The Idea of a Scandinavian Nation

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The idea of a Scandinavian nation

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Scandinavianism was one of the several ideologies of political unification in the nineteenth-century European nation-building processes. As opposed to the German and Italian movements for the construction of a new nation, the Scandinavian case ended in a nazione mancata, an image of a nation that never was realised. Alternative nationalisms, a Swedish, a Norwegian, and a Danish ultimately won the day.

The German, the Italian and the Scandinavian unification movements wrestled with the question of people’s autonomy, which so massively had been put on the European political agenda by the French Revolution. One of the most important questions was the delimitation of this autonomy. The issue of the external borders of popular sovereignty became crucial in the nation-building processes. Contested border areas and the minority issue made the question of autonomy much more problematic and contentious than theory and the French example suggested. Nation-building in the nineteenth century also meant a clash among imagined nations and military violence. The first culmination of the European question of autonomy was World War I. The second came in the 1930s.

Autonomy was also a question of internal border setting. Who were in and who were out in social and political terms? The social question arose in the 1830s when poverty was identified as a political problem. The question of who belonged to the sovereign people and who was responsible for social peace and integration got a massive answer in the 1930s: the citizens, with their rights, social benefits and duties, based on the concept of a universal citizen, and the nation state.¹

The national and the social question were linked to the nineteenth-century European quest for answers to the issue of people’s sovereignty,
coinciding with the fateful era that began so hopefully and confidently in the 1830s and ran amok in the 1930s. The Scandinavian unification project was part of that development. A key question addresses how it remained orderly as opposed to the German and Italian projects.

As an historical part of the Swedish realm and a Grand Duchy under the Russian Empire from 1809, Finland was in an ambiguous way both part of and excluded from the image of a Scandinavian nation. The core of Scandinavianism was Sweden, Denmark and Norway, and the crucial question was how these kingdoms, once unified in the Kalmar-Union (1397-1521), could merge again, but now as a nation rather than a feudal union.

One important dimension of the German and Italian unifications was the use of military power in collaboration or confrontation with the then great powers of continental Europe, France and the Habsburg Empire. The United Kingdoms of Sweden-Norway, a crown union, and Denmark were small states of weakened military power, looking for ways of absorbing and consolidating what was left after the heavy losses of Finland by Sweden and Norway by Denmark after the Napoleonic wars.

Scandinavianism began as an intellectual movement seeking mentally to come to terms with and consolidate the new status as small states at the European periphery. The answers were found in an escapist construction of a bygone period of greatness, from which mobilising visions for the future could be derived. The new role as small states was digested through memorising past greatness. The new role also promoted efforts to end the long history of wars and hereditary enmity between Sweden and Denmark. The cultural dimension of Scandinavianism emphasised shared experiences and nearness in terms of geography, history, religion and language. A frequent icon of Scandinavianism was the tree with shared roots but with different branches.

From the 1830s onwards, instead of plans for military unification, Scandinavianism provided an interpretative framework for domestic consolidation through an invocation of a glorious past. In Sweden and Denmark after the Napoleonic wars, historic-romantic dreams were formulated in the aesthetics of neo-gothicism. Gothic symbols from the Viking age emphasised the ideal of the free peasant, the _odalbonde_. The Nordic peoples shared an energetic and vigorous antiquity. Neo-gothicism could draw on the Swedish Gothicism which had developed in the seventeenth century to legitimate Sweden’s military power histori-
cally, and on Danish eighteenth-century patriotism with an interest in the Danish antiquity. In seventeenth-century Sweden, the Nordic past was Swedish and in eighteenth-century Denmark it was Danish. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Nordic past became Nordic or Scandinavian. The national ideas involved in Romanticism reinforced feelings of a Nordic/Scandinavian kinship.

An event that attracted much attention as an expression of Nordic/Scandinavian idealism was the crowning of the Danish writer Adam Oehlenschläger by the Swedish bishop and poet Esaias Tegner with a laurel wreath in the cathedral of Lund in 1829 in recognition of Oehlenschläger’s contribution to Scandinavian poetry. This event has often been seen as the starting point for Scandinavianism.

The Scandinavianist movement emerged in culture, literature, art and academic reflection. In particular, the movement had an academic core in professors, lecturers, students and literary men around the universities in Copenhagen, Lund and, somewhat later, Uppsala. Later the movement also won adherents in Stockholm and Christiania, the capitals of the united kingdoms. Support in the Norwegian capital was somewhat hesitant. After 300 years as part of Denmark, Norway was recognised as an autonomous state and united with Sweden in 1814. The king was the same, but he was King of Sweden and King of Norway, not King of the Union, which the Norwegian opinion moulders were keen to emphasise. As opposed to Sweden and Denmark, the task for the Norwegian elite was to construct both a nation and a state. Scandinavia was not seen so much in opposition to as secondary to Norway. The Norwegian nation was at most seen as part of a larger Scandinavian nation, while in Sweden and Denmark the constructors and carriers of Scandinavianism, that is, the academic elites, rather imagined Scandinavia as a new nation in some kind of organic unification with the old ones. Because Norwegian patriotic nationalism of the 1830s and early 1840s sought a national position of its own between the Danish past and the Swedish future, Scandinavianism was from the beginning mainly Swedish and Danish.

In addition to the new small-state status, the movement was also able to draw on contemporary technical innovations, such as steam ships and newspaper presses, which facilitated communications and cultural and personal exchanges.

Academic meetings, studentmöten, for Nordic unity began in 1839. Flaming in nature, four science research meetings were held between 1839

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and 1844. The Danish clergyman and peoples educator N.F.S. Grundtvig
suggested the establishment of an internordic university based on ancient Nordic
values in opposition to the existing universities which were caricatured as
radiating scholastic Latin domination. The Liberal dimension was most
pronounced among the Scandinavianists in Sweden, where the Conservatives
harboured distrust in the Scandinavianist student politics as dangerous, while
the Danish debate was dominated by the national question around the southern
border with German speakers. Swedish public opinion was being moulded by
such key figures as O.P. Sturzen-Becker (Orvar Odd), Emil Key, August
Sohlman and Gunnar Hylten-Cavallius, making Scandinavianist propaganda
much more forceful in Sweden than in Norway. Still, at the student meeting in
Copenhagen 1845 many of the participants also came from Christiania. They had
been mobilised by the Grundtvig-inspired theologian Eilert Sundt, who was
aglow with 'the belief in a living Nordic spirit! In his keynote address Orla
Lehmann, the Danish National Liberal protagonist, declared in a panegyric
phrase typical of the period that his fatherland was the triune Norden. The
climax came when the participants took their oath of allegiance.3

Despite Norwegian participation it was clear, however, that the commitment
for Scandinavianism was higher in Sweden and Denmark. In Norway the
national issue was rather connected to the claims for increased autonomy in
the union with Sweden. Therefore, the national issue was seen in terms of a
demarcation to Sweden and Denmark, working centrifugally in relation to
Scandinavianism. Norwegian interest in Scandinavianism increased somewhat
during the 1840s when relations in the Union were marked by detente. The
Scandinavianist rhetoric connected to liberal ideology about people's autonomy.
In the lofty language typical for the period, a contemporary Scandinavianist saw
the movement as 'a protest of the peoples against the erratic and outraging
politics of rulers disposing of the destinies of the nations'. As against the
artificial system of realms that had been added to by the swords of conquerors,
he emphasised the strivings of the nations to group together into natural
families.4

In such statements we can find the reasons for the initial rejection of
Scandinavianism by the Swedish Bernadotte dynasty. Charles XIV John had
shaped the United Kingdoms with his sword in the war against Napoleon after
striking a deal with Tsar Alexander in 1812 to go for

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Norway with Russian support in exchange for recognition of the Russian conquest of Finland in 1809. Moreover, radical Liberals saw Russia as a case of dark reaction and repression. The Scandinavianism of the young student politicians was radically oppositional and turned against the regime of Charles John not least because of his Russian orientation, which was seen as a kind of unification with the Evil. The Scandinavianists initially found like-minded colleagues among young German Liberals who saw guaranteed success in Hegel's concept of history and in its emphasis on the Zeitgeist. As a part of the Weltgeist, the Zeitgeist was on their side in the unrelenting development towards the final victory of Reason. It went without saying that the resistance to the deployment of the World Spirit came from the East. Russia was the greatest obstacle to a Liberal constitutional development. The Swedish students and academic teachers hoped one day to be able to liberate Finland.

The National Liberals in Sweden, and even more so in Denmark, also objected to the despotic absolutism in Prussia. The image of a peaceful Scandinavia surrounded by dangerous hostile powers was depicted and propagated. Liberation would come with national autonomy, that is, through the sovereignty of the peoples. The great moment came with the European revolt in 1848.

However, ironically the great moment also proved an early climax of the movement. National autonomy was propagated all over Europe. The proud rhetoric of autonomy and unity concealed a huge problem of defining the borders of the autonomy. The unsolved question was what demarcated the nation. Since the political thoughts of Johann Gottfried Herder and Johann Gottlieb Fichte around 1800, in response to the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, the standard criteria for demarcation were language and ethnicity. The test case in Scandinavia was the border between Denmark and the German-speaking territories. The two duchies of Schleswig and Holstein belonged historically to the Danish realm. In Holstein the population was German-speaking, while in Schleswig the main languages were German and Danish. The river Eider was the southern border of Schleswig. With their slogan of ‘Scandinavia to the Eider’, the Danish National Liberals argued that Holstein belonged to the German League whereas Schleswig was Danish. They gave up the German-speaking Holstein but not the German-speaking southern part of Schleswig, colliding with the German National Liberals head-on, who also claimed Schleswig as theirs.

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In Denmark a National Liberal government was appointed in 1848 in the wake of the February Revolution in France. Another framework factor was the death of the Danish King Christian VIII in January 1848, which marked the end of the absolutist regime established in 1660. The new King Fredrik VII appointed a constitutional National Liberal government with a programme that contained not only a constitutional reform in a democratising direction in contrast to the old absolutism, but also the establishment of a linguistically/ethnically homogeneous nation. The total incorporation of Schleswig in the Danish state was proclaimed. This was the Eider politics. However, as already mentioned, the Eider was not a language boundary but rather the border between two duchies with origins in medieval princely territorial politics. Therefore, the Eider as a border became controversial in view of the nineteenth-century interest in demarcation according to language and ethnicity. Neither the Danish nor the German National Liberals wanted to draw any conclusions of their own political propaganda and divide Schleswig by the language border. Rather, both wanted the whole of Schleswig. The German-speaking popular uprising in Holstein and Schleswig, which as duchies belonged to the Danish crown without being integrated parts of Denmark, was linked to the February and March Revolutions in the Europe of 1848. The uprising aimed at a political programme for the new Danish constitutional National Liberal government. Prussia as well as the German national assembly in Frankfurt supported the uprising. In the war that ultimately followed, Jutland was invaded by German troops. Fredrik VII appealed to King Oscar I of the United Kingdoms of Sweden and Norway, who abandoned the neutrality policy of his father and intervened on Denmark's side. When he succeeded Charles John in 1844, the progressive Liberals in Sweden had high hopes that through domestic social and political reforms he would bring to an end the conservative politics of the first Bernadotte. However, the continental revolutions frightened him as they did all other European rulers, too. In abandoning the neutral policies, he channelled the domestic reform expectations towards foreign political activism.5

The European National Liberal co-operation project against royal despotism and absolutism and for popular sovereignty broke down, when Prussia attacked Denmark, making effective use of nationalistic rhetorics. The Liberal project against princely power then turned into a rhetorical weapon in the hands of the princes themselves. The Prussian
attack on Denmark in 1848 laid bare the limits of Scandinavianism in its early form. The time had come for the Swedish-Norwegian kings to take over from the students and professors. The student movement became a dynastic movement.

The student meeting scheduled for Christiania 1848 had to be postponed because of the Prussian war of aggression on Denmark. It was finally held in 1851. In the shadow of the Danish defeat the signature tune was a deep contempt for the German and an ovation to a Nordic nation. Now Scandinavianism was no longer feared by the Bernadottes as a radical and subversive movement. The Danish participants were allowed to use the royal steam ship to travel to Christiania, and at the next student meeting in Uppsala in 1856 Oscar I and Queen Josephine received the participants. This was quite a different situation from the previous meeting in Uppsala in 1843, when Charles John had marked his distance to the movement, and 1844, when Oscar I had the Rector of Uppsala University appeal to the students not to travel to the student meeting of that year. Formally, this was because of the death of Charles XIV John, but in reality it had more to do with consideration to the relationships with Russia.

Scandinavianism became a lever against the Russian policy of Charles John from 1812, confirmed again through the neutrality declaration of 1834 in the face of imminent conflict between Russia and Britain. The initiative by Oscar I to support Denmark when the German nationalists in the Duchies revolted, gave Scandinavianism a new military political content which emphasised the demarcation between the Scandinavian and the German. The Crimean War 1853-1856 provided new possibilities to stress the demarcation to Russia. War approaching, Oscar I saw possibilities to change the foreign political course. In July 1853 the Swedish and Danish governments started negotiations on identical and simultaneous declarations of neutrality if, as expected, war should break out between Russia and the allied Western powers Britain and France. The negotiations resulted in an agreement in December. The neutrality formula contained various political possibilities. Sweden's neutrality was pro-Western, growing ever more hostile towards Russia during the war and assuming an increased activism for Finland. In Denmark, however, there was considerable support for a pro-Russian neutrality, not least because the government was no longer National Liberal but Conservative in the wake of the Danish defeat in the war against

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Prussia. Also, Denmark received Russian support for a border policy in the south that maintained also Holstein as part of the realm as opposed to the National Liberal Eider policy. After the November Treaty in 1855, where Britain and France guaranteed the neutrality of Sweden-Norway, pro-Finnish activism blossomed out. Scandinavianism gained a more Nordic profile and now had room also for Finland. Swedish activism in the East stretched the Swedish-Danish relations, but they were restored when at the beginning of the 1860s the National Liberals were back in the Danish government. The fact that the Danish king Fredrik VII was childless made the succession question topical. Charles XV saw himself not only as king of the United Kingdoms of Sweden and Norway but also of Denmark. His objective became to unify the Scandinavian countries with or without Finland under one crown, that of the Bernadotte dynasty. At a royal drinking-bout of Charles and Fredrik in July 1863, Charles pledged Swedish and Norwegian military support in the expected new war with Prussia, which was now much stronger militarily and politically than 15 years earlier. War was a much riskier venture for the Swedish and Norwegian kingdoms than in 1848. This the governments realised much better than the king. The governments intervened in order to hold back the royal horses. The Danish National Liberal government had taken Charles's promise of military support at face value, and relying on the Scandinavian solidarity they challenged Prussia and Bismarck with a new constitution in support of the Eider policy. They realised too late that there was little substance in the royal promise. Denmark had to face the second war with Prussia alone. The outcome could only be one. The despair at the Danes’ fight of destiny was deeply felt, and for many the Swedish-Norwegian lack of support on Denmark’s southern border was a death blow to the Scandinavianist movement.

The Scandinavian Society in Christiania was the seat of the Union adherents in Norway. The Society had been established in May 1864 in order to strengthen solidarity with Denmark, working to consolidate and expand the crown union with Sweden into a federation. This was the preferred option over a confederation including Denmark. Around 1864 there was little contention about the programme. Somewhat later, after the Danish defeat, historian Ernst Sars launched a violent attack on Nordic activism on the southern border and against ‘amalgamation’, i.e. a Swedish-Norwegian merger in a federative direction. ‘Amalgamation’ alluded to the anti-Swedish feelings after 1814 when the fear was con-

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considerable that Sweden would enforce an amalgamation between the two kingdoms.

Ernst Sars and the Norwegian liberals had found the weakest point of their political antagonist, the conservatives who were loyal to the King and the Union with Sweden: the conservatives depended wholly on the King. The political left in Sweden had certainly the same view on the government's royal dependence, but as opposed to the Norwegian adherents of more democracy they could not argue that the King represented foreign interests. In Norway, it was precisely as an instrument of foreign interests that royal power could be depicted. The critique of Sars of the dynastic form that Scandinavianism had taken won strong support in the minds of those who had been frightened by foreign political activism. In the political campaign of Venstre the King as well as Scandinavianism connoted Swedishness. Norwegian nationalism got a more pronounced anti-Swedish profile than earlier when it had had domestic modernisation as its aim.

The tectonic power shift on the European continent in 1871, when a unified Germany defeated France, fundamentally changed the preconditions for Scandinavianist rhetoric. It was not so much 1864 with the Prussian victory over Denmark, but rather 1871 with the German triumph over France that was the decisive turning point: Scandinavianism collapsed definitely as a dynastic dream. Although 1864 was a hard blow to their reverie of a Scandinavian throne, the Bernadottes continued to cherish hopes in the plan and in French support of it. The Bernadotte dynasty was borne in opposition to Napoleons European politics but invested to the very last its expectations in the second Napoleonic restoration in response to 1848. Charles XV was confident about French victory over Prussia. In 1871, however, the royal family and all responsible politicians had to realise that the new point of reference was Germany. Small-state politics in the shadow of the big powers had become too dangerous. In the end no Swede was any longer prepared to die for Denmark in a war against the German Reich and no Dane was prepared to die for Sweden against Russia.

The disintegrating trend continued in the economic depression in the 1870s and 1880s. Dynastic Scandinavianism had passed away in Sweden in 1871, giving rise to a chauvinistic nationalism which preferred Sweden's historical interests in the East to the Union with Norway. This Swedish chauvinistic nationalism developed interactive dynamics with
Norwegian anti-unionism and no less chauvinistic nationalism. The two nationalisms reinforced one another and worked centrifugally on the royal attempts of keeping the union together. Scandinavianism as a political programme in the old sense became ever more irrelevant. The next step in this negative spiral came after 1885, when Swedish nationalism - as nationalism in Germany, too - gave in to protectionism in the economic crisis and adopted an even more reactionary language, which radicalised Norwegian nationalism even further.

The long economic crisis from the 1870s and the subsequent contentious question of protectionism or free trade as the proper response brought the social question, on the agenda since the 1830s, more massively to the centre of political debate. The socialist labour movement was increasingly perceived by the ruling classes as a threat that required a solution. Theoretically, leftist co-operation could have been an alternative in the United Kingdoms of Sweden and Norway with spreading effects to Denmark. However, the Norwegian left did not find this option particularly attractive given the relative weakness of the Swedish left. Theoretically, conservative co-operation to ward off socialist threat could have been conceived. However, in the disintegrating spiral of the two nationalisms, Union institutions never emerged where the social issue could be confronted and the protests be integrated, such as a Union Parliament. An expanding conviction to the right of the labour movement was that the political struggle about the union with Sweden had to be solved in order to concentrate all energy on the socialist threat. The union was used as a mobilising question for the political non-socialist left, depicting Sweden not as a partner but as a foreign intruder on Norwegian autonomy. The solution was the dissolution of the Union.6

Post-1890s politics towards the dissolution of the Union of Sweden-Norway had impacts on the Scandinavian project of co-operation. Domestic consolidation in response to the question of autonomy, defined in terms of both external territorial and internal social borders, was sought in the nation understood not as Scandinavia but as Sweden, Norway and Denmark. The growing Russian grip over Finland from the 1890s, in response to the German power deployment in the Baltic area under the new Emperor Wilhelm II, further undermined the idea of a Scandinavian or Nordic unity.

However, in a contradictory way, the growth of the perceived threats in the East and in the South also promoted new ideas about Scandinavian
co-operation. Many in Sweden questioned the aim of Russia’s new politics in Finland. Was it the beginning of a Russian military attack on the United Kingdoms? As in the years around 1850 and at the beginning of the 1860s, when images of Russian and Prussian threats against Scandinavia were constructed, the imagination of a Russian threat at the end of the 1890s led to thoughts of Scandinavian co-operation. Such thoughts were reinforced through the pragmatic Scandinavian collaboration which emerged in the 1880s and 1890s in response to the collapse of political Scandinavianism. Practical Scandinavianism became a kind of counter-movement to the centrifugal forces triggered by the economic crisis and the increasingly nationalistic rhetoric in Sweden and Norway. The ambitions by the Scandinavian industry and business as well as by the labour movements of developing inter-Scandinavian networks and regular meetings were central in the new pragmatic Scandinavianism. The Swedish Social Democratic leader Hjalmar Branting argued for a future union of the Scandinavian peoples as opposed to the crown union of Sweden and Norway. Serious proposals about a Scandinavian customs union were made, although with small prospects for success given the economic crisis. The first Nordic academic meeting since 1875 was held in 1896. The break-through for neo-Scandinavianism came in 1899. The renaissance in Scandinavian fiction quite obviously must be seen against the backdrop of Russian politics in Finland, but also in the light of the brutalisation of German minority politics among the Danish-speaking population in northern Schleswig. In the spring of 1899 *Nordisk Forening* was established in Copenhagen with Poul La Cour as its first president. He repeatedly emphasised the apolitical character of the association. However, the Nordic Association was to a considerable degree political in arguing that a threatened people could defend itself with other means than bullets and gunpowder. The Scandinavian peoples should mobilise mutual support and help for moral reinforcement and passive resistance against external violence. However, numerous adherents of the new Scandinavianist movement considered cultural co-operation just a step towards military collaboration. Scandinavian co-operation was for some politics with a close connection to Germany, as a support against Russia, while for others it meant the rejection of any thought of dealings with the Great Powers.7

In this neo-Scandinavianist framework the liberal Adolf Hedin moved for Nordic permanent neutrality in the Swedish parliament in

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1899. The proposal won the support of a strong minority in the second chamber but was ultimately rejected. Hedin made a new attempt in 1902, which also was in vain, however. The idea about the neutralisation of Scandinavia was not new. In 1883 motions about negotiating with foreign powers on permanent neutrality had been proposed in the Swedish parliament. In the same year the Swedish Peace and Arbitration Association was established. Hedin was an adherent of strong military defence. His neo-Scandinavianist programme aimed at reinforcing military defence against external enemies through a combination of neutrality policy and domestic social reforms. Defence emerged in his view as a ‘universal peoples interest’. Whether his Nordic neutrality would include an obligation of mutual support against foreign aggression was unclear.

However, Adolf Hedin’s Scandinavian/Nordic neutrality motions in 1899 and 1902 also drew on a vivid neo-Scandinavianist debate, which at the turn of the century had pacifist leanings. His proposals also connected to a similar debate in Norway at the time with Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson as protagonist. The neo-Scandinavianism around 1900 can be seen as a democratic alternative to the royal dynastic Scandinavianism of the 1850s and 1860s. It was not about being a totally new and different alternative. Through Hedin’s emphasis on military defence, although opposed by many influential bodies, there was a line of continuity from the 1850s and 1860s. Apprehensions of foreign aggression for Hedin were directed toward Germany as much as Russia. His aim was not least a constitutional binding of royal foreign politics with its German orientation. He had some ground for his anxiety. Wilhelm II was aspiring to a close connection with Sweden-Norway as part of German security politics. In a handwritten comment on one of the dispatches from the German Minister in Stockholm the Emperor wrote: ‘Es muss ein Zollverein geschaffen werden und es [Sweden] so zum Bundesstaat herübergezogen werden’ [A customs union should be created, and Sweden thereby made into a federal state].

Neo-Scandinavianism experienced a short heyday but could not prevent the final triumph in 1905 of the forces working for the dissolution of the Union Sweden-Norway. At the liquidation of the Union the preconditions of Scandinavian co-operation changed dramatically. They changed again with the outbreak of World War I but now in a unifying direction.

The picture of the attempts at Nordic co-operation in a long historical perspective is one of undulating movement with developments in
the surrounding world as an impelling force. During World War I the Scandinavian kings and prime and foreign ministers met several times to consider the situation of the three countries. The Soviet Union and Germany were weakened after the war, which had an effect on the waning Scandinavian co-operation, or, more correctly, Nordic co-operation, as Finland had by now gained its independence. During the 1920s Finland was more oriented towards the Baltic states than towards Scandinavia. Ministerial meetings among the Scandinavian leaders were no longer as frequent. The 1930s again leaned toward more intensified co-operation.

After Hitler’s *Machtergreifung* in 1933, the Danish Premier Stauning suggested a Nordic defence treaty. In 1934 the Finnish government of Kivimäki said that it favoured a Nordic neutrality policy. The Nordic orientation was an attempt to avoid becoming entrapped in a Russian-German encounter. The Russian envoy Assmus had told the Finnish Premier that the Soviet Union, if threatened by Germany, might have to occupy parts of Finland for security reasons. Through disengagement from Germany and drawing closer to the Nordic countries, Finland hoped to convince the Soviet Union of the genuine character of its neutrality policy. As a consequence of the Finnish orientation towards the Nordic area, deliberations were initiated on common Finnish-Swedish defence of the demilitarised Aland Islands in the Baltic.

However, as external forces had driven the Nordic countries together, so external forces split them again. Neither Hitler nor Stalin wanted Nordic co-operation. In 1937 Stauning abandoned his earlier view, stating that Denmark was no longer prepared to be a watch-dog at the southern border of the Nordic countries. When the USSR in 1939 vetoed the Aland Plan, this was dropped. Plans for a Scandinavian defence union in 1948-1949 failed, and in any case, Finland was still under strong Soviet control and was ruled out as a participant in these deliberations. Negotiations about the Nordic customs union, where Finland was involved from 1956, fell through in 1947-1959, and the Nordek Plan for a Nordic common market around 1970 came to little. These are the three post-World War II examples of how attempts of creating Nordic co-operation in more organised and institutionalised forms have failed. The defence union talks broke down when Sweden could not accept it as a link with Western military co-operation but wanted to see it as an alternative. Instead of joining a Nordic customs union, the Nordic countries became members of the European Free Trade Association in the wake of Great Britain.

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The Nordek Plan failed dramatically when it became clear that the Soviet Union objected to Finnish participation. The post-1945 plans for Nordic governmental co-operation were all dependent on developments in the wider world.

Concurring with these ups and downs there was an intensification not only of pragmatic collaboration, as was evident in the long-standing co-operation between the Scandinavian voluntary associations after 1864/1871, but also of institutionalised government co-operation in areas which have involved concern for third countries to a much smaller extent than in the failed plans. Examples of such institutionalised pragmatism, or, as today's EU language would put it, of an open method of co-ordination, include the Nordic passport union, the Nordic labour market and the Nordiska Rådet, and an interparliamentary assembly of the 1950s; the Helsinki Treaty in 1962 on intensified juridical, cultural, social, economic, transport and communications co-operation; and the establishment of the Nordic Council of Ministers as an institutionalised forum for regular contacts between the Nordic governments in 1971. This establishment of Nordic co-operation in softer policy areas can be seen as a response to the three spectacular failures in the harder policy areas, as attempts to gloss over the flops.

Scandinavianism as a hard political project was problematic after 1871. Repeated attempts at hard military, political and economic market co-operation all failed. The attempts to build a guarantee against threatening forces in the surrounding world, whether seen in military or economic terms, collapsed under the very pressures of these forces. Scandinavianism as a strong identity language died after 1871, but what stayed alive was the idea of a kind of Scandinavian community of destiny, and from 1918 onwards, a Nordic community, although in more vague and pragmatic forms. The idea of a Scandinavian nation disappeared but not the idea of specific Scandinavian/Nordic nearness, which sometimes comes close to the idea of a special community of destiny, and almost always has implied ideas of institutionalised cultural, political and economic co-operation.

The ideology of a Scandinavian nation was dead in 1871 if not earlier. The erosion began in 1864. However, Scandinavianism as an ideology for a special affinity between the peoples in the North continued. It did not result in strong political agreements and institutions, but in a civil society where voluntary associations co-operated and developed
networks, and images of a Scandinavian civil society emerged. Indirectly, Scandinavianism as an idea and as a programme was an important influence during the second half of the nineteenth century. The more precise extent and signification of Scandinavianism after 1871 is under-investigated, however. It can be argued that the networks of civil servants, teachers, artists, authors, painters, scientists, lawyers, economists, statisticians, historians, business associations and trade unions operating through meetings and journals were much more successful than the fanciful and visionary political projects because their targets were narrower, more focused, and more realistic. From the Scandinavian core this pragmatic co-operation expanded to Finland and Iceland. The pragmatic cooperation at its point of departure in the 1860s was closely connected to Scandinavianism as an ideology and as a movement, although the movement followed its own logic under the impact of international developments. A Scandinavian communication community and public sphere emerged within various networks and contributed to the feelings of belonging.

Pragmatism does not necessarily mean a lack of projects, principles or political leadership. On the contrary, such qualities are rather the pre-conditions for the legitimacy of pragmatism. These qualities all existed in the Nordic pragmatism.

Is a strong identity necessary for political legitimisation? Is the nation state the exclusive arena for political problem resolution?

The obvious answer to these questions is provided by the Nordic case. The question is whether these experiences have something to tell us today in the European scenario. In the absence of a clear answer there are nevertheless good reasons to view pragmatism as an alternative to identity politics.

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4. Ibid p. 17.


