146; Visuri and Talvitie, *Kylmän sodan päätös*, pp. 120-2.

⁶⁰ Declaration on a Transformed North Atlantic Alliance – London Declaration, 5-6 July 1990, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_23693.htm.

Caucasus meeting in mid-July: Gorbachev had accepted unified Germany's NATO membership on the basis of the CSCE principle of the freedom to choose one's alliances. And when US President George W.H. Bush declared a "new world order" and announced that the US relationship with Gorbachev's Soviet Union was to be co-operative and no longer confrontational, the Finnish President started to prepare in earnest for the implementation of "Operation Pax."

Timing and execution were crucial. The idea was to closely follow in Germany's footsteps – literally – and to act *independently* and *informally*.⁶¹ Finland would not undertake a formal exchange of diplomatic notes with all the contracting parties of the Paris Peace Treaty ("a very colourful band of states" as René Nyberg, Director of the MFA's Security Policy Division, noted⁶²); nor would it engage in multilateral (re)negotiations of Treaty amendments at the UN SC, the two routes that had been originally spelled out under the Treaty's article 22.⁶³ Instead, Finland would simply make a unilateral declaration that it regarded the stipulations concerning "Germany" and those limiting Finnish sovereignty in Part III of the 1947 Treaty no longer relevant, as having "lost their meaning." It was essential that this move was to be made *after* the signing of the 2+4 Treaty ("on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany") on 12 September in Moscow. The argument went that if in these present "unusual circumstances" Germany could re-establish its unity and "regain its sovereignty" without a peace treaty, Finland should be absolved from the obligation to submit to an "unnecessarily cumbersome process." After all, the 1947 Treaty as such would remain in place.⁶⁴

The Finnish foreign ministry's chosen procedure entailed in the first instance the delivery of a "non-paper" to the UK's FCO and Soviet MID as "principal parties concerned," the idea being to "unofficially inform" – not "consult" – on the upcoming Finnish declaration. This was to be followed up by the President's speech, most likely following Germany's official unity celebration on 3 October.⁶⁵

President Koivisto however, a strong believer in personal diplomacy and keen to maintain his friendly relations with the Soviet Union and its leader⁶⁶, chose to make a personal overture to

⁶¹ The ideas for Finland's steps had been developed in the UM in April. See, "'Pariisin rauhansopimuksen Saksaa koskevien ja sotilaallisten määräysten kuomoaminen; uusi tilanne,' 12 April 1990," in UMA, 18.40 [Pariisin rauhansopimus, v. 1990].

⁶² Nyberg quoted in Ritvanen, *Mureneva kulmakivi*, p. 99. The original signatory-countries included beyond UK and USSR, Belarus, Canada, Czechoslovakia, India, New Zealand, Ukraine and South Africa.

⁶³ See also *ibid.* NB: Article 22 incidentally also spelled out that the Treaty restrictions on sovereignty (chapter III) be only temporary and to be lifted once they were amended in mutual agreement by all Treaty signatories, or upon Finland entry to the United Nations. This was, however, something that, despite Finland gaining UN membership already in 1955, the Cold War realities had thwarted.

⁶⁴ "Smith/HEL emb. to Douglas Hurd/Sec of State, 'Finland: Annual Report for 1990,' 18 Jan. 1991, pt. 4," in TNA, FCO 160-291-10, See also Ritvanen, *Mureneva kulmakivi*, p. 102; Visuri and Talvitie, *Kylmän sodan päätös*, pp. 120-1; Blomberg, *Vakauden kaipuu*, pp. 254-5; Uutela, "Operation Pax," pp. 157-60.

⁶⁵ Visuri and Talvitie, *Kylmän sodan päätös*, pp. 121-3.

⁶⁶ Between 1945 and 2022, Finland enjoyed exceptionally frequent access to the highest echelons of the Soviet and then Russian government. Whether under the semi-presidential system mandated by the 1919 constitution or the full parliamentary democracy that emerged after the constitutional amendments of 1999 and 2012, the Finnish president was in charge of this diplomacy. Kekkonen's tenure was pivotal here. As well as his sauna summitry, he often bypassed the MFA and issued orders directly to civil servants. During his long tenure, his cultivation of close contacts and use of secret backchannels allowed him to keep tight control over foreign affairs. Privileged access meant also privileged knowledge – all used to justify the methods. Yet this approach also underpinned the negative connotations attached to "Finlandization," those of a Finnish (self)-submissiveness. Koivisto changed the nature of foreign policymaking. As prime minister (1968–70, 1979–81) he

Gorbachev and to bypass the Finnish foreign ministry. Through the Soviet embassy's KGB-backchannel he notified Gorbachev on 4 September of his planned statement, offering to discuss the matter on the margins of the upcoming superpower summit in Helsinki (9-10 September) where Gorbachev and Bush hoped to consult over the current international crisis in the Gulf. The meeting between Koivisto and Gorbachev took place as planned, but Gorbachev touched neither on the Paris Peace Treaty nor on Finland's desire for its reinterpretation. He focused instead on his domestic woes: the collapsing economy and the nationalities problem (especially in the Baltics) but also the challenge that an increasingly assertive Russian SFSR⁶⁷ under its new leader Boris Yeltsin posed to the Union and to him personally. What Koivisto had foreseen as a potential problem with the Soviet leadership, had been pushed far down the agenda – it was then clearly not a cause for concern for the Kremlin leader.⁶⁸

Fearing leaks and a sudden closure of their window of opportunity, Helsinki moved its timetable forward and officially notified London and Moscow on 13 September. With international events evolving all the time, a fresh Finnish foreign ministry memo was circulated only four days later, now additionally proposing the excision from the FCMA treaty of “the reference to Germany as a possible aggressor.” In this way amending the FCMA became a subplot of “Operation Pax.”⁶⁹

The British later speculated whether for the Finns, besides the reinterpretation of Paris Peace Treaty, the “main purpose all along” had been “to achieve the change to the Friendship Treaty without risking re-negotiation of an arrangement” which had, “on the whole, served

was often kept in the dark by Kekkonen. Small wonder that he became a staunch believer that the president should conduct foreign policy in tandem with his government. After Finland's entry into the EU in 1995, Koivisto supported a new division of labour, whereby the president became responsible for EU matters while the government controlled everything else. Yet even after the shift to a fully parliamentary system, much of the country has continued to expect the president to play an active role as a personal leader. Against this backdrop, it is unsurprising that President Niinistö has played the prominent role in dealing with both Putin and NATO. between 2012 and 2022, he either met or spoke on the telephone with Putin on more than 40 occasions. Their last phone call took place in May 2022, when they discussed Finland's NATO application. While in the recent past Finland's close interactions with Russia have resulted in suggestions that Helsinki was a “bear whisperer,” access and close experience should not be confused with influence. This channel to Moscow has rather been Finland's method of strengthening its international position, as well as maintaining a close eye on matters of vital importance to its national security. See Heikki Paloheimo, “Divided Government in Finland: From a Semi-Presidential to a Parliamentary Democracy,” in Robert Elgie, ed., *Divided Government in Comparative Perspective, Comparative Politics* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), ch. 5; Henri Vanhanen, “Something New, Something Old – Finland on the Verge of a New Russia Relationship,” 7 Sept. 2022,

<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/something-new-something-old-finland-verge-new-russia-relationship>.

⁶⁷ “Russian Laws Supersede National Law,” *LA Times*, 10 June 1990, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1990-06-10-mn-116-story.html>.

⁶⁸ M.S. Gorbachev, *Sobranie Sochenenii*, t. 22 (Moscow: ves mir, 2013), pp. 43-5. See also Ritvanen, *Mureneva kulmakivi*, p. 103; Koivisto, *Historian tekijät*, p. 361; Blomberg, *Vakauden kaipuu*, pp. 260-2.

⁶⁹ Visuri and Talvitie, *Kylmän sodan päätös*, p. 123; Koivisto, *Historian tekijät*, p. 361; Blomberg, *Vakauden kaipuu*, pp. 256-7. It is noteworthy, that the issue of the “Germany-passage” in article 1 of the FCMA Treaty had been addressed a number of times in summer and fall 1989 by Koivisto and Gorbachev; and while several Treaty paragraphs had then already been deemed “in practice obsolete,” a rewriting of the Treaty, as West German diplomats noted, was not on the table. See “Trebesch/HEL emb. to AA, DB 327, ‘Betr.: Gorbatschow-Besuch vom 25.-27.10.1989 in Finnland; hier: Vorschau aus finn. Sicht,’ 20 Oct.1989,” in PAAA, ZA 178331; “Letter from Trebesch/HEL emb. to AA/Ref 205, ‘Betr.: Deutschland-Klausel im FZB-Vertrag; hier: finn. Diskussion,’ 18.10.1989,” in PAAA, ZA 178331; “Bazing/HEL emb. to AA, Ber.-Nr. 0092/90, ‘Betr: Deutschlandklausel im FZB-Vertrag, hier: finn. Diskussion,’ 12.2.1990,” in PAAA, ZA 178331.

them well for over 50 [sic!] years.”⁷⁰ Be that as may, Finnish diplomats had recognised an opportune moment as German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher and his Soviet counterpart moved straight from the signature of the 2+4 Treaty to discussing a new bilateral “Treaty on Good Neighbourly relations, Partnership and Cooperation” between united Germany and the USSR.⁷¹ Initialled in Moscow on 13 September, the thirty-fifth anniversary of the restoration of relations between the USSR and the FRG, the new Partnership Treaty was seen as offering closure to the Germano-Soviet antagonism that had persisted ever since the Soviets fought their Great Patriotic War against the Nazi Germany.⁷² Genscher and Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze declared that the new Treaty now took them “into the twenty first century” in a spirit of “responsibility, trust and cooperation.” Germany had definitely stopped representing an existential threat to the Soviet Union. The War was over. And the very aspect which had played such a prominent role in the Soviet-Finnish FCMA Treaty had finally been buried.⁷³

In short: the Finns, who had been so anxious not to overstep the mark, now found themselves hurrying to stay abreast of the changes in the geopolitical environment. For the sake of predictability and stability, Helsinki had deemed it necessary to keep the FCMA Treaty in principle intact, especially the point that Finland would not allow anybody to use its terrain to attack the USSR. And the country had continued to adhere to its longstanding construction of Finnish “neutrality.” In the wider world, however, the view had crystallised that Finland should not find itself in the position of being the only European state with restrictions on its sovereignty originating from the post-War settlements of the late 1940s. The Finns most certainly wanted to avoid such “singularisation” which is why the FCMA Treaty needed to be re-interpreted in tandem with the Peace Treaty’s military clauses.⁷⁴

On 19 September 1990, President Koivisto decided that he would cover both treaties in his public announcement. Moscow was once more unofficially pre-informed and in the absence of objections, Koivisto, went ahead with his declaration on the 21st.⁷⁵ To the Finns, it seemed obvious that this démarche was saturated with historical significance. By contrast, the British embassy to Helsinki reported that the Finnish statement was “met with slightly irritated indifference” and ultimately “uncontested.”⁷⁶ The Soviets, in turn, had more pressing

⁷⁰ “Smith/HEL emb. to Douglas Hurd/Sec of State, ‘Finland: Annual Report for 1990,’ 18 Jan. 1991, pt.4,” in TNA, FCO 160-291-10.

⁷¹ Note: The new, “great” German-Soviet Treaty had first been proposed to Gorbachev by chancellor Kohl during their Caucasus summit on 15 July. Aleksandr Galkin and Anatolij Tschernajew, eds., *Michail Gorbatschow und die deutsche Frage: Sowjetische Dokumente 1986-1991* [hereafter *MGDF:SD*] (München: Oldenbourg, 2011), Doc. 102, 15 July 1990, p. 459. See also Bundesministerium des Innern, ed., *Deutsche Einheit: Sonderedition aus den Akten des Bundeskanzleramtes 1989/90* [Dokumente zur Deutschlandpolitik] (München: Oldenbourg, 1998), Doc. 421, p. 1540.

⁷² Institut für Zeitgeschichte, ed., *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik 1990: 1. Juli - 31. Dezember* (München: De Gruyter-Oldenbourg, 2021), Doc. 378, pp. 1580-1. Cf. *MGDF:SD*, Doc. 115, 12 Sept. 1990; Andreas Hilger, ed., *Diplomatie für die deutsche Einheit: Dokumente des Auswärtigen Amtes zu den deutsch-sowjetischen Beziehungen 1989/90* (München: Oldenbourg, 2011), Doc. 46, 13 Sept 1990, pp. 256-7.

⁷³ See Spohr, *Post Wall*, p. 249.

⁷⁴ Blomberg, *Vakauden kaipuu*, p. 259.

⁷⁵ Koivisto, *Historian tekijät*, p. 362.

⁷⁶ “Smith/HEL emb. to Douglas Hurd/FCO, ‘Finland: Annual Defence Review,’ 8 Feb.1991 incl. ‘Defence Attache’s Annual Report for 1990,’ pt.3e,” in TNA, FCO 179-250; “Smith/HEL emb. to Douglas Hurd/FCO, ‘Finland: Annual Report for 1990,’ 18 Jan. 1991,” in TNA, FCO 160-291-10.

priorities than a quarrel with Finland over Treaty paragraphs that had become, as the Finns declared and no one else denied, “outdated”⁷⁷ and thereby effectively “obsolete”⁷⁸.

4 Sidestepping Anglo-Soviet Irritations

The condescension of the British report is unsurprising, but what was the irritation about? At stake in London and Moscow were questions of status and institutional power struggles. The British were annoyed to learn that Koivisto had personally informed Gorbachev well ahead of the official ambassadorial notifications, while Premier Margaret Thatcher and Downing Street had not been approached. In a heated exchange in October, Graham Hand, number 2 of the British embassy, half-jokingly complained to René Nyberg that “Mrs T’s Britain” could “not be treated just any old way.” Nyberg dryly quipped: “You sold us down the river in 1947.” Hand complained about this choice of words to Nyberg’s boss, but the meeting passed without serious consequences. London considered Finland a “friend,” one that had always dutifully fulfilled its treaty obligations including all payments of its reparations. Britain understood that Finland’s declaration was a political “act of sovereignty.”⁷⁹

From inside the USSR came the rumblings of miffed Soviet foreign ministry (MID) officials, many of whom were more ideologically hard-line or old-school than Gorbachev and Shevardnadze. They resented Finland’s unilateral re-interpretation of the 1947 and 1948 Treaties. They also felt they had been deliberated side-lined by their bosses on an issue where the future direction of Soviet foreign policy was at stake. Put off by Koivisto having gone above their heads straight to Gorbachev, MID bureaucrats briefly dug in their heels and, hoping to raise their profile on the domestic stage, threatened to go public. In the event, the crisis blew over once the Soviets had delivered a note to Finland. The latter responded with uncontentious reassurances which for the Soviets closed the matter. As the Finns made quite clear, they had no intention of “increasing their armed forces” and “specifically undert[ook] not to change their Non-Proliferation policy.” Furthermore, both President Koivisto and his foreign minister “firmly quashed” suggestions made in the press that Finland sought to revise any of the other “results of the last war,” for example by reclaiming the “lost Karelian territories.”⁸⁰

Perhaps the British Defence attaché to Helsinki was right in suggesting that the secretive, unilateral Finnish handling of their declaration had been “a trifle naïve,” though, he added, they were evidently “pleased with themselves for doing it.”⁸¹ And British ambassador Neil Smith sounded quietly pleased stating that, while “careful not to crow about it,” Helsinki with its Operation Pax had “scored a rare point over Moscow.”⁸²

⁷⁷ Blomberg, *Vakauden kaipuu*, p. 257.

⁷⁸ “Smith/HEL emb. to Douglas Hurd/Sec of State, ‘Finland: Annual Report for 1990,’ 18 Jan. 1991, pt 4,” in TNA, FCO 160-291-10.

⁷⁹ Ritvanen, *Mureneva kulmakivi*, pp. 110-11. Cf. Nyberg, “Olette kajonneet yya-sopimukseen;” Blomberg, *Vakauden kaipuu*, pp. 259, 269.

⁸⁰ “Report by Ivey/HEL emb. to Henderson and Kelly/ FCO, ‘Lunch with Mikhail Amirdzanov,’ 19 Nov. 1990,” in TNA, FCO 33-10993; “Smith/HEL emb. to Douglas Hurd/Sec of State, ‘Finland: Annual Report for 1990,’ 18 Jan. 1991, pt.4,” in TNA, FCO 160-291-10. See also Blomberg, *Vakauden kaipuu*, pp. 262-7.

⁸¹ “Smith/HEL emb. to Douglas Hurd/FCO, ‘Finland: Annual Defence Review,’ 8. Feb. 1991 incl. ‘Defence Attaché’s Annual Report for 1990,’ pt.3e,” in TNA, FCO 179-250.

⁸² “Smith/HEL emb. to Douglas Hurd/Sec of State, ‘Finland: Annual Report for 1990,’ 18 Jan. 1991, pt.4,” in TNA, FCO 160-291-10.

The Germans, the central party referred to in the Treaties and thus much talked about, were never pulled directly into the affairs of “Operation Pax.” But they, too, were in full agreement when it came to interpreting what had unfolded on 21 September⁸³ and what it meant for the future of Finland in a changing Europe. In an internal memorandum for Foreign Minister Genscher, dated 27 September, the *Auswärtiges Amt* summed up the German view. Finland’s “course of action” had demonstrated “an increased Finnish self-confidence and the aspiration to widen its own political room for manoeuvre, while simultaneously normalizing their relations with the USSR.” From this it followed that the term ‘Finlandization,’ implying submissiveness to the Soviet Union, was now definitely obsolete.⁸⁴

The Finns had taken their first step out of Moscow’s shadow. They had drawn a line under the legacy of World War II, just as the Germans had done. And to Bonn’s great relief, this recalibration included an assurance from Finland that it did not intend to seek any reparations from unified Germany for the destruction caused by German troops in the Lapland War of 1944/45. German companies, including the armaments and civilian industries of the FRG,⁸⁵ could now benefit from normal access to Finnish markets. Given Finland’s new and “more independent self-perception,” the country represented an even more valuable partner for Germany than before. This is not to deny that “difficult decisions” still lay ahead for Finland. There remained, as one German diplomat remarked, the “regional problems of the Baltics,” “Finland’s position in Europe,” and the associated “redefinition of Finnish neutrality in a changing world.”⁸⁶

The impact of Helsinki’s cautious manoeuvring could also already be detected in official British attitudes to Finland. The time had now come, British Ambassador to Helsinki Neil Smith suggested, for Britain to “help Finland consolidate her economic and political ties with the West.” It was to be expected that Finland’s trade with the new Germany would flourish, and that Helsinki would welcome the “redevelopment of Germany’s historic trading links with the USSR.” And yet the country’s newfound status remained fragile. “If reform in the Soviet Union were to turn sour,” the ambassador warned, with a touch of the old condescension, Finland’s “new sense of international political maturity could too easily fade away.” Helsinki would need the support of London to handle the problems expected to arise from its “concept of neutrality.” The British read this latter concept as a “codeword for ‘sovereignty’” – “that sovereign right [of Finns] to choose for themselves how best to walk the tightrope between East and West” that had “served them well for 75 years.” The assumption, so central to earlier British readings of Finland, that the country belonged within the Soviet sphere of interest, no longer held sway. “In seeking to preserve their own

⁸³ See “UM Press Release No. 277, ‘Beschluss der finn. Regierung über die Deutschland betreffenden Bestimmungen des Pariser Friedensvertrages und die Beschränkungen der finnischen Souveränität’ + ‘Beschluss der Reg. Finnlands betreffend Teil III des Pariser Friedensvertrages, 21.9.1990,” in PAAA, ZA 178331; “UM Press Release No. 278, ‘Stellungnahme des Präsidenten der Rep. Finnland betreffend den Vertrag über Freundschaft, Zusammenarbeit und Beistand,’ 21 Sept. 1990,” in PAAA, ZA 178331.

⁸⁴ “Letter by Leutrum/Ref205/AA to BM, ‘Betr.: Finnische Reaktion auf deutsche Vereinigung,’ 27 Sept. 1990,” in PAAA, ZA 178331.

⁸⁵ It is noteworthy that Finland also at this point felt able to purchase German military materiel, incl. East German NVA-armaments (now of course owned by the Bundeswehr). See, for example, “Letter by Leutrum to Ref 213/AA, ‘Betr.: Weitergabe von NVA-Material; hier: Grundsatzentscheidung des BSR,’ 12 Feb. 1991,” in PAAA, ZA 178331; “Letter by BM für Wirtschaft to AA/ Ref 424 and BM der Verteidigung/ Rü T II 3, Betr.: Verwertung von ehem. NVA-Material; hier: Mögl. Abgabe von Material an Finland,’ 29 May 1991 + Anlage,” in PAAA, ZA 178331; “Letter by Friedrich/AA to AA/Ref 205, ‘Betr.: Ausfuhr von Seeminen nach Finnland,’ 19.6.1991 + Anlage,” in PAAA, ZA 178331.

⁸⁶ “Letter by Leutrum/Ref205/AA to BM, ‘Betr.: Finnische Reaktion auf deutsche Vereinigung,’ 27 Sept. 1990,” in PAAA, ZA 178331.

independence” while dealing with the “chaos in the USSR,” the ambassador wrote, the Finns were “on the side of the angels.”⁸⁷

The problem, as the British well understood, was not just geopolitical but also economic. On 6 December 1990, Moscow had shocked the Finns, announcing that it would be discontinuing the Finnish-Soviet Clearing Trade and Payment System from the start of 1991. It was predicted that the move to hard-currency financing in Fenno-Soviet trade would lead to a massive plunge in Finnish exports to the USSR.⁸⁸ The sudden evaporation of what for Finland had been a dependable (and lucrative) Soviet market naturally sharpened Helsinki’s interest in the prospects of a common European Economic Area (EEA) already under discussion between EFTA and EC since the summer of 1990. Austria’s EC application in July 1989 and Sweden’s October 1990 “decision in principle” to formally seek full EC membership appeared to endow the issue with even more urgency. A further spur to action came from the transitioning economies of Central and Eastern Europe. These had already established trade and cooperation agreements with the European Community, and Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary were keen to begin exploratory conversations on formal EC association. An all-party consensus began to emerge in Helsinki in favour of Finland’s joining the Community, which was itself on the road towards an ever closer political and economic Union. And yet for the moment, the British observed, nothing was yet settled, and the security environment around Finland remained in constant flux.⁸⁹

A new European order was emerging. The “Charter of Paris for a new Europe,” signed during the CSCE summit in the French capital on 19-20 November 1990, proclaimed that “the era of confrontation and division of Europe had ended” and that future relations would be “founded on respect and cooperation.” Europe was “liberating itself from the legacy of the past,” and entering “a new era of peace, democracy and unity.” The values underwritten were ones that the West had long espoused – democratic government, economic liberty, human rights, the rule of law, and other “fundamental rights” including the freedom of states to choose their own security arrangements. Endorsed, in principle at least, by all CSCE members in 1975, they were now being patchily implemented in the former Soviet satellites of Eastern Europe, and in the USSR itself.⁹⁰

The Finnish government believed that EC, NATO, WEU and the Council of Europe would remain crucial to the management of geopolitical change. But Helsinki was also committed to strengthening the CSCE, as the organisation best suited to serve Finnish security interests. Finland welcomed the CFE Treaty, whose purpose was to reduce both alliances’ (NATO and Warsaw Pact) conventional forces and to facilitate a new understanding of collective security on the European continent. At the same time, the Finns warned of the treaty’s potentially negative consequences for their immediate neighbourhood. They feared that Soviet force

⁸⁷ “Smith/HEL emb. to Douglas Hurd/FCO, ‘Finland: Annual Report for 1990,’ 18 Jan. 1991, pt.16,” in TNA, FCO 160-291-10; “Smith/HEL emb. to Douglas Hurd/FCO, ‘Finland: Annual Defence Review,’ 8 Feb. 1991,” in FCO 179-250.

⁸⁸ The drop in Finnish exports to the USSR was predicted to be from 26% in 1989 to 8% in 1991.

⁸⁹ “Smith/HEL emb. to Douglas Hurd/Sec of State, ‘Finland: Annual Report for 1990,’ 18 Jan. 1991, pts.5+6, 16,” in TNA, FCO 160-291-10. It is noteworthy that the German AA also believed that beyond Germany, Britain would play a key role in Finland’s re-orientation toward EC member-states. See “Trebesch/HEL emb. to AA, Telnö 208, ‘Betr.: Finnland-Besuch von MP Thatcher von 28.-30.8.1990,’ 31 Aug. 1990,” in PAAA, ZA 178338. See also “Association Agreements with the Countries of Central and Eastern Europe: A General Outline, COM (90) 398 final, 27 Aug. 1990,”

http://aei.pitt.edu/1683/1/east_europe_assoc_agree_COM_90_398.pdf.

⁹⁰ “Charter of Paris for a New Europe,” Nov. 1990, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/6/39516.pdf>.

withdrawals from Europe's central zone might merely entail a transfer of men and materiel to the Northern periphery – the Leningrad military district and the Baltic SSRs. Security in the Baltic Sea area remained a serious concern and it was not clear whether the CSCE was really the answer.⁹¹

For all its high-flying rhetoric, the Paris Charter was not about building a viable architecture for European security. The CSCE's soft politics did not address the hard realities of the post-Cold War continent and it was all too obvious that the "main [institutional] pillars of the new Europe" remained "those of the old Western Europe." In any case, for many of the key decision-makers, Europe was at this moment not the first priority. Most great-power decision-makers were more concerned with the crisis in the Gulf, questions over the USSR's cohesion as a unitary state, and Gorbachev's political future as Soviet leader. Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 had rallied the international community around the UN and allowed for cooperative bipolarity to flourish under Bush's proclaimed "new world order," but how could one be sure that this was to last?⁹²

For Finland, there were potential advantages in this moment of East-West détente. Its position was "considerably eased" by the fact that the Soviets and the Americans were working so well together. The successful September Bush-Gorbachev Helsinki summit talks had boosted Finland's image as a "serious East West broker," and by year's end the country's "international profile" had risen further, thanks to plaudits for the "constructive role" they were playing on the UN Security Council. As chair of the Iraq sanctions committee, they occupied an unusually "exposed" position. Finland's international assertiveness was well received by the British, permanent members of the UN SC. They credited President Koivisto for his firmness and especially for instructing the Finnish UN delegation to vote in favour of the "use of force resolution [against Iraq] *regardless* of the Soviet vote."⁹³

Notwithstanding these small self-emancipatory steps and the general mood of optimism in 1990, the problem of the Soviet Union remained, as the British ambassador noted, "the main existential threat" to the country. And while they "unreservedly welcomed" the waning of the "military, economic [and] political strength" of the USSR, they also worried about "the clear signs of collapse and disintegration" inside the Soviet Union. Life on "the deepest fault line in Europe," as a senior Finnish MFA official referred to the Fenno-Soviet border, demanded small changes, not sudden strategic foreign policy shifts. Confronted with the danger of massive upheaval in the East, Finland focused on policies of continuity that could be pursued within the old treaty frameworks, notably the FCMA, in order to avoid any unnecessary strains in the Finnish-Soviet relationship.⁹⁴

⁹¹ "UM Press Release No. 245, 'Government's Report on Finnish Security Policy to the Foreign Affairs Committee of Parliament on 24 Oct. 1990,' 9 Nov. 1990," in TNA, FCO 33-10993.

⁹² Alan Riding, "The Question that Lingers on Europe: How Will Goals Be Achieved?," *NYT*, 22 Nov. 1990, <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/11/22/world/summit-in-europe-the-question-than-lingers-on-europe-how-will-goals-be-achieved.html>; Spohr, *Post Wall*, pp. 313-18.

⁹³ "Smith/HEL emb. to Douglas Hurd/FCO, 'Finland: Annual Report for 1990,' 18 Jan. 1991, pt.7," in TNA, FCO 160-291-10; "UM Press Release No. 245, 'Government's Report on Finnish Security Policy to the Foreign Affairs Committee of Parliament on 24 Oct. 1990,' 9 Nov. 1990," in TNA, FCO 33-10993. Cf. "Bazing/HEL emb. to AA, DB 293, 'Betr.: Finnische Haltung in der Golfkrise; hier: Pressekonferenz Präsident Koivistos am 4.12.1990,' 5 Dec. 1990," PAAA, ZA 178331. Italics are the author's.

⁹⁴ "Smith/HEL emb. to Douglas Hurd/FCO, 'Finland: Annual Defence Review,' 8 Feb. 1991 incl. 'Defence Attaché's Annual report for 1990,' pt.3f," in TNA, FCO 179-250.

As Nyberg summed it up: “How could you change the basis for living together with the giant neighbour to the East when nobody – in Finland, in the west or, indeed in the USSR itself – had the slightest idea of how the present chaos there would be resolved or how long that process would take? Moreover, Finland’s place in Europe could scarcely be definitely re-defined now, when the entire continent – including the European Community – was rapidly evolving in unpredictable directions.” This uncertainty was an argument for caution. The age-old habit of tiptoeing around the bear died hard – the fact that the bear was now ailing and unpredictable was no reason to let one’s guard down.⁹⁵

5 Changing Horses in Moscow, 1991

1991 began with disturbing news. Just as the attention of the global media was focusing on the impending Kuwait War, clashes erupted between the Soviet central government and the peripheral SSRs, specifically in the Caucasus and the Baltic. Most shocking for Western observers was the brutal crackdown on the independence movement in Vilnius on 11-13 January 1991 and a week later in Riga. It appeared that Gorbachev had tolerated, if not ordered, the use of military force.

The Kremlin denied complicity in the carnage. But the hardliners applauded the policy of force and in Moscow their influence was growing. In the ministerial reshuffle of December 1990, Gorbachev had surrounded himself with men from the Communist Party, the military command, and the KGB, driving his most notable liberal ally, Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, to resign just before Christmas. Some speculated that Gorbachev had integrated conservative critics into his entourage, in order to nip a potential coup in the bud. With hindsight, it seems that the reshuffle made a putsch more likely. Be that as may, his actions were read as an attempt to display executive resolve.⁹⁶

By then, the Soviet pillar of the new world order was already crumbling – internally *as well as* externally. In winter 1991, new crises popped up almost daily. News of botched monetary reform, rampant corruption, constant strikes, and mass demonstrations filled Soviet TV screens. The Finnish government looked on anxiously. There was relief when the feared mass-exodus to Finland of hungry Russians from Leningrad and the Soviet Karelian borderlands never materialised.⁹⁷ On the other hand, Soviet society, appeared to be polarising between diehard Communists and radical reformers. The latter had now found their own

⁹⁵ “Henderson/HEL emb. to Dickerson/FCO, ‘Finnish Security Policy,’ 7 Jan. 1991, pt.2,” in TNA, FCO 179-250.

⁹⁶ For the most recent research on the crackdown in the Baltic, see Una Bergmane, *Politics of Uncertainty: The United States, the Baltic Question and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Oxford: OUP, 2023), pp. 117-24. See also Vladislav M. Zubok, *Collapse: The Fall of the Soviet Union* (New Haven, NJ: Yale UP, 2021), pp. 181-7; Spohr, *Post Wall*, pp. 412-21.

⁹⁷ Finns had been keen to coordinate with the Nordic and Western allies (including UK and Germany) a food and economic aid initiative for the USSR, not least to avoid a mass-migration in the winter. Their attitude, succinctly put, was that “We would rather feed them there than here.” See “Smith/HEL emb. to FCO, Telno 281, ‘My Telno 279: Finland and the USSR – Food Aid,’ 26 Oct. 1990,” in TNA, FCO 33-10993. See also “Smith/HEL emb. to FCO, Telno 279, ‘My Telno 274: Finland and the USSR: Food Aid,’ 16 Oct 1990,” in TNA, FCO 33-10993; “Smith/HEL emb. to FCO, Telno U/N, ‘Finnish Views on Situation in USSR,’ 19 Oct. 1990,” in TNA, FCO 33-10993; “Letter by Henderson/HEL emb. to Edgar/ FCO, ‘Food Aid to the Soviet Union,’ 19 Dec. 1990,” in TNA, FCO 33-10993.

champion in the RSFSR leader Boris Yeltsin, who had fallen out with the Kremlin over economic policy.⁹⁸

To make matters worse, the USSR's international standing was in free fall. In the Kuwait crisis, Moscow played second fiddle in the rollback of Iraq (a former Soviet client state) from its small, but oil-rich, neighbouring emirate. It was the United States that led the UN sanctioned international "coalition of the willing" in the brief air and ground operations that bought about Saddam's military defeat and Kuwait's liberation on 27 February.

Meanwhile, in Europe the Kremlin and Red Army faced the impending retreat of some half a million Soviet troops following the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. Hungary and Czechoslovakia had negotiated agreements for the total withdrawal of Soviet forces from their soil by mid-1991, while the Soviet soldiers in Poland were to leave between April 1991 and September 1993, and those on ex-East German territory between autumn 1990 and the end of 1994. New security arrangements were taking shape in the heart of a Europe no longer divided by blocs. On 15 February, Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia – with their eyes fixed on NATO – established the Visegrad Group. The same pattern was repeated in the economic domain as the old Soviet-focused structures began to give way. Comecon held its last meeting in June 1991. The ex-Communist Central and Eastern European states were all focused on securing EC accession and a larger role in the CSCE. The "neutral" Finns observed these developments with keen interest.

Gorbachev did nothing to prevent the erosion of the Eastern bloc. But he was determined to see through the renovation of the Soviet Union itself. His attempt to maintain Soviet power hinged on the introduction of a new Union Treaty. On 17 March 1991, he held a referendum asking Soviet citizens whether they were for or against a "renewed federation of equal sovereign states in which the rights and freedoms of any nationality will be fully guaranteed." Remarkably, 76% of those who voted were in favour. Yet, six of the fifteen republics (the 3 Baltics, Armenia, Georgia, and Moldova) had officially boycotted the vote. And in the 9 other republics, additional local votes on anti-Kremlin initiatives gained strong majorities, most notably in the RSFSR (for a popular election of a Russian president) as well as in Ukraine (for greater autonomy, even independence).

Far from sketching a clear path for Gorbachev and the Kremlin, the multiple results laid bare the country's passionate contradictions. Here the most challenging element for Gorbachev was the widespread support for a directly elected Russian president, for this seemed likely to catapult Yeltsin into an even stronger position than his current role as Chairman of Russia's Supreme Soviet. It would also highlight the contrast with CPSU Secretary General and Soviet President Gorbachev, who had sidestepped the idea of a direct vote to the federal presidency in March 1990, thereby denying himself the potential benefits of a comparable popular mandate.

Despite of the deepening personal and political animosity between the two, Gorbachev managed to gain Yeltsin's backing for his "New Union Treaty." On 23 April together with the eight other republic presidents (who had supported the March referendum) the two men

⁹⁸ See, for example, "Letter from Henderson/HEL emb. to Dickerson/FCO, 'Finland/ USSR,' 18 Feb. 1991, pt.3," in TNA, FCO 33-11524.

pledged to prepare a treaty establishing a new Union of “Sovereign States” and to adopt a new constitution – all within 6 months.⁹⁹

Ultimately, both Gorbachev and Yeltsin were interested in ensuring the USSR’s continuity. They were “striving,” as the Finnish foreign ministry assessed it, “to preserve the great-power status of the Soviet Union and hoping to create unity among the [Soviet] nations.” For Russia, too, they noted, the fundamental question was not one of “building or preserving a Russian national identity,” but rather the “continuity of the state, of the Russia-centric empire.”¹⁰⁰ But while Gorbachev wanted a strong federation with an effective central government, Yeltsin preferred a confederative model with Russia as the dominant player. Perhaps this had been obvious from the outset. Because ever since Russia’s sovereignty declaration in June 1990, Yeltsin had been pushing for more political room for manoeuvre both for Russia and himself.¹⁰¹

In its pursuit of “sovereignty,” the Russian leadership put out feelers towards its neighbours. As early as the autumn of 1990, Russian Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev was already lobbying in Helsinki for a “constructive parallelism” as “the basis for separate relations with foreign powers of the USSR on the one hand and the RFSFR on the other.” Finns were “keen to develop channels and ‘mechanisms’ with the Russian Federation” as they looked ahead to the day when genuine Finno-Russian bilateral activity would be possible. Herein lay important novel opportunities: it was plausible to hope that the decline in Soviet-Finnish economic relations might be offset by the fact that most Soviet fossil fuel reserves and other desirable raw materials were located on Russian soil.¹⁰²

But the potential benefits of the changing constellation did not cancel out the risks. The “home” transfer of personnel and materiel from East-Central Europe was giving rise to Soviet military concentrations in Kola and the southern part of the Leningrad District, while the elimination of all land-based intermediate missiles under the 1987 INF Treaty was producing a growth in strategic significance of the air- and sea based nuclear weapons in the Murmansk region. These developments called for close scrutiny especially in the light of moves to emancipate Russia from the Soviet superstructure. And uncertainty persisted over how

⁹⁹ Spohr, *Post Wall*, pp. 381-427; Zubok, *Collapse*, pp. 200-28. On Soviet troop withdrawals, see “1990 - Report on the Withdrawal of Soviet Troops from Eastern Europe,” CCNY, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/report-withdrawal-soviet-troops-eastern-europe>; Tyler Marshall, “Few Russian Troops Remain in Ex-Satellite States; Military: Of an estimated 600,000 in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s, only about 113,000 Haven’t Gone Home,” *LA Times*, 1 April 1993, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-04-01-mn-17702-story.html>; Boris Egorov, “How the USSR pulled its troops from Eastern Europe,” *Beyond Russia*, 20 April 2020, <https://www.rbth.com/history/332046-how-ussr-pulled-its-troops>; Christoph Meißner and Jörg Morré, eds., *The Withdrawal of Soviet Troops from East Central Europe: National Perspectives in Comparison* (Göttingen: V&R, 2021).

¹⁰⁰ Finnish MFA assessment quoted in Ritvanen, *Mureneva kulmakivi*, p. 145.

¹⁰¹ “MOS emb to AA, DB 954+955,” 12 March 1991,” in PAAA, ZA 158578.

¹⁰² Ritvanen, *Mureneva kulmakivi*, pp. 178-9. “Letter from Henderson/HEL emb. to Dickerson/FCO, ‘Finland/USSR and Finland/ Poland Relations,’ 14 Nov. 1990, pts.5+6,” in TNA, FCO 33-10993. On the collapse of Soviet-Finnish trade, see also Saara Matala, “Idänkauppa oli varmaa, mutta sitten se loppui,” *Historiallianen aikakauslehti*, No. 2 (2012), pp. 188-203; Juhani Laurila, “Finnish-Soviet Clearing Trade and Payment System: History and Lessons,” *Bank of Finland Studies A*: 94 (Helsinki: Trio Offset OY, 1995), <https://publications.bof.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/43602/A94.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

competencies were distributed across the central (Soviet) government in Moscow and the Republic leaderships, most notably that of the RSFSR.¹⁰³

Russia mattered and would come to matter ever more, predicted Finnish ambassador Heikki Talvitie in Moscow. For now, both Gorbachev and Yeltsin worked from the same starting point: they looked to “preserve the USSR’s great power status” and “a Russo-centric empire.” “Russian nationalism,” Talvitie predicted, “would come to fill the void left by the collapse of communist ideology.” It was Finland’s good fortune that “security issues” were not currently top of the Russians’ priority list, and that Russia’s policy makers were “new people.” Nevertheless, the leadership in Helsinki had to ensure that neither Finland nor the Nordic region would become “the object of speculation” in Moscow, or be seen “as posing a possible security risk.”¹⁰⁴ From a Finnish perspective, it was crucial that the establishment of novel relations with the Russian SFSR should not disturb, or be perceived as undermining, the existing relationship with the Soviet Union, as defined by the FCMA framework.

The Finnish government applied a similar logic to its dealings with the Baltics, which led some media pundits – but also such vocal supporters of the Baltic cause as the governments of Iceland and Denmark – to criticize Helsinki’s (or President Koivisto’s) Baltic policies as too deferential to Muscovite wishes.¹⁰⁵ Finland’s attitude, after the Lithuanian bloodshed in January 1991, towards Baltic aspirations was guided by two principles: support for the efforts of the Baltic nations to determine their own affairs in accordance with the UN Charter and Helsinki Final Act; and insistence that the differences between the Balts and the Soviet central government should be settled by peaceful means and at the negotiating table. At the same time, Finland pursued active practical cooperation with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania using transnational networks below state-level with the intention of helping the Balts in their struggle to break free from Moscow. But the overriding political concern remained to avoid any action that might damage relations with the Kremlin or exacerbate the instability of the Soviet Union. In taking this view, Finland believed itself to be acting in line with the leading Western powers including Germany, France and the United States.¹⁰⁶

Like everyone else who grappled with the question of whether to keep betting on the devil they knew, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, or whether to put their money on Yeltsin, Finns believed that now was not the time to change allegiances. President Koivisto (like US President Bush and German Chancellor Kohl) felt a personal connection, even a kind of indebtedness, to Gorbachev and his course of Soviet reinvention. Each of these western statesmen had all gradually developed a genuine partnership, if not a friendship with the man,

¹⁰³ “Allison Bailes/FCO, Doc. no 22 in file – untitled, DZN 061/24 Sec pol paras 7-10, 28 Jan. 1991,” in TNA, FCO 179-250; “Letter by Henderson/HEL emb. to Dickerson/FCO, ‘Finnish Security Policy,’ 21 Nov. 1990,” in TNA, FCO 33-10993. “AA 205-320.11 FIN, ‘Betr: Politischer Halbjahresbericht Finnland; Stand: 1.3.1992,’ 12 March 1993, pt.II,” in PAAA, ZA 178330. Bloomberg, *Vakauden kaipuu*, pp. 155-6. See also “‘UM Moskovan suurlähetystölle,’ 17 Sept. 1990,” in UMA, 18.41 NLO [Suhteet Suomi-Neuvostoliitto, Suhteet Venäjään v 1988-1990].

¹⁰⁴ “Talvitie/MOS amb. to UM, MOS-382, salainen, ‘PR Saksa on yhdistynyt. Minkäläinen on tulevaisuuden suurvalta itärajallemme?’, 3 Oct. 1990,” in UMA, Moskova, r-sarja 1990. See also Ritvanen, *Mureneva kulmakivi*, p. 145-6.

¹⁰⁵ “Letter from Henderson/HEL emb. to Dickerson/WED, ‘Finland/ USSR,’ 18 Feb. 1991, pt.4,” in TNA, FCO 33-11524.

¹⁰⁶ Visuri and Talvitie, *Kylmän sodan päätös*, pp. 133-46; Blomberg, *Vakauden kaipuu*, p. 299; Ritvanen, *Mureneva kulmakivi*, pp. 157-70; idem, “The Change in Finnish Baltic Policy as a Turning Point in Finnish-Soviet Relations: Finland, Baltic Independence and the End of the Soviet Union 1988-1991,” *Scandinavian Journal of History*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (2022), pp. 280-99, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03468755.2020.1765861>.

who in 1990 had won the Nobel peace prize. And pragmatically speaking, Gorbachev was of course still the man who controlled the USSR's 30,000 nuclear weapons and the Soviet forces, while Yeltsin, whatever his democratic credentials, simply did not.

As Bush had noted in his diary earlier that spring, "my view is, you dance with who is one the dance floor – you don't try to influence the succession. Certainly, you don't do anything to give the 'blatant appearance' of encouraging 'destabilisation.' ... We meet with the republic leaders, but we don't overdo it."¹⁰⁷

On 12 June 1991, in the country's first-ever free elections, Yeltsin won the Russian presidency. Eight days later, President Yeltsin made a private visit to the United States and sat with President Bush in White House. "We have good relations with the USSR and the Gorbachev government and want to keep that," Bush insisted. "I am the U.S. President and Gorbachev is the USSR President and so we will deal with each other," but, he continued, "that does not mean that we cannot do business with you." On the premise that America would not interfere in the USSR's internal affairs and be "careful on foreign policy issues," Bush opened channels to the RSFSR.¹⁰⁸ The general idea, in Washington as in Helsinki, was to stick to the Kremlin leader and keep hoping for a recast Union, rather than switching horses in mid-stream.¹⁰⁹

On 24-25 June 1991, one week before Bush was due to meet Gorbachev in Moscow to sign the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I) and three weeks before the Soviet leader for the first time was to participate in an informal 7+1 format at a G7 summit in London, Finnish President Koivisto and his foreign minister paid an official visit to the Soviet capital. The atmospherics around this routine trip were very good. Koivisto met with Gorbachev five times. Both sides emphasised the significance of "maintaining good neighbourly relations while adapting to the new realities in the relationship."¹¹⁰

Yet it was clear that Finns were worried about the consequences of the collapse in bilateral trade. The squeeze on Soviet hard currency reserves had led to big delays in payments for Finnish exports, and as its industries folded, Finland was heading into depression. Koivisto wanted to maintain Finnish exports at the present level, while looking for ways of resolving the current trade imbalance and growing debt between the countries. But no progress was made on these issues or on the growing problem of cross-border pollution. Under the rubric of "enlightened environmental self-interest," Finland offered soft loans so the USSR could adopt green technological innovations in its mining and smelter operations in Karelia and the Kola Peninsula, but the Soviets were not interested.

Gorbachev continued to oppose the Baltics' desire to break away from the Soviet Union, insisting that they go through an orderly, proper "divorce process" from the Centre. Yet he said little else about the issue, despite the strategic significance of the Baltic Sea region for both Moscow and Helsinki. Instead, he touched briefly on the question of Europe's security architecture, welcoming the ongoing process of change within NATO and praising it as

¹⁰⁷ George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), p. 500.

¹⁰⁸"Memcon Bush-Yeltsin talks, 3:00-4:40pm, White House, Cabinet Room, 20 June 1991, pp. 1-2, 7," in George H.W. Bush Presidential Library (GHWBPL), <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1991-06-20--Yeltsin.pdf>.

¹⁰⁹ Ritvanen, *Mureneva kulmakivi*, pp. 180-1; Blomberg, *Vakauden kaipuu*, p. 342.

¹¹⁰"Bazing/HEL emb to AA, DB 169, 'Betr.: Besuch des finn. Staatspraes. Koivisto am 24. und 25. Juni in Moskau,' 28 June 1991," in PAAA, ZA 178331

“another step in the right direction.” In relation to the plan to transform the Alliance into “the main pillar of European security,” Gorbachev presented the already familiar Soviet line that this was contrary to the Charter of Paris. He repeated his view that security in Europe ought to be founded on a non-bloc system built around the CSCE. It vexed him that the Americans, and specifically US Secretary of State James Baker, had spoken first and foremost about NATO and side-lined the CSCE process. “Even if great changes have taken place in Eastern Europe, external interference has to be prevented,” Gorbachev proclaimed. “The borders are permanent and that ought to be highlighted.” There was less controversy around the European Community. Here, Gorbachev simply took note of Koivisto’s position that Finland intended to accede to the EEA agreement before it considered its next European steps.¹¹¹

For the Finns, it was the meeting with Yeltsin, organised at the last minute, presumably on the back of his visit to Washington 4 days earlier, that proved, in the words of the Finnish foreign minister, the “most interesting.” In his first Moscow-parley with foreign dignitaries, the Russian president put forward a 6-point plan for strengthening direct links between the Russian Federation and Finland. The plan included: the drawing up of a Russo-Finnish state treaty in harmony with the existing Fenno-Soviet FCMA; a commercial agreement; and a joint environmental program. Plus, it expressed Russian hopes for participation in the activities of the Nordic Council; for the establishment of Finnish consulates, starting in Karelia; and the simplification of border matters.¹¹² Yeltsin expressed his conviction that in the light of Soviet developments, Russia would soon entertain direct relations with more and more countries. The Kremlin would be “responsible only for defence, railways and energy; the republics would deal with everything else.” For this reason, Yeltsin argued, it was important that the Russian Republic “complete agreements directly” with Finland. Alluding to similar openings with the United States, South Korea, Turkey, and Taiwan, he added that “questions of principle would be agreed on at the federal level, but their content would belong to the republics.” A case in point was the FCMA treaty, the concrete future content of which, Yeltsin thought, was a matter for Russia *not* the Kremlin. Koivisto – “mindful of his country’s dependence of Soviet goodwill” – listened carefully but gave Yeltsin no firm promises. Nevertheless, it was agreed that a high-level delegation of the RSFSR Council of Ministers should be sent to Helsinki to begin discussions on the (treaty)-foundations for a new Russo-Finnish relationship.¹¹³

This first parley with Yeltsin, who according to the Finns seemed at times over-excited, “volatile” and “restless,” left Koivisto, however, unimpressed. Given the present domestic circumstances in the USSR one should anticipate “complications,” the Finnish president thought. Gorbachev considered Yeltsin a populist, an assessment Koivisto (along with Kohl and Bush) shared. The US president, in his Moscow summit talks the following week, made no moves towards a specifically Russo-American bilateral agreement. And in his subsequent speech in Kyiv, capital of the Ukrainian SSR, he argued that the choice between “supporting

¹¹¹ See M.S. Gorbachev, *Sobranie Sochenenii*, t. 26 (Moscow: ves mir, 2015), pp. 296-309. “Smith/HEL emb. to FCO, Telno 165, ‘President Koivisto’s visit to Moscow: 24-25 June,’ 28 June 1991,” in TNA, FCO 33-11524. See also Koivisto, *Historian tekijät*, pp. 422-6.

¹¹² Ibid.; “Braithwaite/MOS emb. to FCO, Telno 1375, ‘Helsinki Telno 165: Visit of Finnish President to Moscow,’ 2 July 1991,” in TNA, FCO 33-11524. See also Koivisto, *Historian tekijät*, pp. 426-7. “Blomberg, Muistio 714, salainen. ‘Koiviston keskustelu ja Jelzinin kanssa,’ 2 July 1991,” in UMA, 18.60 NLO [Tasavallan presidentti Mauno Koiviston vierailu Neuvostoliittoon 24-25.6.1991].

¹¹³ Ibid.

the Kremlin leader and supporting independence-minded leaders throughout the USSR” was a “false choice.”¹¹⁴

Everybody’s money was still on Gorbachev. The view persisted that Yeltsin was using foreign policy to score points in his power struggle with the Kremlin. Caution was still essential. But the Finns began, nevertheless, to hedge their bets; now that the Finnish-Soviet “special trading relationship” was “defunct,” there was nothing for Finland but to focus on the possibility of new economic ties with the RSFSR.¹¹⁵

The failed August putsch in Moscow irrevocably transformed the power dynamics within the Soviet Union. The Communist old guard self-destructed, Gorbachev was fatally weakened, and Yeltsin – the man of the moment – entered his ascendancy. It was at this hour of rapid and deep change that the Balts finally walked out of the Union. The Finns, too, abandoned their earlier circumspection, swiftly re-establishing diplomatic relations with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and focusing more openly on the future relationship with Yeltsin’s Russia.¹¹⁶ Moscow now was the seat of two governments and of two foreign ministries. Finland still had to juggle two difficult partners, but the balance between them had shifted.¹¹⁷

6 New Beginnings: Soviet Demise and the Making of the Fenno-Russian “Basic Treaty”

The Russians were keen on a Russo-Finnish treaty that included a political and various practical cooperation agreements. In the Finnish foreign ministry, there was speculation on whether and how this could be squared with the Soviet-Finnish FCMA treaty. Finland, with its Soviet-era treaty, appeared increasingly anomalous. Everybody else, especially among the ex-satellites, had moved on from the old Stalinist treaties, with their language of “friendship” and “mutual assistance,” to new agreements that referred to “partnership” and “good neighbourly relations.” It seemed that the moment had come for Finland to step out of the past. Letting the FCMA simply “atrophy” carried the risk of its possible “resurrection” by the Soviet side at a later date. It was surely better to take the initiative, and to do so quickly and methodically.¹¹⁸

With Koivisto and Yeltsin having agreed in principle to work towards a wide range of practical agreements and treaties between Finland and the RSFSR, there was a sense of urgency about the future form of the “overall arrangements” between Finland and the Soviet Union. Helsinki saw two options:

¹¹⁴ Koivisto quoted in Visuri and Talvitie, *Kylmän sodan päätös*, p. 149; Bush’s “Remarks to the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Ukraine in Kiev, Soviet Union,” 1 Aug. 1991, American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-arrival-ceremony-kiev-soviet-union>; “Bazing/HEL emb to AA, DB 169, ‘Betr.: Besuch des finn. Staatspräsident Koivisto am 24. und 25. Juni in Moskau,’ 28 June 1991,” in PAAA, ZA 178331.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.; “Letter by Powell/SovDept to Matthews/WED, Confidential, ‘Future of Fenno-Soviet Relations,’ 8 Oct. 1991, pt.1,” in TNA, FCO 33-11524.

¹¹⁶ See “Smith/HEL emb. to FCO, Telno 196, ‘Soviet Coup: Finnish Reactions,’ 21 Aug. 1991,” in TNA, FCO 33-11524; “Smith/HEL emb. to FCO, Telno 200, ‘Finland/Estonia,’ 22 Aug. 1991,” in FCO 33-11524.

¹¹⁷ Blomberg, *Vakauden kaipuu*, pp. 349-56.

¹¹⁸ “Blomberg, Muistio 813, ‘Suomen ja Venäjä suhteet: alustava kartoitus,’ 13 Aug. 1991,” in UMA, 18.41 NLO [Suhteet Suomi-Venäjä, v. 1991]. “Thorne/HEL emb. to MacGlashan/FCO, Teleletter, 20 Sept. 1991, pt.5,” in TNA, FCO 33-11524; “UKMIS/New York to FCO, Telno 2274, ‘Fenno-Soviet Agreement, 21 Sept. 1991,” in TNA, FCO 33-11524.

- 1) adaptation of the 1948 Agreement to bring it in line with the present-day realities;
- 2) negotiation of an entirely new and much more vaguely phrased agreement along the lines of the one signed by Germany and the USSR on 9 November 1990 and ratified on 25 April 1991.¹¹⁹

President Koivisto decided that the FCMA treaty – extended in 1983 for a further 20 years¹²⁰ – needed to be replaced with something new and more fitting with the current *Zeitgeist* and circumstances. He had in mind something modelled on the German-Soviet 1990 “Partnership Treaty.” Seeking to pre-empt any unwanted overtures from the Soviet foreign ministry, the Finnish president resorted once more to his KGB backchannel and sent Gorbachev a direct message about Finland’s intention to replace the old FCMA. He did so on 12 September 1991, the first anniversary of the signing of the 2+4 Treaty. On the following day, he informed his prime minister about his intentions, all the while bypassing the foreign ministry which to him seemed too fixated on Yeltsin and what he perceived as Russia’s overly exuberant overtures. Koivisto stressed that he wanted to assure Gorbachev of his desire to avoid, on this occasion, any unilateral Finnish declarations regarding the FCMA.¹²¹

To Koivisto’s delight, six days later, in a speech in Stockholm, Acting Soviet Foreign Minister Boris Pankin signalled Soviet readiness to discuss the 1948 Friendship treaty with Finland. Koivisto’s message had evidently worked itself through the Soviet bureaucracy and reached its intended recipient. Despite the usual hiccups due to factional rivalries in the Soviet foreign ministry and its pervading conservatism as well as due to the sticky information flow between the Kremlin and its wider government bureaucracy, Finland and the Soviet Union embarked from mid-October on two rounds of negotiations towards a so-called “Agreement on Good Neighbourly relations and Cooperation.” The idea was for the FCMA to be rescinded once the new treaty was signed. The date for these steps was set for 18 December 1991.¹²²

At the same time, the Finns stated their willingness to begin separate negotiations with the RSFSR regarding a set of three treaties: a general agreement, a treaty on commerce, and one on cooperation in the border regions. These treaties were all to be contingent on the new agreement between Finland and the USSR, and so Fenno-Russian consultations were not expected to start until late November.¹²³

¹¹⁹ “UKMIS/New York to FCO, Telno 2274, ‘Fenno-Soviet Agreement, 21 Sept. 1991,” in TNA, FCO 33-11524. See also “Bazing/HEL emb. to AA, DB 261, ‘Betr.: Finn.-sowj. Beziehungen; hier FZB-Vertrag aus dem Jahre 1948,’ 23 Sept. 1991,” in PAAA, ZA 178331.

¹²⁰ “Neubert’s ‘Vermerk – Betr.: Sowjetisch-finn. Beziehungen,’ 25 Sept. 1991,” in PAAA, ZA 178331.

¹²¹ “Bazing/HEL emb. to AA, DB 286, ‘Betr.: Finn.-sowj. Beziehungen; hier: Vertrag über die Grundlagen finn.-sowj. Beziehungen,’ 11 Oct. 1991,” in PAAA, ZA 178331. “Matthews/WED to Callway and MacGlashan/FCO, ‘Nick Thorne’s teleletter of 20 Sept. to Miss MacGlashan: Future of the FCMA Treaty’ + ‘attachments: MacGlashan/ FCO to Thorne/HEL emb.,’ 21 Oct. 1991,” in TNA, FCO 33-11524; “Thorne/HEL emb. to MacGlashan/FCO, Teleletter 20 Sept. 1991,” in TNA, FCO 33-11524. See also Koivisto, *Historian tekijät*, pp. 442-3.

¹²² Ibid., and pp. 443-5. “Thorne/HEL emb. to Callway/WED, ‘Fenno-Soviet Negotiations on a Treaty(s) to Replace the FCMA,’ 28 Oct. 1991 + ‘Attachment: Summary of Draft Agreement + Luonnos, 8 Oct. 1991 (Actual Draft Agreement),” in TNA, FCO 33-11524.

¹²³ Russo-Finnish negotiations would indeed begin in late November, see “Bazing/HEL emb. to AA, DB 332, ‘Betr.: Finn.-russ. Beziehungen; hier: Vertrag über gute Nachbarschaft und Zusammenarbeit u.a.,’ 27 Nov. 1991,” in PAAA, ZA 178331.

In the event, the Fenno-Soviet talks were successfully concluded as early as 5 November.¹²⁴ British fears that Soviets might stall the process because they would feel “humiliated by the loss of FCMA” proved unfounded. As the FCO itself conceded, the Soviets could simply not afford to indulge such feelings. Good relations were essential. After all, crucial “EC and US food aid to the Soviet Union” was transported via Finnish railways and port facilities. And the Finns, though very conscious of the Soviets’ “relatively weak position,” had themselves realised that taking a long view would serve them best. “Any temptation to secure a text” that “the Russians might later come to regard as humiliation – and thus an irritant” had to be avoided.¹²⁵

Overall, Finns were happy with the negotiations’ outcome. The new Fenno-Soviet draft treaty, whose final article spelled out the demise of the FCMA, genuinely secured their objectives at normalising relations with the USSR. There were “no references to military cooperation, consultation or non-participation in unfriendly alliances as contained in the FCMA,” and no explicit mention of “neutrality.” While Soviets insisted on including a clause on the “inviolability of frontiers,” Finns managed to get in “balancing references” regarding the “peaceful change of borders” so that “eventual negotiations on areas of Karelia ceded by Finland after the last war” would “not be precluded.” The issue was not that Finland now wanted to pursue any territorial claims. On the contrary, it considered the borders set out in the Paris Peace Treaty to be fully valid. But the Helsinki government had to keep in mind the country’s domestic debate. It simply “could not (and would not) be seen to be signing away Karelia,” the British noted, as this was such an “emotive issue.” Whatever the current views of the majority of the Finnish population, in the longer run, the issue of “Karelia” might prove “political dynamite.”¹²⁶

Given that the Russian authorities were content with the Soviet negotiation line, the new Fenno-Soviet Treaty replacing the FCMA was initialled on 9 December. By then, however, the Soviet Union was already in its death throes. On 8 December, Yeltsin had agreed with the leaders of Ukraine and Belarus – in the aftermath of their national independence referenda – to form a “Commonwealth of Independent States” (CIS). In doing so, they effectively opted out of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, turning it into an empty shell.¹²⁷ The impact of this process was amplified when the leaders of the five Central Asian Republics declared their intention on 13 December to join the CIS in a signing ceremony on 21 December.

¹²⁴ “UM Press Release No. 370, ‘The New Finnish-Soviet Treaty of Neighbourliness Has Been Completed at Negotiations at a Functionary Level,’ 5 Nov. 1991,” in TNA, FCO 33-11524; “Tel Thorne/HEL emb. to FCO, ‘Fenno-Soviet Negotiations to Replace FCMA Treaty,’ 6 Nov. 1991,” in TNA, FCO 33-11524.

¹²⁵ “MacGlashan/ FCO to Thorne/HEL emb., 21 Oct. 1991, pt.4,” in TNA, FCO 33-11524; “Thorne/HEL emb. to Callway/WED, ‘Fenno-Soviet Negotiations on a Treaty(s) to Replace the FCMA,’ 28 Oct. 1991, pt.6 + “Attachment: Summary of Draft Agreement + Luonnos 8.10.1991 (Actual Draft Agreement),” in TNA, FCO 33-11524.

¹²⁶ “Planitz/HEL emb. to AA, DB 313, ‘Betr.: Finn. Sowj. Beziehungen; hier: Verhandlungen über einen Vertrag über gute Nachbarschaft und Zusammenarbeit,’ 7 Nov. 1991,” in PAAA, ZA 178331. “Thorne/HEL emb. to FCO, Telno 249, ‘New Fenno-Soviet Treaty of Good Neighbourliness and Co-Operation,’ 7 Nov. 1991,” in TNA, FCO 33-11524; “UM Press Release No. 370, ‘The New Finnish-Soviet Treaty of Neighbourliness has been Completed at Negotiations at a Functionary Level,’ 5 Nov. 1991,” in TNA, FCO 33-11524; “Thorne/HEL emb. to Callway/WED, ‘Fenno-Soviet negotiations on a Treaty(s) to replace the FCMA,’ 28 Oct. 1991 + “Attachment: Summary of draft agreement + Luonnos 8.10.1991 (actual draft agreement),” in TNA, FCO 33-11524; “Thorne/HEL emb. to FCO, Telno 231, ‘Replacement of the Fenno-Soviet FCMA Treaty,’ 11 Oct. 1991, pt.2,” in TNA, FCO 33-11524.

¹²⁷ “Bazing/HEL emb. to AA, DB 344, ‘Betr.: Erklärung der Staatsoberhäupter der Rep. Belo Russland, der RSFSR und der Ukraine über die Gründung eines Commonwealth; hier: Erste finn. Reaktionen,’ 11 Dez. 1991,” in PAAA, ZA 178331.

Yeltsin and his Russian Federation had clearly won the power struggle vis-a-vis Gorbachev and his dying Soviet empire. As a consequence, the Russian president forbade Eduard Shevardnadze, who had been reinstated in the post of Soviet foreign minister, to sign the new Soviet treaty with Finland on 18 December. As Andrey Kozyrev, Shevardnadze's Russian counterpart pithily pointed out to the Finns, the USSR was about to cease to exist any day now. Indeed, on Christmas day 1991 the Soviet flag was lowered from the Kremlin for a last time. The "Soviet experiment" that had lasted 70 years was officially over.¹²⁸

The Finns made immediately clear that the novel Fenno-Russian political agreement already in the pipeline should now guide relations between Helsinki and Moscow, not the new (replacement) Fenno-Soviet Treaty, which would be revoked. Helsinki further explained that Finland would proceed from the assumption that signature of the new Fenno-Russian treaty would also automatically amount to recognition of the Russian Federation as an independent state. Finns were obviously keen to embrace the post-Soviet era and to start their new eastern policies from a clean slate. In the words of Foreign Minister Väyrynen, they could not "kill" the old FCMA fast enough.¹²⁹

On 20 January 1992, the day Russia and Finland signed their new "Basic Treaty" in Helsinki, the Agreement of 1948 was dissolved.¹³⁰ For Finland, this marked a real historic pivot – the postwar era was over. For Russia it was its "first political treaty with a Western country," as the *Washington Post* noted, though it contained, in fact, the very points on security and political relations that the Soviet foreign ministry had negotiated with the Finns during the autumn.¹³¹

Finland and Russia – based on the principles of the UN Charter and the CSCE – were committed to "refrain from the threat or use of force against territorial integrity or political independence of the other Party" and to "maintain the border between them as border of good-neighbourliness and cooperation." They also promised to support "the preservation of the original character of the Finns and related peoples and nationalities in Russia, and similarly, of Russian emigrants in Finland." The treaty would be valid for 10 years and automatically renewed for five-year periods unless annulled by either party. On the occasion, Finnish Prime Minister Esko Aho and Russian Deputy Premier Gennadi Burbulis also signed the practical agreements on bilateral economic relations and on regional collaboration which, like the main political treaty, called for the development of their border lands, specifically the Russian areas around Murmansk, St Petersburg, and the Karelian Republic.

¹²⁸ "Bazing/HEL emb. to AA, DB 361, 'Betr.: Finn-Sowj. Grundlagenvertrag,' 18 Dec. 1991," in PAAA, ZA 178331; "Smith/HEL emb. to FCO, Telno 281, 'Oslo Telno 486: Norwegian Recognition of Russia – Finnish Views,' 18 Dec. 1991, pt.2," in TNA, FCO 33-11524; "Smith/HEL emb. to FCO, Telno 284, 'Finnish Evaluation of the situation in the Soviet Union,' 18 Dec. 1991," in TNA, FCO 33-11524. See also Spohr, *Post Wall*, pp. 444-52; Visuri and Talvitie, *Kylmän sodan päätös*, pp. 193-4; Ritvanen, *Mureneva kulmakivi*, p. 255.

¹²⁹ "Smith/HEL emb. to FCO, Telno 281, 'Oslo Telno 486: Norwegian Recognition of Russia – Finnish views,' 18 Dec. 1991, pt.2," in TNA, FCO 33-11524; "Smith/HEL emb. to FCO, Telno 296, 'Finnish recognition of the former Soviet republics,' 21 Dec. 1991," in TNA, FCO 33-11524; "Braithwaite/MOS emb. to FCO, Telno 2797, 'Recognition of Russia, Romania and Finland,'" 19 Dec. 1991," in TNA, FCO 33-11524.

¹³⁰ For the Treaty plus commentary, see "Bazing/ HEL emb. to AA/Ref 205, Ber.-Nr.: 1040/92, 'Betr: Grundlagenvertrag zwischen Finnland und Russland; hier: DB 25 vom 21.1.1992 – Pol 322 Sow,' 17 Feb. 1992," in PAAA, ZA 178331.

¹³¹ "Russia, Finland Sign Political Treaty," *Washington Post*, 20 Jan. 1992, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1992/01/21/russia-finland-sign-political-treaty/84e04ce2-40e9-4b2d-ac5c-843b1174f543/>.

The latter two treaties were meant to kickstart Fenno-Russian trade in order to help Finland out of its worsening recession. To be sure, much of the western world was suffering from an economic downturn, amplified by 1990 Kuwait War which brought an oil price shock. Inflation rates rocketed. These were countered by restrictive monetary policies, which in turn led to a loss of consumer and business confidence. Finland, due to the loss of the Soviet market, however, was particularly badly hit. Its unemployment ran at 12% in 1992. GNP had dropped by 6% in the past year, industrial production by 9%, and bankruptcies were at an all-time high, with even the banks not spared. Capping it all, a run on the Finnish “markka” in November had forced Helsinki to devalue its currency. British Ambassador Smith in his “annual review for 1991” had observed that the Soviet Union (now Russia) was “indebted to Finland to the tune of FIM 5.5 bn (pounds 715 million) which on a per capita basis was far higher than the debt for Germany (and which if applied on a pro rata basis to Britain would be the equivalent to pounds 8 bn).” Even if Finns were hopeful of rebuilding a modest amount of barter trade – on the assumption that Russia was “not a poor country” but a “badly managed rich one” – the chaos inside the Russian Federation suggested that the foreseeable future was bleak.

At the signing ceremony of the Basic Treaty, Premier Aho emphasised that Finland would continue to “aid Russia and participate in international projects aimed at alleviating its neighbour’s serious socio-economic problems,” especially food shortages. The Finns knew this would be a very expensive undertaking, but “self-interest” gave them little choice. The prospects of either accepting or forcefully repelling thousands of economic migrants and refugees were equally “abhorrent.” Helsinki hoped that a common international effort to supply emergency assistance would keep the Russians inside their borders.¹³²

Overall, the Finns were optimistic. The FCMA’s demise meant that the “oppressive shadow” of the Soviet Union “over Finnish political life” had vanished.¹³³ So had the “special” relationship with the USSR that had curtailed Finland’s room for manoeuvre for over four decades. It was not insignificant that Burbulis in the final press conference “emphatically” stressed Russia’s support for Finland’s EC membership, because “Russia,” he said, saw “Finland as bridge to Europe and the world.” The new “Basic Treaty” with Russia, then, indicated a new beginning for Finns in their relations with their eastern neighbour. Finland had finally regained her full sovereignty. As a result, the Finnish government could begin to pursue a more “active” western policy.¹³⁴ The time had come for Finland to cement her institutional place in the Euro-Atlantic community.

¹³² Ibid.; “Smith/HEL emb. to Hurd/FCO, ‘Finland: Annual Review for 1991,’ 9 Jan. 1992, pts.10-11,” in TNA, FCO 160-307-34; “DB 25, ‘Betr.: Finn-Russ. Grundlagenvertrag; hier: Besuch des stellv. russ. Vize-PM Gennadij Burbulis in Helsinki, 21.1.1992,” in PAAA, ZA 178331.

¹³³ “MacGlashan/ FCO to Thorne/HEL emb.,” 21 Oct. 1991, pt.4,” in TNA, FCO 33-11524.

¹³⁴ On the argument that Finland in the autumn had already begun to consider a more “active *Westpolitik*” as a shift in emphasis away from the primacy of Moskau- and Ostpolitik, see “Bazing/HEL emb. to AA, DB 261, ‘Betr.: Finnisch-sowj. Beziehungen; hier FZB-Vertrag aus dem Jahre 1948,’ 23 Sept. 1991,” in PAAA, ZA 178331; “Bazing/HEL emb. to AA, DB 286, ‘Betr.: finn.-sowj. Beziehungen; hier: Vertrag über die Grundlagen finn.-sowj. Beziehungen,’ 11 Oct. 1991,” in PAAA, ZA 178331; ZA 178331, “Planitz/HEL emb. to AA, DB 313, ‘Betr.: Finn.-sowj. Beziehungen; hier: Verhandlungen über einen Vertrag über gute Nachbarschaft und Zusammenarbeit,’ 7 Nov. 1991,” in PAAA, ZA 178331.

7 Turning Westward¹³⁵: EU Membership and the End of Neutrality

On 18 March 1992, barely two months after placing its relations with Russia on a new footing, Finland lodged its application for full membership of the European Communities – EEC, ECSC and Euratom – in Brussels. This decisive step, which some framed as Finland’s “westernization”¹³⁶, had been coming for some time. Since January 1989, the Finns had taken part together with the Swedes in the EES/EEA negotiations. This initiative by EC Commission President Jacques Delors was designed to link EFTA countries to the Community’s own integration process towards closer political and economic Union. It would grant them the privilege of “free movement of goods, services, persons and capital.” But it would do so without tying them to the Community’s common agricultural and fisheries, trade, or foreign and security policies – the first and the last of which were particularly contentious policy areas for the Nordics.¹³⁷ Finland and Sweden had also acted in tandem when it came to pegging their currencies, Swedish “krona” and Finnish “markka” to the European currency unit (ECU), which they did in May and June 1991, respectively.¹³⁸

In October of 1990 Sweden had taken Finland completely by surprise with its announcement that it intended to pursue full EC/EU membership. With Austria first out of the blocks in 1989 and Sweden following with its formal application in July 1991, a stunned Finnish government was left wondering what Switzerland and Norway were going to do next and crucially, what they themselves ought to do.¹³⁹

Traditionally, the Finns had pointed to their policy of neutrality as the reason why EC membership on their part was out of question. But after successfully concluding “Operation Pax,” discussion over Finland’s relationship with “Europe” had gathered pace.¹⁴⁰ By the summer of 1991, Finns found themselves in a triple bind: Firstly, there were concerns over of being left behind in an awkward grey zone between Soviet Russia and the integrating “West.” Secondly, there was the question of too much alignment versus too little freedom of manoeuvre. Finns had to manage the delicate FCMA treaty replacement issue with the Soviets/Russians on the one hand, and the uncertainties over the substance of the European Union’s future common foreign and security policy (CFSP) on the other. Thirdly, Finns were following closely the direction NATO was taking out of the Cold War, as the Alliance, with its structural and doctrinal amendments, sought to reposition itself amid the evolving post-

¹³⁵ “Bazing/HEL emb. to AA, DB 286, ‘Betr.: Finn.-sowj. Beziehungen; hier: Vertrag über die Grundlagen finn.-sowj. Beziehungen,’ 11.10.1991,” in PAAA, ZA 178331. The Germans spoke of Finland’s “turn” (*die Wende*) westward.

¹³⁶ Cf. Sami Moisio, “Finlandisation versus Westernisation: Political Recognition and Finland’s European Union Membership Debate,” *National Identities*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (March 2008), pp. 77-93, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14608940701819785>.

¹³⁷ Hanna Ojanen, “If in ‘Europe’, Then in its ‘Core’?: Finland,” in Jürgen Elvert and Wolfram Kaiser, eds., *European Union Enlargement: A Comparative History* (London/New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 165-7. See also Koivisto, *Historian tekijät*, p. 517.

¹³⁸ Isabelle Clary, “Finland to Peg Currency to ECU,” *UPI*, 4 June 1991, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1991/06/04/Finland-to-peg-currency-to-ECU/6325676008000/>.

¹³⁹ Blomberg, *Vakauden kaipuu*, pp. 325, 381.

¹⁴⁰ Paavo Väyrynen, *Suomen puolueettomuus uudessa Euroopassa: Kansallinen doktriini ympäristön murroksessa* (Helsinki: Otava, 1996), pp. 132-6. “Smith/HEL emb. to Douglas Hurd/FCO, ‘Finland: Annual defence review,’ 8 Feb. 1991 incl. ‘Defence Attaché’s Annual Report for 1990,’ pt.3e,” in TNA, FCO 179-250. See also ‘Pertti Paasio’s Speech ‘Finnish Neutrality in a New Europe,’ Europe Conference, Oslo, 3 Jan. 1991,” in TNA, FCO 33-11529.

Paris Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and the Western European Union (WEU).¹⁴¹

The German and French foreign ministers had put forward common European defence structures as their joint objective under CFSP.¹⁴² But while Paris worried about the “destabilising” effects of neutral Finland’s EC entry, the diplomats in Bonn expressly did not see neutrality as an obstacle to Community membership. Neither, incidentally, did the British.¹⁴³ To great relief of the Finns and Swedes, chancellor Kohl further stressed that “defence policy cooperation within the EC would not be extensive.”¹⁴⁴ He was a strong believer in the Community’s widening as much as deepening, because he hoped to see a united Germany embedded in a re-unified Europe, i.e. surrounded by friends and allies so as to do away with the ghosts of Germany’s domineering past that haunted the continent. He was therefore keen on the (neutral) EFTA states in the EU. They were prosperous, stable democracies and would thus be net contributors to the club. For Kohl, this established them as frontrunners among the aspirant countries – well ahead of Turkey and Cyprus, and certainly of the ex-Communist East-Central European states. The latter in particular would take much longer to fulfil the *acquis communautaires*, and the entry bar would be much higher once Europeans signed up to the Treaty on European Union (TEU).¹⁴⁵

Stockholm’s sudden decision to apply to the EC was a pull-factor for Helsinki. Given Finland’s precarious geopolitical position, Finns liked to keep in step with their Swedish neighbour, the former imperial power to the West and crucial fellow Nordic neutral ally during the Cold War.¹⁴⁶ Sweden’s actions triggered a full-scale public discussion in Finland where a historically wary public and a cautious policy elite, fixated on self-sufficiency and independence but always looking to Sweden, was slowly becoming more pro-European. According to polls in early 1991, it was the business community and the young, the 18-24

¹⁴¹ Blomberg, *Vakauden kaipuu*, pp. 325-30; See also “Smith/HEL emb. to Hurd/FCO, ‘Finland: Annual Review for 1991,’ 9 Jan. 1992, pt.12,” in TNA, FCO 160-307-34; “Letter from Henderson/HEL emb. to Dickerson/WED, ‘Finnish Foreign and Security Policy,’ 23 April 1991, pt.6,” in TNA, FCO 33-11529.

¹⁴² On the Genscher-Dumas initiative of 4 February 1991, see Simon Duke, *The Elusive Quest for European Security: From EDC to CFSP* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 87-8. See also “Letter by Douglas Hurd to Prime Minister, ‘Common Foreign and Security Policy,’ 7 Feb. 1991 + ‘Attachment: Draft Treaty Provisions on CFSP + Commentary,” in TNA, PREM 19-3326; “Letter from Goulden to Private Secretary, ‘European Security and Defence,’ 5 April 1991 + ‘Attachment: Contribution franco-allemande,”” in TNA, FCO 33-11175.

¹⁴³ “DB 208, Trebesch/Hel emb. to AA, ‘Betr.: Finnland-Besuch von MP Thatcher vom 29.-30.8.1990,’ 31 Aug. 1990,” in PAAA, ZA 178331; “Kerr/UKREP/BXL to FCO, Telno 1120, ‘IGC on Pol. Union; Personal Reps, 2 May: CFSP,’ 2 May 1991, pts.9+10,” in TNA, FCO 33-11175. Visuri and Talvitie, *Kylmän sodan päätös*, p. 250; Uutela, “Closer to Germany than Sweden,” p. 1072.

¹⁴⁴ “Guest/STO emb. to FCO, Teleletter 026/2, ‘Our Telno 134: Carl Bildt’s Visit to Bonn,’ 13 March 1991, pt.2,” in TNA, FCO 179-250. See also FM Genscher’s views on the premise that he expected there to be future EC members that would not be in the WEU, “Vermerk, ‘Betr.: Gespräche des BM in Helsinki, 10. Juni 1991,’ 12 June 1991,” in PAAA, ZA 178330.

¹⁴⁵ Bundesministerium des Innern, ed., *Sonderedition*, Doc. 1, p. 276; Institut für Zeitgeschichte, ed., *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1991: 1. Januar - 30. Juni* (München: De Gruyter-Oldenbourg, 2022), Doc. 157, p. 643. See also Visuri and Talvitie, *Kylmän sodan päätös*, p. 273.

¹⁴⁶ The Swedes tend to refer to Finland as the erstwhile “eastern half of the country,” while Finnish diplomat René Nyberg has highlighted that it is occasionally useful to remind the Russians that Finland historically sees itself belonging politico-culturally to “shvedskiy mir” (Swedish world), not “russkiy mir” (Russian world). Conversation with René Nyberg, Helsinki, 24 Oct. 2023.

year olds (with 81% in favour), who were keenest to join the EC, whereas farmers were the most hostile.¹⁴⁷

Until the August putsch 1991, President Koivisto tried to dampen speculation about a possible Finnish entry into the Community so as to avoid unnecessary upheavals in relations with the Kremlin. But once he had initiated negotiations to dissolve the FCMA, he also looked for the first time beyond the prospect of the EEA and openly voiced Finland's firm interest in full EC membership. In doing so, he laid Finland's political cards on the table – the country's political course towards "Europe" clear for all to see. The most urgent goal was to complete the FCMA negotiations, because "the EC would not want to deal with a candidate which had an uncertain relationship with its Russian neighbour." But as soon as the "decks" were cleared in the "East," Helsinki would focus on *Westpolitik* and the "redefinition of Finnish neutrality" – all in "preparation for an application to join the EC."¹⁴⁸

Much hinged on the results of the European Council meeting in Maastricht on 9-10 December 1991 that would define pivotal aspects of the TEU or so-called "Maastricht Treaty."¹⁴⁹ Finland watched especially carefully the evolution of Franco-German plans for the CFSP and the issue of qualified majority voting (QMV) which was potentially unsettling for the Union's smaller members.¹⁵⁰

Bonn reassured Helsinki that as part Europe's deepening QMV would not be applied in all policy spheres, such as, for example, the EU's Soviet policies. At the same time, the Germans insisted that a European defence policy ought to belong to the EU, something Helsinki and Stockholm absorbed with some unease.¹⁵¹ The British by contrast, always much more reticent regarding all-out Europeanisation and sceptical of all supra-national competences, favoured NATO and the WEU on defence.¹⁵² The British and German-led EC camps, though

¹⁴⁷ "Henderson/HEL emb. to Dickerson/FCO, 'Finnish Security Policy,' 7 Jan. 1991, pts.5-7," in TNA, FCO 179-250; "Letter from Henderson/HEL emb. to Dickerson/WED, 'Finish Foreign and Security Policy,' 23 April 1991, pt.8," in TNA, FCO 33-11529.

¹⁴⁸ Institut für Zeitgeschichte, ed., *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1991: 1. Juli - 31. Dezember* (München: De Gruyter-Oldenbourg, 2022), Doc. 198, p. 120. "MacGlashan/ FCO to Thorne/HEL emb.," 21 Oct. 1991, pt.4," in TNA, FCO 33-11524; "Thorne/HEL emb. to Callway/WED, 'Fenno-Soviet negotiations on a Treaty(s) to Replace the FCMA,' 28 Oct.1991, pt.6 + 'Attachment: Summary of Draft Agreement + Luonnos 8.10.1991 (Actual Draft Agreement),' in TNA, FCO 33-11524; "Tel Thorne/HEL emb. to FCO, 'Fenno-Soviet Negotiations to Replace FCMA Treaty,' 6 Nov. 1991," in TNA, FCO 33-11524. Cf. Thorne/HEL emb. to FCO, Telno 249, 'New Fenno-Soviet Treaty of Good Neighbourliness and Co-Operation,' 7 Nov. 1991," in TNA, FCO 33-11524. On Koivisto, see also Blomberg, *Vakauden kaipuu*, pp. 381-2. See also for Koivisto's views on "neutrality" ("puolueettomuus") and "nonalignment" ("liittoutumattomuus") his *Uusi Suomi* interview 22.9.1991 quoted in Väyrynen, *Suomen puolueettomuus uudessa Euroopassa*, pp. 133-6, 143.

¹⁴⁹ On Finland's step by step policy in shaping its relations with USSR/Russia and moving closer towards EC/EU, see "Planitz/HEL: emb. to AA, DB 283, 'Betr.: Arbeitsbesuch des neuen schwedischen Ministerpräsidenten Carl Bildt in Helsinki am 8.10.1991,' 10 Oct. 1991," in PAAA, ZA 178331.

¹⁵⁰ See, for example, "Letter by Douglas Hurd to Prime Minister, 'Common Foreign and Security Policy,' 7 Feb. 1991 + 'Attachment: Draft Treaty Provisions on CFSP' + Commentary, here: para.5," in TNA, PREM 19-3326.

¹⁵¹ "Kerr/UKREP/ BXL to FCO, Telno 1120, 'IGC on Pol. Union; Personal Reps, 2 May: CFSP,' 2 May 1991, pt.5(i)," in TNA, FCO 33-11175.

¹⁵² On NATO as "the only organisation that sustains the commitment of the United States and Europe to work together for collective defence," see "Irish Neutrality: European Political Union and the Gulf, 12 Feb. 1991, pts.3+4," in TNA, FCO 179-250. On NATO and WEU, see "Callway/WED to Weston/FCO, 'Carl Bildt's call on the PM: 16 April,' 11 April 1991" + "Attachment: Private Secretary to PS/No 10, 'Call on the PM by Swedish Moderate (Conservative) Party Leader: Carl Bildt, 16 April, 1230 hours,'" in TNA, FCO 179-250. See also "Allison Bailes/FCO, Doc no 22 in file – untitled, DZN 061/24, Sec pol paras 7-10, 28 Jan. 1991," in TNA, FCO 179-250. See also "Message from PM to President Bush, 17 May 1991," TNA, FCO 33-11175.

committed to conflicting visions of “Europe,” made no secret of their lobbying efforts among the EFTA-aspirants.¹⁵³

The Germans saw the EFTA states as potential allies within the EU, not least in view of the eventual integration of the East-Central Europeans, the Baltics, and even the USSR/Russia into European structures. This approach fitted neatly into Bonn’s post-Wall *Ostpolitik* strategy, under which the German leadership funnelled billions of DM and Dollars in direct aid and assistance to the states of the former Warsaw Pact, in order to stabilise the young, still shaky, capitalist democracies against political instability and to prevent migrant outflows from the East. The Germans also hoped – with keen Finnish support – to activate Nordic-Baltic-Soviet/Russian cooperation through an intergovernmental initiative, the Council of Baltic Sea States, which was launched in October 1991.¹⁵⁴ It helped that Germany, as part of its efforts to increase regional interdependence, was also making special overtures to Moscow – even if the British complained that Bonn viewed its relations with Moscow through “rose-tinted spectacles”¹⁵⁵ and the Finns worried that the Germans risked becoming dependent on or even colluding with the Soviet Union.¹⁵⁶ Crucially, neither Gorbachev nor Yeltsin felt threatened by “Europe,” especially if this Europe were to be German-led. And this in turn greatly eased Finland’s decision to stride more confidently towards this institution of the West.¹⁵⁷

Even if the Maastricht Treaty bound EU members to a common foreign and security policy including the prospect of common defence and even if the WEU would become an integral part of the European Union as its future defence pillar, there remained plenty of political and interpretative wriggle room for the two Nordic neutral newcomers. To be sure, “neutrality” in the strictest literal sense would be impossible once one joined the European club. At the same time, full WEU membership, though it would be *offered* to non-NATO members, was *not* going to be a *requirement* for EU states. This had worried all three prospective neutral newbies Austria, Sweden and Finland but it also affected the one pre-existing neutral EC member: Ireland. Moreover, the Finns, always jealous of their foreign (and security) political independence, found relief in the post-Maastricht Commons’ statement of British Prime Minister John Major, who declared: “... if Britain needs to act on her own we must be free to

¹⁵³ As the British noted in November 1991, PM Esko Aho was not only “in regular touch” with Chancellor Kohl. “Germany is the alternative role model for the Finns but most would prefer to stay close to us.” See “Smith/HEL emb. to FCO, Telno 266, ‘PM Esko Aho’s Call on the Prime Minister [Major]: Monday 2 Dec., 27 Nov. 1991,” in TNA, FCO 179-251. See also “Letter by Thorne/HEL emb. to MacGlashan/WED, ‘The Importance of Finland,’ 10 Dec. 1991, pt.6,” in TNA, FCO 179-744. Earlier in the year the UK MOD suggested “increasing and improving contacts as a medium- to long-term project, to predispose the “neutral non-aligned countries” to “see the UK as a natural partner and ally within the EC.” “Letter by Johnson/MOD to Dickerson/WED-FCO, 23 May 1991,” in TNA, FCO 33-11175.

¹⁵⁴ German Minister-Präsident Björn Engholm of Schleswig Holstein had first developed his ideas on Baltic Sea cooperation (“*Ostseezusammenarbeit*”) in 1990 during the Finnish symposium “neue Hanse” in Kotka. One year later, in the aftermath of the putsch in Moscow and Finnish establishment of diplomatic relations with the Baltic states, Finland’s Foreign Minister Väyrynen had used Finland’s growing room for political manoeuvre to pick up the German idea (by now developed further by German Foreign Minister Genscher) and to emphatically lobby for enhanced and broader cooperation in the Baltic Sea area and for a Baltic Sea Council. See “DB 216, HEL emb. to AA, ‘Betr.: Errichtung eines ‘Ostseerates (‘Baltic Sea Council’),’ 2 Sept. 1991,” in PAAA, ZA 178331; “UM Press Release No. 277, ‘Co-operation in the Baltic Sea Area and a Baltic Sea Council,’ 27 Aug 1991,” in PAAA, ZA 178331.

¹⁵⁵ “Tod R Adm/ACDS to PSO/CDS, D/ACDS (pol/Nuc)/7/13/91 (33/91), ‘11th UK-Sweden Defence Talks,’ 22 Jan. 1991, pt.10,” in TNA, FCO 179-250.

¹⁵⁶ Pauli Järvenpää (MOD) quoted in “Allison Bailes/FCO, Doc no 22 in file – untitled, DZN 061/24, Sec pol paras 7-10, 28 Jan. 1991,” in TNA, FCO 179-250.

¹⁵⁷ See Blomberg, *Vakauden kaipuu*, p. 383.

do so. The [Maastricht] Treaty meets that requirement....” What disturbed the Finns was the news of the enlargement timetable, according to which Europe was ready to start access negotiations with the existing applicants – Austria and Sweden – soon after the signing of the TEU in early in 1992. The decisional pressure on Helsinki was building fast.¹⁵⁸

That New Year, as Finland extricated itself from the FCMA, the domestic debate over neutrality and the prospect of a future in the EU gained significantly in nuance and momentum. In the process, Finland’s post-war strategy of “neutrality” (*puolueettomuus*) – as a counterweight to the FCMA Treaty or, as some put it: “neutrality as *Ostpolitik*” – was reframed as “non-alliance” or military “non-alignment” (*liittoutumattomuus*). At the same time, Finns proudly stuck with their “independent defence force.” As the British observed, everybody understood this choice. Finland could not (and was not going to) “dump 50 years of experience with the Russians.” They would always have to “take geography into account.”¹⁵⁹

Meanwhile, Helsinki had signed a “memorandum of understanding” on reciprocal principles in defence procurement with the United States. In the course of preparing to upgrade the country’s air defence through an arms deal encompassing some 60 aircraft, Helsinki’s defence establishment had already quietly excluded Soviet MIG-29 fighter jets from the list of potential tenders.¹⁶⁰ Among the offers considered were aircraft of the Swedish, French, and American defence industries. Ultimately, the Finns purchased U.S. F-18 Hornets. Although technological advantages and favourable pricing were said to have played a role, it was obvious that for all the public talk about capabilities, the Finnish desire for closer ties to the United States and its longer-term aspirations for greater interoperability with NATO armed forces influenced this decision.¹⁶¹ Military “non-alignment” coupled with the commitment to an “independent defence” with a western twist were to be the new cornerstones of the country’s foreign and security policies.¹⁶²

Perhaps, therefore, it is unsurprising that President Koivisto’s address to the nation on 1 January 1992 no longer featured the term “neutrality.” Instead, he primarily discussed the pros and cons of joining the EU.¹⁶³ To be sure, domestic soul searching over entering the supra-national European club and vocal expressions of resentment against possible agricultural *diktats* from Brussels would continue for a while. Ultimately, however, the calculation was simple. Once relations with Yeltsin’s new Russia were established, Finland was ready to jump on the express train to Brussels to enter the European political and trading

¹⁵⁸ “Smith/HEL emb. to Hurd/FCO, ‘Finland: Annual Review for 1991,’ 9 Jan. 1992, pt.12,” in TNA, FCO 160-307-34. See also “Smith/HEL emb. to FCO, Telno 316, ‘Foreign Secretary’s Talk with Finnish FM, Helsinki 9 July,’ 9 July 1992, pt.4,” in TNA, FCO 179-745.

¹⁵⁹ Blomberg, *Vakauden kaipuu*, pp. 377-94, esp. pp. 390-4; Visuri and Talvitie, *Kylmän sodan päätös*, p. 249. “Smith/HEL emb. to FCO, Telno 266, ‘PM Esko Aho’s Call on the Prime Minister [Major]: Monday 2 Dec.,’ 27 Nov. 1991, pt.10,” in TNA, FCO 179-251.

¹⁶⁰ “Smith/HEL emb. to Douglas Hurd/FCO, ‘Finland: Annual Defence Review,’ 8 Feb. 1991 incl. “Defence Attaché’s Annual Report for 1990” + Annex B to DA/7/33, “The Finnish Air Force,” 22 Jan. 1991, pts.2+3,” in TNA, FCO 179-250; “Letter by Lindsay/PAR emb. to Thorpe/MOD, ‘MIRAGE 2000 for Finland,’ 15 Jan. 1991,” in TNA, FCO 179-250.

¹⁶¹ Koivisto, *Historian tekijät*, pp. 487-92. See also “Bazing/HEL emb. to AA, DB 49, ‘Betr: Besuch von Vizepräsident Dan Quayle in Helsinki, 5.-7.2.1992,’ 10 Feb. 1992,” in PAAA, ZA 178331.

¹⁶² As the Swedes saw it, with the F-18s Finns had placed themselves to the West of the CEEs. “Guest to HMA, Visits to Sweden by Mr Dick Cheney and M. Pierre Joxe, 18 June 1992,” in TNA, FCO 179-745. See also “Thorne/HEL emb. to Lyne/WED, Teleletter, ‘Finnish Airforce buys US-built FA18 fighters,’ 15 May 1992,” in TNA, FCO 179-744.

¹⁶³ Blomberg, *Vakauden kaipuu*, pp. 448-9. Koivisto, *Historian tekijät*, pp. 534-6.

bloc. Ensuring independence and retaining a high standard of living in a globalising post-Cold War world pointed inexorably in this direction.¹⁶⁴

So too did Finland's foreign policy identity. Despite the apparent success of neutrality policies, the Finns gained significant advantages from both their post-Soviet legal situation and from their changed strategic environment. With encouragement from the Germans and the British, they were at last getting to exactly where they had long wanted to be: firmly anchored in and recognised as part of the community of Nordic and Western states, rather than in Russia's orbit. The Finns understood that spring 1992 was a special moment of opportunity. If they did not apply to the EU now, they ran the risk of being left "out of the mainstream of European development." And if that happened, they might be lumped together with former communist states and associated once more with the old Soviet bloc.¹⁶⁵

In mid-March 1992, Finland unequivocally made its *political* "turn" to the West by submitting its application documents to the EU Council. Three years later, on 1 January 1995, the Finns, together with the Austrians and the Swedes, entered the European Union.¹⁶⁶

8 Approaching NATO: Military Non-Alignment, NACC Observership, and the Partnership for Peace

The option of joining NATO, as a way of "maximising" Finnish security after the collapse of the Soviet Union, was not yet on the horizon. In its defence and security choices in 1992, Finland's history, its unique pathway since the Second World War and its recent shift from the doctrine of "neutrality" to "non-alignment," played a bigger role than any other considerations.¹⁶⁷ A deep suspicion towards the great powers persisted; but there was also real hope for better, truly cooperative relations, in particular regarding the "Russian question."

The Finnish commitment to gradual change and international collaboration was not driven by altruism. The Finns were just as motivated by national interest as the Germans were. For Kohl, "money for Moscow" was money spent to purchase full German sovereignty. In Finland's case, as British diplomats shrewdly noted, "generously" helping to stabilise the

¹⁶⁴ "Smith/HEL emb. to Hurd/FCO, 'Finland: Annual Review for 1992,' 11 Jan. 1993, pts. 2-4," in TNA, FCO 160-316-7. On the rumbling issue with the agricultural lobby, see Tarkka, *Itsenäisyyden elpymysaika: Aikalaiskronikka vuosilta 1990-2000* (Helsinki: Siltala, 2022), pp. 98-9; Koivisto, *Historian tekijät*, p. 541. See also "Smith/HEL emb. to FCO, Telno 266, 'PM Esko Aho's Call on the Prime Minister [Major]: Monday 2 Dec.,' 27 Nov. 1991, pts.9+13D," in TNA, FCO 179-251; "Thorne/HEL emb. to Parry/ECD (E), Teleletter, 'EC Enlargement: Finland,' 1 July 1992, pt.4a+b," in TNA, FCO 179-745.

¹⁶⁵ On "neutrality politics," see, for example, Väyrynen's speech: "Neutrality in an Integrating Europe," held in Rovaniemi at the "Council of the Paasikivi Societies" on 4 Sept. 1991, in PAAA, ZA 178331. See also "'Muistio, Väyrynen-Genscher,' 17 Jan. 1992," in UMA, 18.60 SLT; "Vermerk, 'Betr.: Gespräch BM mit dem finn. AM Väyrynen am 15.1.1992,' 16 Jan. 1992, pt.Ia," in PAAA, ZA 178330. On Finns being anxious not to miss the 'Swedish boat' in 1991, see "Smith/HEL emb. to FCO, Telno 266, 'PM Esko Aho's Call on the Prime Minister [Major]: Monday 2 Dec.,' 27 Nov.1991, pt.13D," in TNA, FCO 179-251. See also "Letter from Henderson/HEL emb. to Dickerson/WED, 'Finnish Foreign and Security Policy,' 23 April 1991, pt.6," in TNA, FCO 33-11529. On being isolated, left behind, and stuck with CEE and Balts outside EC/EU, see Jukka Tarkka, *Itsenäisyyden elpymysaika*, p. 88; "Letter by MacGlashan/WED to Thorne/ HEL emb., 'The importance of Finland,' 20 Oct. 1991, pt.3," in TNA, FCO 179-744.

¹⁶⁶ Note: As a consequence of joining the EU, Austria, Finland, and Sweden left EFTA.

¹⁶⁷ "Thorne/ HEL emb. to Parry/ECD (E), Teleletter, 'EC Enlargement: Finland,' 1.7.1992, pt.4c," in TNA, FCO 179-745.

“East” (with cash, food, and by acting as an “entrepot” for Western technical assistance) helped to keep the Russian “problem as far away from their frontiers as possible.” And this, so the calculation went in Helsinki, would foster predictability in Fenno-Russian relations and help Finland increase its room for manoeuvre in foreign policy.¹⁶⁸

By remaining non-allied, Finland cleaved to a political line that had become part of its postwar survival strategy and self-image in difficult geopolitical circumstances. Indeed, as one could observe at many points in this era of geopolitical transformation, the Finns clung to what they knew. Even after the Cold War was over and Helsinki was headed into the EU, they kept keenly promoting what they felt was “their” CSCE process. This initiative – originally rooted in the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 and reinforced through the Paris Charter of 1990 with the USSR, USA, Canada and all Europeans as signatories – entailed straddling ideological divides and power differentials by discussion, focusing on common, *all-European* values, mutually agreed norms, and fundamental rights. As the Finnish government saw it the CSCE kept “Finland on the map;” and it provided a “convenient Europe-wide structure” within which Finns could “depart from their traditional neutrality.”¹⁶⁹

The problem was that institutionally the CSCE turned out to be a damp squib when confronted with European conflict or even warfare. The “Helsinki-2” summit on 9-10 July 1992 – billed as the culminating pan-European moment in which Russia and America met as equals – turned out to be completely incapable of dealing with Yugoslavia’s implosion and descent into civil war. To be sure, the CSCE members declared their forum a regional “organisation” under the UN charter. And this in turn gave them the authority to call upon NATO, WEU, and individual countries’ armed forces to provide peacekeepers to the conflict. But this merely highlighted the inability of the CSCE to deliver “hard security” and “follow-through capability.” It was, quite simply, not a “security organisation.”¹⁷⁰

As leaders continued to grapple with the challenge of how to build a stable European security architecture, while trying to integrate more than a dozen newly independent post-Soviet and post-Yugoslavian states, Helsinki weighed up its options. Finland’s “deep-seated fear” of Russia had not suddenly evaporated. “The name of the beast may have changed,” British Ambassador Neil Smith reported from Helsinki, “but Finns have no reasons to believe they are dealing with a completely reformed character.” The “uncertainties created by a more open border” – one which continued to mark “the greatest difference in living standards in Europe” – made them nostalgic for “the predictability of the old Soviet Union.”¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ See, for example, “Smith/HEL emb. to FCO, Telno 284, ‘Finnish Evaluation of the Situation in the Soviet Union,’ 18 Dec. 1991 + Attachments: ‘The Action Plan of Finland for Central and Eastern Europe,’ 13 Dec. 1991,” in TNA, FCO 33-11524; “Thorne/HEL emb. to Dickerson/ WED, ‘Visit of Anatoli Sobchak: 9/10 Dec. – Finnish Food Aid to Russia,’ 13 Dec. 1991,” in TNA, FCO 33-11524; “Letter by Powell/SD to Matthews/WED, ‘Future of Fenno-Soviet Relations,’ 8 Oct. 1991,” in TNA, FCO 33-11524. On “relative [Finnish] independence,” see Moisio, “Finlandisation versus Westernisation,” pp. 89-90.

¹⁶⁹ “Smith/HEL emb. to FCO, Telno 266, ‘PM Esko Aho’s Call on the Prime Minister [Major]: Monday 2 Dec.,’ 27 Nov. 1991, pt.12,” in TNA, FCO 179-251. See also “Letter by Ivey/HEL emb. to DHM, ‘CSCE and Disarmament Issues: Finnish Views,’ 23 Sept. 1991,” in TNA, FCO 33-11529.

¹⁷⁰ Spohr, *Post Wall*, pp. 485-6, 511, 151. Kristina Spohr & Kaarel Piirimäe, “With or Without Russia? The Boris, Bill and Helmut Bromance and the Harsh Realities of Securing Europe in the Post-Wall World, 1990-1994,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (2022), p. 164, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592296.2022.2041816>.

¹⁷¹ “Smith/HEL emb. to Hurd/FCO, ‘Finland: Annual Review for 1992,’ 11 Jan. 1993, pt.5,” in TNA, FCO 160-316-7.

Sadly, there was little prospect of an improvement in that quarter. Yeltsin's "shock therapy" policies were failing miserably, and in the absence of successful efforts to democratise or implement law and order, Russia was sliding fast into total economic meltdown, political turmoil, and social desolation. There were signs of deepening resentment and outrage at the drastic loss of global status.¹⁷² Taken together with the paralytic pan-European debate over collective security and the excruciatingly slow and toothless efforts by the European Community to speak with one voice on foreign affairs and security matters, it was unsurprising that Finland, from the sidelines, closely followed NATO's reinvention efforts.¹⁷³

The attempts by Alliance ever since its London summit in the summer of 1990 to reach out to the East had notably intensified in course of 1991, all the while institutionally NATO was being reaffirmed as the central contributor to peace and security on the continent.¹⁷⁴ In November the NATO Allies launched the so-called North Atlantic Cooperation Council.¹⁷⁵ The NACC, was the organisational manifestation of the "hand of friendship" NATO had offered to the former Eastern bloc in London in the previous year. It was envisaged as involving regular foreign minister conferences. Going beyond NATO's earlier bilateral "liaison" initiative, the NACC was intended to facilitate general East-West "rapprochement" and "consultation." It was explicitly *not* about expanding the Alliance's membership or extending NATO's security guarantees. This issue together with the question mark over NATO's future mission¹⁷⁶, was being deferred to an unspecified time in the future. The NACC's declared interest was "to seek a Europe that is whole and free" with "a new, lasting order of peace;" its immediate practical aims were the implementation of the CFE and START treaties and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. More generally, it formed part of an "interlocking network" of institutions, within which the CSCE, NATO, EC/EU, WEU, and the Council of Europe "complement[ed] each other."¹⁷⁷ Anxious to avoid isolation, Finns were asking themselves whether to somehow formalise their relationship with the Alliance, perhaps through the NACC.¹⁷⁸

Crucially, Europe's neutrals were never the target group of this new cooperative body. Most NATO Allies (apart from France) felt that the NACC should not resemble a mini-CSCE meeting and thus that the Cooperation Council's enlargement should be limited.¹⁷⁹ In the CSCE every member was equal, but in the NACC NATO-states were in the lead with the United States out at the front, while the USSR, East-Central Europeans and Balts took the

¹⁷² Spohr, *Post Wall*, pp. 455-86.

¹⁷³ See, for example, Koivistos's sceptical statements in "Braithwaite/MOS emb. to FCO, Telno 1375, 'Helsinki Telno 165: Visit of Finnish President to Moscow,' 2 July 1991, pt.7," in TNA, FCO 33-11524.

¹⁷⁴ Spohr, *Post Wall*, ch.5.

¹⁷⁵ "Betzuege, Ortez Nr. 81/82, 15 Nov. 1991," in PAAA, ZA 158578.

¹⁷⁶ See also "FCO Background Brief, 'The NACC,' May 1992," in UMA, NATO 14.01 [NACC-Suomi, v 1992 I (1.1.-25.9.)]. Ploetz/NATO to AA, 'Kommuniqué und Vorschau,' 16 Nov. 1990," PAAA, ZA 158578.

¹⁷⁷ "North Atlantic Cooperation Council Statement on Dialogue, Partnership and Cooperation," Brussels, 20 Dec. 1991, <https://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c911220a.htm>; "FCO Background Brief, 'The NACC,' May 1992," in UMA, NATO 14.01, NACC-Suomi, v 1992 I; "BRY emb. to UM, Muistio 'NACC:n luonne ja tarkoituksperät,' 12 June 1992," in UMA, NATO 14.01, NACC-Suomi, v 1992 I.

¹⁷⁸ Marjo Uutela, "Eyes on the North Atlantic Cooperation Council: To What Extent was Germany Involved in the NATO Diplomacy Surrounding Finland and Sweden in the Early 1990s?," *TIHR*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (2023), pp. 431-41, here esp. p. 434, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2022.2140179>.

¹⁷⁹ "Weston/UKDEL/NATO to FCO, Telno 249, 'Our Telno 239: Albanian Interest in Joining NACC,' 20 May 1992," in TNA, FCO 179-744; "Smith/UKDEL/NATO to FCO, Telno 238, 'Your Telno 115: Albanian Interest in Joining NACC,' 14 May 1992," in TNA, FCO 179-744. See also "Ploetz/Bruessel NATO to AA, DB 1578, 'Betr.: NATO-Gipfel in Rom am 7-8.11.1991; hier: Gipfelerklärung,' 2 Nov. 1991," in PAAA, ZA 158578. "Bertram, 'Vermerk,' 6 Nov. 1991," in PAAA, ZA 158578.

role of guests or even apprentices. The neutrals, though invited to build closer relations with NATO, were not seen as belonging to the group of so-called transforming states. The latter were countries suffering from a security void who still had to learn the ropes of democracy and capitalism, all the while shifting to post-Soviet civil-military relations and undergoing defence reforms. As the Finns saw it: “NACC was an arrangement that offered development aid” as well as “guidance how to live in a democracy.” Finland needed neither. Above all, it “was a net defence provider, not consumer.”¹⁸⁰

These neutrals were often keen to distinguish themselves from the ex-Communist states. When their idiosyncratic political histories since World War II are borne in mind, the reasons why they quickly signalled their lack of desire for NATO membership becomes clearer. At the same time, the Alliance itself also kept the neutrals at arm’s length. Finland’s foreign ministry only learned of the first NACC meeting – to be held in Brussels on 20 December 1991 – a few days in advance; and they did so thanks to NATO’s Norwegian delegation. And only after some delay were they briefed by NATO’s Assistant Secretary General Gebhardt von Moltke.¹⁸¹

Following the USSR’s demise, it quickly became obvious that, while the Conference for Security and Cooperation, the Western European Union, and the European Community with its goal of formulating a *common* foreign and security policy were all struggling to take off institutionally in any meaningful way, NATO’s Cooperation Council was on the path towards wielding ever more significant influence over Europe’s security landscape. A sharp-eyed observer of these developments, Finland began to consider what it might want to gain from closer ties with NATO.¹⁸²

The Finnish foreign ministry believed it to be important to know what was discussed at the NACC, especially by its members Russia, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, regarding the Baltic Sea region. More broadly, they saw it as in Finland’s national interest to actively participate in *all* new post-Cold War initiatives.¹⁸³ And, so the MFA calculated, by cultivating close relations with NATO HQ, Helsinki would keep open the option of one day acceding to the Western alliance; though at the time, the Finnish government always insisted that it had no such ambitions.¹⁸⁴

After consultations with the Finnish president, the Finnish foreign ministry decided actively to seek a rapprochement with the NACC. Before approaching NATO, the Political Director of the Finnish MFA Jaakko Blomberg would first contact his Swedish counterpart – as was the tradition – to discuss possible ways of how they might gain access as “observer”-participants in the next NACC meeting, to be held in conjunction with NATO’s June foreign ministers’ summit in Oslo. But the Swedes were not at all keen on the idea. Perhaps they felt

¹⁸⁰ “WAS/Järvenpää nro 040, Embassy Report from Washington,” 17 March 1992,” in UMA, NATO 14.01, NACC-Suomi, v 1992 I; “Thorne/HEL emb. to Parry/ECD (E), Teleletter, ‘EC Enlargement: Finland,’ 1 July 1992, pt.6,” in TNA, FCO 179-745. Blomberg, *Vakauden kaipuu*, p. 610.

¹⁸¹ Uutela, “Eyes on the North Atlantic Cooperation Council,” p. 434. Cf. “ETYK-JAKELU, ‘NACC: Suomen tarkkailija-asema,’ 5 June 1992,” in UMA, NATO 14.01, NACC-Suomi, v 1992 I.

¹⁸² “Thorne/ HEL emb. to Parry/ECD (E), Teleletter, ‘EC Enlargement: Finland,’ 1 July 1992, pts.5-7,” in TNA, FCO 179-745; “‘CAS’s Visit to Finland, Sweden and Norway,’ 24 June 1992, pt.4,” in TNA, FCO 179-745.

¹⁸³ “BRY/ Heiskanen, BRYB nro 021, 12 May 1992,” in UMA, NATO 14.01, NACC-Suomi, v 1992 I.

¹⁸⁴ “Blomberg’s Lausunto, ‘Suomen tavoitteet lähialueillamme ja huomioitsija-asema NACC:ssa,’ 16 June 1992,” UMA, NATO 14.01, NACC-Suomi, v 1992 I. cf. “Ulkoministeri Paavo Väyrynen: Suomen jäsenyyss Natossa ‘periaatteessa mahdollinen’,” *Turun Sanomat*, 22 March 1992.

more ideologically wedded to their neutrality of old;¹⁸⁵ perhaps they simply felt more secure than their Eastern neighbour.¹⁸⁶ Whatever the reason, they preferred to refrain from engagement with the Atlantic Alliance.¹⁸⁷

Undeterred, Finland went ahead alone. On 21 May 1992 Helsinki communicated its interest in closer NACC contacts to ASG von Moltke. In his answer, he expressed cautious optimism about what the Allies' response might be. But, he warned, "some" members might see Finnish "ad hoc participation" as a road to "NACC enlargement" to which they were strictly opposed.¹⁸⁸ NACC had been defined as a forum for former Warsaw Pact and NATO states, and the Allies were already stuck with the problem of Albania's unexpected NACC membership-application.¹⁸⁹ One week later, NATO ambassadors refused Finland's request. No clear reasoning was offered, and the issue was quietly buried in Helsinki and Brussels.¹⁹⁰

At NATO's summit meeting on 4 June in Oslo, Norway's Foreign Minister Thorvald Stoltenberg unexpectedly raised Finland's NACC observer status with his colleagues over lunch. The mood at the highest level was much more favourable. US Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger and NATO SG Manfred Wörner as well as French foreign Minister Dumas welcomed the idea of Finnish participation. Their views would carry the day. And while, Albania and Georgia were formally admitted to the NACC, the ministers jointly proceeded to invite Finland to observe the forum's proceedings next day. This last-minute NATO-*volte face* took Finns totally by surprise. As no MFA representative from Helsinki could be flown in on time, it was decided that Finland's ambassador to Norway would participate.¹⁹¹ After Oslo, there were two weeks of frantic diplomatic toing and froing until

¹⁸⁵ The Swedes had after all, as part of their EU *démarche*, defined their new "neutrality" doctrine as follows: to seek "freedom from alliances in peacetime," while "aiming at neutrality in war." See "Guest/STO emb. to HMA, 'Swedish Security Policy and EC Accession,' 18 Feb. 1991," in TNA, FCO 179-250; "Catherine Roe/ECD (E) to Guest/STO emb., Teleletter, 'Swedish Neutrality and CFSP,' 28 March 1991," in TNA, FCO 179-250.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Mikael Holmström, *Den dolda alliansen – Sveriges hemliga NATO-förbindelser* (Stockholm: Bokförlaget Atlantis, 2011); Robert Dalsjö, "Trapped in the Twilight Zone? Sweden Between Neutrality and NATO," *FIIA Working Paper* 94 (April 2017); https://www.fiaa.fi/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/wp94_trapped_in_the_twilight_zone.pdf.

¹⁸⁷ "Blomberg's 'Muistio, luottamuksellinen,' 12 June 1992," in UMA, NATO 14.01, NACC-Suomi, v 1992 I.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*; "BRY/Heiskanen to UM, BRYB nro 021, 12 May 1992," in UMA, NATO 14.01, NACC-Suomi, v 1992 I; "Heiskanen's 'Muistio nro 635: NACC ja Suomi,' 2 June 1992," UMA, NATO 14.01, NACC-Suomi, v 1992 I. US skepticism towards "NACC enlargement" (potentially to post-Yugoslavian states) was complemented by UK and Dutch as well as Turkey's hesitation towards the granting of observerships, esp. when it came to participation at the working level (ambassadorial meetings and working groups). See for example, "BRY/Mennander to UM, BRYB 024, 13 June 1992," in UMA, NATO 14.01, NACC-Suomi, v 1992 I; "BRY/Mennander to UM, BRYB 025, 17 June 1992," in UMA, NATO 14.01, NACC-Suomi, v 1992 I; "BRY/Mennander to UM, BRYB 041, 14 Sept. 1992," in UMA, NATO 14.01, NACC-Suomi, v 1992 I. Turkey worried about a bid from Cyprus. See "BRY/Mennander to UM, BRYB 0351, 15 Sept. 1992," in UMA, NATO 14.01, NACC-Suomi, v 1992 I.

¹⁸⁹ "UKDEL/NATO to FCO, Telno 258, 'Our Telno 249: Albanian Interest in Joining NACC,' 22 May 1992," in TNA, FCO 179-744.

¹⁹⁰ "ETYK-JAKELU, 'NACC: Suomen tarkkailija-asema,' 5 June 1992," in UMA, NATO 14.01, NACC-Suomi, v 1992 I.

¹⁹¹ "OSL/Yrjö-Koskinen, OSLB nro 020, 4 June 1992," in UMA, NATO 14.01, NACC-Suomi, v 1992 I; "Blomberg's Letter to Heiskanen, 'NACC osallistuminen,' 8 June 1992," in UMA, NATO 14.01, NACC-Suomi, v 1992 I; "OSL/Yrjö-Koskinen, OSLB nro 021, 'PR: NACC – Suomen huomioitsija-asema,' 8 June 1992," in UMA, NATO 14.01, NACC-Suomi, v 1992 I; "Letter by Yrjö-Koskinen/OSL to Finnish FM, OSL-053, 'PR – Suomi NACC:n huomioitsijaksi,' 9 June 1992," in UMA, NATO 14.01, NACC-Suomi, v 1992 I. See also "Creswell to Minister, 'NACC/Finland,' 12 June 1992," in TNA, FCO 179-745. It is notable that Finns

clarification was obtained that Finnish observership at the ministerial conference had not been a one-off occurrence, and that its NACC observer status would be permanent. What remained open to negotiation were questions pertaining to the scope of Finland's rights to participate at NACC ambassador and other working level meetings. Ultimately, despite this initial confusion surrounding the nature of Finns' NACC involvement, none of these issues mattered. Finland had gained what it wanted, albeit in a somewhat roundabout way.¹⁹²

Surprisingly, perhaps, Finland's solo demarche towards NATO and its successful denouement came under intense, even hostile, scrutiny in the national media and the Finnish parliament.¹⁹³ Amid severe criticism of the foreign ministry's actions, a heated public debate ensued.¹⁹⁴ Questions abounded about an overly bold, "unilateral advance" by the MFA, given that even the President claimed to have been taken by surprise. Why, how, and based on whose decision had Finland so suddenly become a NACC observer? Foreign Minister Väyrynen, known as a strong defender of Finland's old neutrality stance, had to explain himself to members of the parliamentary foreign affairs committee. They blamed the foreign ministry for unacceptable lone-wolf initiatives and accused the diplomats of bypassing the democratically elected legislative and for willingly neglecting to observe proper transparency in their conduct of Finnish foreign and security policy. Some MPs and pundits even alleged that, as a result of those actions, Finland's military non-alignment status had been violated, if it had not been changed by stealth.

understood from the Norwegians that FM Stoltenberg had forced NATO SG Wörner's hand, while suspecting that von Moltke was a slight spanner in their works before the summit and afterwards when it came to the meeting minutes and outcome. The British in turn thought von Moltke was too generous and had promised the Finns too much too soon, causing a mess. What's more, they were deeply skeptical of NATO Deputy ASG for Pol. Affairs Mr Kriendler's version of events regarding Finland/NACC at the NATO PermReps' lunch in Oslo, namely that the SG could not resist Stoltenberg's advance, if, as they questioned, such there was. They believed that NATO IS staff should have raised the issue of Finnish NACC interest in the last week of May in pre-Oslo meetings. The British also felt Wörner was not willing to pull down the "porticullis" on NACC observerships soon enough and was being too open towards non-NACC CSCE members, as evident over his soft handling of the Finnish case.

¹⁹² "OSL/Yrjö-Koskinen, OSLB nro 021, 'PR: NACC – Suomen huomioitsija-asema,' 8 June 1992," in UMA, NATO 14.01, NACC-Suomi, v 1992 I; "Letter by Yrjö-Koskinen/OSL to Finnish FM, OSL-053, 'PR – Suomi NACC:n huomioitsijaksi,' 9 June 1992," in UMA, NATO 14.01, NACC-Suomi, v 1992 I; "Letter by Blomberg to von Moltke, 10 June 1992," in NATO 14.01, NACC-Suomi, v 1992 I; "Letter by von Moltke to Blomberg, 12 June 1992," in UMA, NATO 14.01, NACC-Suomi, v 1992 I; "BRY/Mennander to UM, BRYB 025, 17 June 1992," in UMA, NATO 14.01, NACC-Suomi, v 1992 I; "BRY/Mennander to UM, BRYB 040, 10 Sept. 1992," in UMA, NATO 14.01, NACC-Suomi, v 1992 I; "BRY/Mennander to UM, BRYB 0351, 15 Sept. 1992," in UMA, NATO 14.01, NACC-Suomi, v 1992 I. For British scepticism on Finnish NACC-working level participation, see "Weston/UKDEL NATO to FCO, Telno 334, 'NAC, 1 July: NACC – Observer Status for Finland,' 2 July 1992," in TNA, FCO 179-245; "Court/BRNAT to Bond/FCOLN, Teleletter, 'Finland's Observer Status at NACC,' 18 June 1992," in TNA, FCO 179-245.

¹⁹³ "BON/Valtonen to UM, Lehdistökatkaus nro 43/92, 12 June 1992," in UMA, NATO 14.01, NACC-Suomi, v 1992 I. "Smith/HEL emb. to FCO, Telno 297, 'Sec of State's Bilateral with Finnish FM – 9 July, 1545: Bilateral issues,' 7 July 1992, pt.7," in TNA, FCO 179-745.

¹⁹⁴ Vuoristo Pekka, "Koivisto vahvisti kutsun NACC:hen tulleen yllätyksenä," *HS*, 9 June 1992; Sippola Anna-Riitta, "Aho sysäsi Koivistolle vastuun NACC-päätöksestä: Eduskunta ei saanut pääministeriltä selvyyttä Suomen tulosta tarkkailijaksi," *HS*, 12 June 1992; Tuomo Pietiläinen, "Hallitus ei käsitellyt Suomen tarkkailijäsenyyttä NACC:ssä Aho: 'Hallitus yllättyi, koska Nato ei kertonut mielenmuutoksestaan'," *HS*, 14 June 1992; idem, "Salamyhkäinen NACC-päätös: Porvarit hajallaan presidenttipelissä," *HS*, 15 June 1992; Paavo Rautio, "Väyrysen mukaan Suomi ei lipsahtanut NACC:hen: Suomi pääsi seuraamaan vain Oslon kokousta; Nato päättäneen pian pysyvistä huomioitsijan asemasta," *HS*, 17 June 1992; Renny Jokelin, "Väyrysen ilmoitus eroaa läntisen sotilasliiton tulkinnasta: Suomi pysyvä tarkkailija NACC:ssä," *HS*, 18 June 1992; Asto Astikainen, "Ulkoministeri Väyrynen pitää kiinni NACC-selvityksestään: Väyrynen on tyytyväinen pysyvään huomioitsijan asemaan," *HS*, 19 June 1992. See also Penttilä and Karvinen, *Pitkä tie NATOon*, pp. 40-3.

Väyrynen had no appetite to enter into the complexities of the matter. He simply explained that at bottom it had always been Finland's desire to "gain access to information" on the NACC's work, "nothing more." NATO had been approached by the Finns', not vice versa as claimed by those who decried NATO- or US-imperialist influence. And so this Finnish step had led to Alliance's invitation of Finland to sit as an observer at the forum's ministerial meetings. This, Väyrynen insisted "was always public knowledge," and was "relayed honestly and correctly to the foreign affairs committee and parliament" at the time. "The matter" was now "closed."¹⁹⁵

President Koivisto also worked hard to calm the troubled waters.¹⁹⁶ He went out of his way to state that in his view there was no point in seeking culprits or denouncing procedural errors, since the outcome for Finland had been a good one. Maybe, as Blomberg recalled Koivisto saying, it was a bit awkward that Finland was now the only "neutral" state with formal ties to the NACC, but of course, Helsinki had had its very own, special reasons for pursuing these.¹⁹⁷

In the end, the Finns extracted considerable benefits from their position at the NACC table, where they could observe the participants from East and West at close quarters, hear them air their concerns, and gain insights into NATO's operating modus. But, by contrast to Finland's later entry to the European Union, NACC observer-status was hardly the major strategic shift that some claimed it to be.

Finland, as firmly committed to "non-alliance" as ever, had no express interest in NACC or NATO membership. If this attitude was guided in part by the desire to avoid any unnecessary provocation of Russia, it also reflected Finland's own historico-ideological attachment to non-alignment and absolute decision-making sovereignty in defence, a principle that seemed all the more precious at a moment when the world remained in flux.

What its unilateral push for NACC observer status did reflect, however, was a growing Finnish self-assertiveness, a determination to use the country's newly found freedom to pursue its own agenda more overtly. Finland would henceforth engage pro-actively in the construction of Europe's future security structures. This reflected an important change of mood.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ Väyrynen quoted in "Section of Protocol of Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee Meeting, 17 Sept. 1992," in UMA, NATO 14.01, NACC-Suomi, v 1992 I. See also Blomberg, *Vakauden kaipuu*, pp. 610-13. The British considered NATO's initial internal response a "mishandling" regarding Finnish interest in NACC participation as an "invited guest," and the post-Oslo intra-Finnish saga "a real mess," see "Letter by Thorne/HEL emb. to HMA, 'Finland's Observer Status at NACC,' 12 June 1992," in TNA, FCO 179-745.

¹⁹⁶ "Smith/HEL emb. to FCO, Telno 266, 'PM Esko Aho's Call on the Prime Minister [Major]: Monday 2 Dec.,' 27 Nov. 1991, pt.11," in TNA, FCO 179-251. On the difficulties to "assess what Koivisto really thinks," see also "Letter from Henderson/HEL emb. to Dickerson/WED, 'Finnish Foreign and Security Policy,' 23 April 1991, pt.6," in TNA, FCO 33-11529.

¹⁹⁷ Blomberg, *Vakauden kaipuu*, p. 612. On Finland being the only neutral NACC-observer, with Sweden, Switzerland and Austria currently harbouring no such ambitions, see "BRY/Mennander to UM, BRYB 0351, 15 Sept. 1992, pt.3," in UMA, NATO 14.01, NACC-Suomi, v 1992 I; "POL-40, Muistio, salainen, 'NACC ja Suomen tarkkailija-asema; Suomen esitys,' 28 Sept. 1992," in UMA, NATO 14.01, NACC-Suomi, v 1992 II (26.9-31.12.1992).

¹⁹⁸ It is noteworthy that Finland and Sweden, in recognition of their "security concerns" while not "initial signatories," played an active role in the NATO-Warsaw Pact countries' negotiations over "Open Skies." These negotiations started, following U.S. President George H.W. Bush's 1989 initiative, in Ottawa in February 1990 and continued through several rounds of negotiations in Budapest, Vienna, and finally Helsinki where on 24

The British ambassador, as he looked back at the start of 1993 to the momentous events of 1992, stuck to a minimalist view of Finland's agency in international affairs. To him, exogenous, structural factors – the death of the USSR, Russia's economic meltdown, Finland's recession, and Sweden's decision to join the EC – appeared to be the key shapers of Finland's course. In the end, he reasoned, Finland had "little real choice," but to apply for full membership of the European Community. The same ineluctable forces ensured that Finland's NACC-observership would "in due course be followed by observer status in WEU and an ever-closer relationship with NATO."¹⁹⁹

Smith was not wrong about how the story would pan out. In 1994 Finland joined NATO's new "Partnership for Peace" before becoming an observer in the WEU alongside Austria and Sweden in 1995. But the Finns were never coerced into making these choices; nor were their choices pre-determined. Like the policy of "neutrality" during the Cold War, military "non-alignment" after bipolarity was a device for managing the challenges of the present, not an end in itself. It enabled Finland to manage independently its security interests in the evolving post-Wall world.

Conclusions

Finland's path into the fold of the "institutional West" was long, tortuous, and intimately entwined with the global Cold War.

To be sure, as a British diplomat remarked in autumn 1991, Finland for "all practical purposes" had "always been part of the West."²⁰⁰ This sounded reasonable enough in the transformed climate of that year and considering Finland was an established capitalist democracy. But, as we have seen, it was a retrospective gloss on something more complex and ambivalent. After 1945, the country had been forced to operate within the Soviet-German forcefield, in the grey zone between the Eastern and Western military blocs. Its sovereignty was severely curtailed in 1947-48 by the Paris Peace Treaty and the Soviet-Finnish friendship pact. In this way systemic factors – strategic and juridical – played a significant and limiting role in the conduct of Finnish foreign affairs.

The policy of neutrality (devised to balance against the impact of the FCMA) had served Finns well, but Soviet power remained a potential threat to Finland's existence as an independent, democratic state. Only after this power began to wane and Cold War structures

March 1992, the "Open Skies Treaty" was signed. The Treaty, which entered into force on 1 Jan. 2002, permitted each state-party to conduct short-notice, unarmed, reconnaissance flights over the others' entire territories to collect data on military forces and activities. For the Treaty, see <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/openskies>. See also "Intelligence and Security Implications of the Treaty on Open Skies – Report of the Select Committee on Intelligence United States Senate," 19 May 1993, <https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/publications/10344.pdf>, pp. 1-3. For Finland's input into the Treaty, see Stefan Forss and Päivi Kaukoranta, "Kattava 'Avoimet taivaat'-sopimus allekirjoitettiin äskettäin Etyk-kokouksen yhteydessä," *HS*, 3 April 1992; Stefan Forss, "Memo, 'STYX-projekti, 28.7.1993,' 28 July 1993," – copy of memo shown to author. Cf. Pertti Torstila, "Open Skies ja Suomi – Etykin asevalvontaneuvottelut 1990-1992," *Sotilasajakauslehti*, No. 993 (May 2020), pp. 70-5.

¹⁹⁹ "Smith/HEL emb. to Hurd/FCO, 'Finland: Annual Review for 1992,' 11 Jan. 1993, pt.5," in TNA, FCO 160-316-7.

²⁰⁰ "Letter by Powell/SD to Matthews/WED, 'Future of Fenno-Soviet Relations,' 8 Oct. 1991, pt.2," in TNA, FCO 33-11524.

to crumble, did Finland gain more room for manoeuvre. Even so, it is important to stress that Finland's Cold War policy of restraint was not simply a signifier of weakness, timidity, or even silent submissiveness to the USSR. Rather, in the words of Max Jakobson, it was as an expression of "the sacro-egoism of the nation" underpinned by extreme political patience and self-discipline and a "rejection" of the imputation of "ideological solidarity" with the Soviet Union.²⁰¹

As the East-West conflict faded away, the Finns began to re-assert themselves. Step by step, they seized the political opportunities as they arose – thanks to the European revolutions of 1989, German unification in 1990, and the death of the USSR in 1991. Without abandoning their customary political caution, they pursued the recovery of full sovereignty, following closely on the heels of the reuniting Germans and calmly manoeuvring through the doors that the "winds of change" of 1989 had blown wide open to the West.²⁰²

Constantly adapting to the rapidly changing international circumstances, the Finns went through a process of self-emancipation, leaving behind the constraints imposed by the post-War treaties and by the geopolitical realities of the bipolar order.²⁰³ In 1990, they unilaterally declared the military clauses and references to Germany in the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947 outdated and therefore null and void. Then in 1992 they revoked the Soviet-Finnish FCMA Treaty of 1948 upon signing a new Partnership Treaty with Yeltsin's Russian-Federation (as the Soviet successor state). With the USSR's demise, the Cold War over and old legal limitations removed, a new chapter in Finland's history began.

Helsinki's foreign and security policy had to be continuously recalibrated and reformulated. By lodging their EU membership application in the spring of 1992, Finns started their overt political alignment with the West. This turn was further underlined by Helsinki's parallel pursuit of becoming a "NACC observer" to which NATO members agreed later that summer. The historic change in Finland's international positioning thus became manifest through the reorientation of its *Europapolitik*, previously dominated by its Moscow-centric *Ostpolitik*, to an increasingly active, more overt *Westpolitik*. Herein lay the break with the past.²⁰⁴

The largely unilateral political decisions taken by Finland enabled the country to become an active shaper of both its own and Europe's foreign affairs. Helsinki had to cede some of its newly acquired sovereignty when entering the European Union. But in an ever more globalised world it deemed this voluntary self-curtailment a reasonable price to pay. Not only did membership in Europe's political and economic Union promise continued prosperity; it also granted Finland full participation in European governance, and thereby offered an escape from geopolitical isolation.

If Finland's Cold War position had been unique, so was its transition into the "post-Wall world." Crucially, for all of Finland's optimism about a reuniting Europe – one that under CSCE auspices would be at peace with itself – the seeds of Helsinki's full strategic pivot to

²⁰¹ See fn. 1.

²⁰² George H.W. Bush's quote from his "Remarks at the Welcoming Ceremony in Warsaw," 9 July 1989, American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-welcoming-ceremony-warsaw>.

²⁰³ Stefan Forss and Sam Gardiner, "No Longer a Junior Partner: Thoughts about Nordic Defense and Security," in Magnus Christiansson, ed., *Defence and Security: Festschrift in honour of Tomas Ries* (Stockholm: Swedish Defence University, Jan 2022), pp. 57-80.

²⁰⁴ "AA 205-320.11 FIN, 'Betr: Politischer Halbjahresbericht Finnland; Stand: 1.3.1992,' 12 March 1993, pt.III.1," in PAAA, ZA 178330. Cf. Möttölä, "From Aspiration to Consummation and Transition."

the West were sown at the outset. To be sure, the post-1991 non-alliance policy that grew out of the old neutrality paradigm helped Finland re-affirm its relative security political independence, while trying to pacify and manage a highly volatile post-Soviet Russia. But Finland's solo-push for NACC-observer status and its subsequent entry into the Alliance's Partnership for Peace, indicated a tentative desire to keep the option of full Western security-alignment open, if strategic circumstances were to change for the worse. It did, after all, not go unnoticed that while the Kremlin under CFE and INF treaty provisions did adhere to the agreed conventional and nuclear arms reduction regimes in the heart of Europe, Soviet/Russian military concentrations simultaneously increased in the North. In other words, as the Finns experienced firsthand, the benefits of changing security constellations in one area of the continent did not cancel out the risks in another.

Finnish apprehensions about the evolution of the new Russian Federation proved prescient. In 2022, the Kremlin brought large-scale "war of conquest"²⁰⁵ back to Europe. This was something Finns had experienced first-hand in 1939. Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine broke the European security order as formulated in the 1990 CSCE Paris Charter and killed stone-dead the idea that economic interdependence and close, friendly relations might keep the peace. For the Finns the old maxim rang true: If you want peace, you must prepare for war – or rather, for self-defence, and preferably not alone.

Maximising security in 2022-23 meant exercising their sovereign right, as originally enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act, to freely choose their alliance membership – in this case NATO with its nuclear deterrent. This was Finland's own pragmatic choice in the face of Russian aggression. It was emphatically not the consequence of some American or NATO grand imperial design. Nor did it mark a fundamental departure from the Finnish foreign and security policy that had emerged since 1992. Achieving interoperability with NATO partners and strong national defence capabilities was a policy long in the making. Where geopolitical circumstances did come into play was above all in the sudden massive shift in public mood.

That the Finnish government, following President Sauli Niinistö's outspoken leadership, in spring 2022 was able to take the decision so rapidly to apply for NATO accession was only possible because Russia's War had prompted an unequivocal expression of popular support on an extraordinarily broad societal basis. If from the 1990s through January 2022, Finnish popular support for NATO had steadily hovered at the 20-30 percent mark, while those opposed were between 50-70 percent, the turnaround was striking. Within weeks after the shock of 24 February 2022, backing for NATO had risen to 62 percent. Two months later, it stood at a staggering 76 percent, with a mere 15 percent against joining the Alliance.²⁰⁶ When Europe's post-Wall security architecture shattered, the Finnish people showed extraordinary unity and decisiveness – just as they had done at previous pivotal historical moments. By expressing their clear belief that it was necessary for Finland to adapt its position overnight to the new geostrategic realities, the Finnish nation gave its political leaders a clear mandate to act. Determined to avoid ever again being subsumed into Russia's "sphere of

²⁰⁵ Cf. Tanisha M. Fazal, "The Return of Conquest? Why the Future of Global Order Hinges on Ukraine," *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2022), online, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-04-06/ukraine-russia-war-return-conquest>.

²⁰⁶ Tuomas Forsberg, "Finland and Sweden's Road to NATO," *Current History*, Vol. 122, No. 842 (1 March 2023), pp. 89-94, <https://doi.org/10.1525/curh.2023.122.842.89>.

influence,” Finland, with Sweden following, activated its “NATO option” in summer 2022.²⁰⁷

In April 2023, more than 30 years after first sitting in as a “guest” at the Oslo NACC ministerial meeting, Finns watched their flag being raised at NATO HQ in Brussel. In what seemed a fateful closing of a historical circle, the presiding NATO Secretary General was none other than Jens Stoltenberg, son of Norwegian Foreign Minister Thorvald Stoltenberg, who had invited them to Oslo in 1992.

²⁰⁷ Minna Ålander, “Finland Wants to Use the ‘NATO Option,’” *Point of View*, 27 April 2022, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/finland-wants-to-use-the-nato-option>.