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# A 'SECRET ALLIANCE' OR 'FREEDOM FROM ANY ALLIANCES'? NATO ACCESSION DEBATE IN SWEDEN AND FINLAND, 1991–2016

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*The authors analyze the NATO relations with Sweden and Finland, the neutral states of Northern Europe, in 1991–2016. The authors emphasize that Finland and Sweden have always been of high strategic importance for NATO and the EU defence policy. The authors investigate the main areas of cooperation between NATO and the non-aligned countries of Northern Europe and describe the prerequisites, prospects and possible consequences of Sweden and Finland's membership in NATO. Special attention is paid to the evolution of the policy of neutrality of these countries before and after their accession to the European Union. The aim of this research is to assess the evolution of political views of Sweden and Finland on the development and implementation of the policy of neutrality in 1991–2016. To achieve this goal, the authors use comparative analysis to explore the stance of the governments of Sweden and Finland on the cooperation with NATO or membership in it. The authors reflect on the concepts of "Finlandization", "freedom from alliances", "neutrality" and "secret alliance", which are often used in academic descriptions of the evolution of the position of both countries towards NATO. The authors hold that Finland and Sweden may become NATO members only if there is a direct threat to their security. Russian politics in the region may provoke them to take such a step. A referendum on joining the bloc seems to be highly unlikely; even though after the Crimean events, the number of NATO supporters in the two countries increased, they remained a minority. The authors conclude that both countries are involved in a "creeping" integration with NATO after they have become actors of the EU defence strategy. There is a minimum probability of Sweden and Finland becoming full members of the Alliance. However, the traditional policy of neutrality of both countries is often compromised, particularly towards Russia.*

**Keywords:**

neutrality, Finlandization, preventive diplomacy, NATO, EU

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## **Introduction**

Sweden and Finland have been playing a special role in complex interaction mechanism between NATO and neutral states. Both countries hold an important military and strategic position. Sweden controls the major part of the Baltic sea western coast, connecting Norway and Denmark, and together with the latter controlling the exit from the Baltic to the Northern sea. Finland, spanning 1265 km from south to north along the Russian border, controls the northern shore of the Gulf of Finland. While remaining outside the NATO structures, both states interact with the Alliance actively on various issues, e.g. military and intelligence information exchange, peacekeeping operations, including enterprises under the UN auspices. In this way the two countries contribute to NATO activities, particularly those held along the northern frontiers of Russia, despite being formally free from any alliances.

The purpose of the paper is to reveal grounds for Sweden and Finland to join NATO that emerged between 1991 and 2016. The issue first appeared on the agenda after their acceptance to the EU and admission of the nearby Baltic states to NATO in 2004. As the result of these two events, Sweden and Finland have tight contacts with their neighbors who are included into the Alliance, follow the EU joint security and foreign policy and are involved in the united European defense area for the US and Canadian allies.

## **Methodology and methods**

“The main condition for preserving stability in Northern Europe is Swedish and Finnish non-alignment to military alliances” is a dominating thesis in Russian political thought and historiography towards the issue [1, p. 71]. This persistent opinion makes an independent survey of the non-alignment policy largely impossible. Over the last few years, especially after Crimea merged into Russia, numerous critical articles have appeared regarding the tentative admission of Sweden and Finland to NATO<sup>1</sup>. Nonetheless, the issue remains a subject for debate and a topic for academic inquiry, as demonstrated by the present research.

Sweden and Finland have a long history of relations with Russia in various forms. Of these, the military factor remained one of the crucial ones, as it was

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<sup>1</sup> Hasselbach, K., Alekseeva, Yu. Finlandia i Shvecija stremyatsya bolee tesno sotrudnichat' s NATO [Finland and Sweden towards closer cooperation with NATO] // Deutsche Welle. 31.08.2014. URL: <https://www.dw.com/ru/финляндия-и-швеция-стремятся-более-тесно-сотрудничать-с-нато/a-17890512> (access date: 12.02.2020) (in Russ.); Sergey Shoigu poobeshal otvetit' na vtyagivanie Finlandii i Shvecii v NATO [Sergey Shoigu promised a response towards the Swedish and Finnish NATO pull] // Kommersant. 24.07.2018. URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3695400> (access date: 12.02.2020) (in Russ.); Gritzai, Yu. Finlandia, Shvecija i SShA ukreplajut voennoe sotrudnichestvo [Finland, Sweden and the US to strengthen military cooperation] // Kommersant. 09.05.2018. URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3623863> (access date: 12.02.2020) (in Russ.)

connected with geopolitical interests of Sweden, Russia, and, as of 1917, Finland, as well as with interests of third parties, such as France, Great Britain, Germany, and the USA. It created tension in Europe and brought the situation closer to a conflict. As a result of its struggle with Russia, Denmark and Prussia, by 1721 Sweden had lost both its dominating role and unilateral control over the Baltic sea. Stockholm had ceased to be one of the key players in the Baltic area in 1808 with the loss of Finland and lost even more of its power in 1905, when the Swedish-Norwegian union collapsed.

Sweden remained neutral during both World wars with significant concessions in favor of Germany, especially when it came to trade in strategic minerals and military transit via Lapland, which made Swedish foreign policy a subject to criticism both within the country and abroad. After the attempt to create a Scandinavian Defense Union under the Swedish leadership with the participation of Norway and Denmark failed in late 1940-s due to the admission of Oslo and Copenhagen into NATO, the country became formally “free of alliances”. This concept and its synonym, “neutrality”, are widely used in both academic and political discussions to describe Swedish relation towards military blocs. To maintain its independent status and fighting capacity of its armed forces, the country invested heavily into its military production facilities during the Cold War [2]. *De facto*, Sweden assisted NATO in intelligence information exchange in the Baltic sea area and facilitated defense cooperation with Denmark and Norway. After the end of the Cold War Stockholm cut its armed forces and military production, and enhanced cooperation with NATO within the information exchange and the Partnership for Peace program.

After gaining its sovereignty in 1917 and until 1947, Finland had a long-lasting conflict with the USSR due to territorial tensions, which included a threat to Leningrad from Finnish invasion and a possibility of closing the entrance to Gulf of Finland for Soviet vessels. Both countries developed a hostile image of its neighbor. These tensions led to the “Winter war” of the 1939-1940 and to Finnish participation in the war against the USSR on German side in 1941—1944. The contemporary Russian-Finnish border was established as the outcome of these conflicts. Finland was also to fulfill a number of obligations towards the Soviet Union, including those in the sphere of defense policy. Thus, Soviet troops were now stationed in Porkkala-Udd military base, a situation which lasted until 1956, when the peninsula once became Finnish sovereign territory and the troops had to leave the area. The ensuing military and defense cooperation between the two countries took the form of information exchange and Soviet military exports to Finland. Bilateral trade experienced a rapid growth, having at one point reached 25% of all Finnish foreign trade [3], with bilateral cooperation in education, culture, youth exchange and twin cities programs [4] in tow. All of those forms of cooperation continued to grow after 1991, now with the Russian Federation. Experts and politicians have dubbed such a model of interaction “Finlandization”, thus defining a country formally free of alliances that gets sucked into cooperation with a superpower — leader of an opposing bloc.

While this topic is studied from a variety of perspectives, it remains highly politicized. Since 1945 until now, the “freedom of alliances” of Sweden and Finland would usually be studied separately due to differences in historical experience of these countries and the peculiarities of their cooperation with superpowers. Thus, Sweden was known for its tight cooperation with Germany during the Second World War, and Finland had vast political obligations to one of the superpowers and extensive economic cooperation with it, now referred to as “finlandization”. Comparative studies of the two countries in this respect are a recent trend.

At present we can consider two approaches as prevailing towards the subject. The first one, presented by M. Holmström in his book *Hidden Alliance: secret bounds between Sweden and NATO* [20], defines the Swedish bounds with the Alliance as a high level of integration into NATO structures even without formal membership. K. Korhonen uses the same approach towards Finland in his work *A Transfer Treaty. In This Way Finland is Being Dragged* [15], so do I. Novikova and N. Mezhevich [19]. The similarity is that all of them recognize the status of both countries as a “creeping integration” into NATO, reaching its highest possible level outside the formal membership in the bloc. The second approach stresses regional cooperation between two countries and their neighbors in defense policy regardless of the bloc affiliation, while maintaining that both countries preserve the “freedom of alliances”. The advocates of this approach include G. Åselius, H. Ojanen, J. Tarkka, T. Forsberg [2; 8; 13; 18]. These studies can also be framed as security culture analysis in defense strategy, connections with the certain partners, or regionalism in international policy of a country. The proponents of this approach often position their work as analysis applicable for adjusting the governmental course in the case. U. Möller and U. Bjergeld refer to “post-neutrality” concept as an evolving one, including a dynamic formal non-alignment strategy that is a subject to regular ‘revisits’ for political and ideological purposes [16].

## **Results and discussion**

Discussions on the alignment of Sweden and Finland to NATO began in the early 1990s. After the reunification of Germany in autumn of 1990, the Finnish government announced that the Peace Treaty articles of 1947 concerning obligations of the country to repel German aggression lost their force. In addition, Finland now considered itself free from military and technical restrictions stipulated by the Treaty. On January, 20 1992<sup>2</sup> the Russian Federation and Finland signed an agreement replacing the former Treaty on friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the Republic of Finland originally signed on April 6, 1948 [5]. In accordance with the new agreement, Finland was free to enter any political or military alliance with a third party [6, p. 206]. The “third party” war revealed shortly afterwards: in his speech in

<sup>2</sup> Kuchinskaya, M. Kuda idut byvshie “Evroneutrali” (na primere Shveciji i Finlandii) [Where do former Euroneutrals go: the case of Finland and Sweden]. URL: <https://riss.ru/images/pdf/journal/2012/6/10.pdf> (access date:26.09.2018) (in Russ.).

May of 1992, the Finnish Prime Minister Esko Aho emphasized the historical significance of NATO as a security guarantor for Denmark and Norway [8], which signaled the policy change towards NATO from Finnish perspective.

Still, both Finland and Sweden maintain their official military non-alignment policies, which is explained, first of all, by geopolitical factors, namely by territorial proximity to Russia and, accordingly, by heightened sensitivity to Russian take on the matter<sup>3</sup>.

The fact that NATO aims included crisis management and partnership development with other countries made an impact to the approaches of Sweden and Finland towards their relations with the bloc. It correlated with the foreign policy objectives in both countries, which started to implement preventive diplomacy approach. In 1992 both countries became observers at the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), which was later transformed into the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC). They also joined the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program<sup>4</sup>. Both Finland and Sweden participated in NATO operation aimed to implement the Dayton Agreements on Bosnia, and later in the Stabilization Force (SFOR)<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, both countries contributed to including Russia and the Baltic States in activities within the “Partnership for Peace” framework. Being more interested in stable relations with its Eastern neighbor, Finland, in contrast to Sweden, has been more active in lobbying Russia’s interests, in particular within the framework of the above-mentioned program.

In Sweden, the need to revise the basic principles of foreign policy in the new international relations became a subject of active discussion in 1991, when Carl Bildt government came into power. The question of maintaining traditional neutrality in the foreign policy appeared on the agenda. Carl Bildt and leaders of the Christian Democratic party (*Kristdemokraterna*) and People’s liberal party (*Folkpartiet — liberalerna*) believed that the country should abandon its neutral status [9]. Anders Björck, the then Minister of Defense, argued that the country needed this to maintain the appropriate level of national security in the face of the planned cuts to military spending<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Valtioneuvoston ulko- ja turvallisuuspoliittinen selonteko [Government report on foreign and security policies] 2016. URL: [http://valtioneuvosto.fi/documents/10616/1986338/VNKJ072016\\_fi.pdf/9a3a074a-d97f-43c4-a1d8-e3ddb8d8d1da](http://valtioneuvosto.fi/documents/10616/1986338/VNKJ072016_fi.pdf/9a3a074a-d97f-43c4-a1d8-e3ddb8d8d1da) (access date: 22.11.2019); Bringéus K., Eriksson C.M. Säkerhet i ny tid. Betänkande av Utredningen om Sveriges försvars- och säkerhetspolitiska samarbeten [Security in the new era. Report on defense and security policies of Sweden]. Stockholm, 2016. URL: [http://www.sou.gov.se/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/SOU-2016\\_57\\_webb.pdf](http://www.sou.gov.se/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/SOU-2016_57_webb.pdf) (access date: 12.11.2019).

<sup>4</sup> Trukhachev, V. NATO gotovit neozhidanniy “udar” po Evrope [NATO’s surprise “attack” on Europe is in the works]. URL: <https://www.pravda.ru/world/europe/europe-an/22-08-2008/280291-nato-0/> (access date: 26.09.2018) (in Russ.).

<sup>5</sup> According to Dayton agreements NATO troops (Implementation Force — IFOR) entered Bosnia and Herzegovina on November 21, 1995. The SFOR mission emerged according to the UN Security Council Resolution No. 1088 on December 12, 1996 as IFOR continuation.

<sup>6</sup> Malmqvist, H. Shvecija i NATO: 23 goda spustya [Sweden and NATO: 23 years down the road]. URL: <https://www.nato.int/docu/Review/2018/Also-in-2018/sweden-and-nato-23-years-down-the-road-defence-security/RU/index.htm> (access date: 26.09.2018) (in Russ.).

The thesis, that the country would “preserve the non-alignment principle towards military alliances in order to maintain the neutrality in case of war” was a compromise achieved within the Swedish political elites after this discussion of the first half of the 1990s<sup>7</sup>. In the end of the 1995 the Swedish Parliament reinstated the two principles of the country’s foreign policy — maintaining both neutrality and high defense capability. Anna Lindh, the new Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden noted during her speech at the Swedish Institute of International Relations in 1998 that neutrality still contributed to security in the Baltic Sea region [21, p. 180-181].

Still, the Swedish army actively cooperates with NATO by participating in military exercises and joint operations. The economic argument is still on the agenda, too: since the Swedish army requires significant annual funding, amounting to 1.7% of the country’s GDP, the NATO membership is often seen by the Swedish politicians as an opportunity to cut national defense expenditures [10].

The special role of Sweden in relations with NATO is also manifested in the sub-regional Nordic Defense Cooperation program established in 2009 that includes Sweden, Finland and three NATO members: Denmark, Iceland and Norway. While outside NATO, Sweden has a position similar to the Alliance making sure there is a unity of defense policy among the Nordic Defense Cooperation countries. In 2014, Sweden denounced Crimea’s merging into Russia and joined anti-Russian sanctions. In April 2014, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark and Iceland signed an agreement on enforcing their military cooperation. Some analysts have already dubbed this alliance an “Atlantic mini-NATO”. Sweden also restored its military presence on Gotland<sup>8</sup>. Politicians link the decision on the deployment of troops to the Ukrainian crisis and the Swedish position on the Crimean issue. In May 2016, Riksdag ratified a cooperation treaty, allowing the NATO contingent to participate in military exercises on Swedish territory. Additionally, in case of war, Sweden is to be ready to host the NATO troops<sup>9</sup>.

The Ukrainian crisis became a subject to reflection in the strategic document of the Moderate Coalition Party (*Moderaterna*), in the part dealing with defense policy. “Russian aggression in the Ukraine alongside with growing military activities of Russia has led to growth of tensions and military conflict risks. Sweden can be a subject to involvement into them”, reads the document. It further em-

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<sup>7</sup> Kuchinskaya, M. Kuda idut byvshie “Evroneutrali” (na primere Shveciji i Finlandii) [Where do former Euroneutrals go: the case of Finland and Sweden]. URL: <https://riss.ru/images/pdf/journal/2012/6/10.pdf> (access date:26.09.2018) (in Russ.).

<sup>8</sup> During the period of 2005 to 2016, there were no regular military units of the Swedish army on Gotland. In September 2016, military exercises of 150 motorized infantry company were held there; the company, upon completion of the exercises, was ordered to remain on Gotland on a permanent basis.

<sup>9</sup> Bringéus K., Eriksson C.M. Säkerhet i ny tid. Betänkande av Utredningen om Sveriges försvars- och säkerhetspolitiska samarbeten. Elanders Sverige AB, Stockholm, Sweden. URL: [http://www.sou.gov.se/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/SOU-2016\\_57\\_webb.pdf](http://www.sou.gov.se/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/SOU-2016_57_webb.pdf) (access date: 31.01.2020).

phasizes that “contemporary threats towards global security appear to be more complex than before, which justifies the unification of efforts and cooperation development with other countries and organizations, including NATO”<sup>10</sup>.

The position of the ruling Social Democratic party on the issue of the “freedom of alliances” (*Alliansfrihet*)<sup>11</sup> is that Sweden should preserve cooperation with NATO within certain programs, in peace-keeping operations sanctioned by the UN, in struggle against international terrorism, or in defense cooperation in the Baltic sea area. Social democrats state that the country should avoid participation in military operations held without the UN sanction.

The third most influential party in the country (17,6% in 2018 General elections), the conservative nationalist Swedish Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna*), advocates for the increase of military expenses up to 2,5% of the GDP and enforcing the Armed forces without NATO membership. The party maintains that NATO membership is an unprofitable affair since Sweden can be subject to involvement into war on the side of the Alliance. Furthermore, “the majority of Swedish people will protest against risking the lives of their soldiers to forward the interests of foreign state”. What generally remains supported is the cooperation with the Baltic sea area states, and the Partnership for Peace program<sup>12</sup>. The “Russian threat” is a subject to discussion in the party’s strategic documents as one of the key determiners of foreign policy.

To sum up, three major political parties of Sweden do not have a shared position on Swedish “freedom of alliances”. The Moderates rely heavily on the “Russian threat”, Social democrats and Swedish democrats justify their position through calls to participation in peace-keeping missions and answering global threats. The parties either avoid mentioning NATO membership, or claim it is irrelevant for national interests. Yet the NATO membership issue remains one of the those having the most potential to provoke a breakup in the Swedish political elite and to become a detonator to a more general political crisis.

NATO membership advocates in Finland remain a minority, though disputes on the issue have been taking place for a long time. NATO expansion to the east launched in the 1990s after the unification of Germany and the fall of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe stimulated this discussion. Max Jakobson, a well-known Finnish diplomat and political observer was one of the ideologists for the country’s accession to the Alliance. He believed that the admission of Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary to NATO in 1999 had shifted the balance of forces in Europe, and reinstated the need for reconsideration of Swedish and

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<sup>10</sup> Moderaterna. Den nya svenska Modellen. URL: <https://moderaterna.se/forsvar> (access date: 01.12.2018).

<sup>11</sup> The concept is implemented in documents and materials of Social Democratic party towards neutrality. E.g.: Socialdemokraterna. Alliansfrihet (21.02.2018). URL: <https://www.socialdemokraterna.se/var-politik/a-till-o/Alliansfrihet/> (access date: 30.11.2018)

<sup>12</sup> Sverigedemokraterna. Forsvarspolitik. URL: <https://sd.se/vad-vi-vill/forsvarspolitik/> (access date: 02.12.2018).

Finnish neutrality<sup>13</sup>. At the same time, he noted that it is a shared fear in Finland that acceptance of the Baltic states into NATO would undermine stability in Northern Europe, and, thus, the relations with Russia. According to Max Jakobson, the position of Sweden and Finland regarding their possible accession to the Alliance will not change the intentions of Russia in maintaining of its dominance in the Baltic region. Thus, there is no sense to connect the position of Finland with the perceived reaction of a country whose actions the Finnish government is unable to influence. He further argued that “if NATO were to remain the guarantor of European security, Finland and Sweden with their neutral status could turn out to be in the position of secondary players in the decision-making process regarding European security”<sup>14</sup>.

In Finland, the official course of the government remains the same despite the debate on tentative NATO membership: Finland does not join the existing military blocs, NATO membership is seen as a very distant perspective for the future<sup>15</sup>. The 1995 government report, *Security in the Changing World*, contained a statement that within all changes happening in Europe, “Finland would continue to pursue a non-alignment policy towards military alliances and that Finland managed to create a world-trusted reliable defense potential on its own”<sup>16</sup>. The Finnish military command has always emphasized that the independent defense capability of the country is the only reliable guarantor of avoiding war in case of any insignificant crisis<sup>17</sup>. According to many Finnish politicians, accession to NATO is not an absolute necessity, as for Finland there is no need in any security guarantees from the bloc. On the contrary, accession to the NATO would significantly change the situation and create a threat to the stability in the region.

Inside Finland, there is a small group of politicians who support the idea of joining NATO. Originally, this group mainly consisted of members of the “Young Finns” minority party (*Nuorsuomalaiset*) led by Ristö Penttilä. In addition, the

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<sup>13</sup> Rebro, O. Oboronnaya pilitika Finlandii i Shveciji: perspektivy vstuplenija v NATO (Sweden’s and Finland’s defence policy: NATO ascension prospects). URL: <http://www.foreignpolicy.ru/analyses/oboronnaya-politika-finlyandii-i-shvetsii-perpektivy-vstupleniya-v-nato/> (access date: 26.09.2018) (in Russ.).

<sup>14</sup> Jacobson, M. Strakhovka po-finski (Finnish insurance) URL: <http://www.rg.ru/2004/02/20/finlyandiya.html> (access date: 26.09.2018) (in Russ.).

<sup>15</sup> Bergquist M., Heisbourg F., Nyberg R., Tiilikainen T. Arvio Suomen mahdollisen Nato-jäsenyyden vaikutuksista. Suomen ulkoasianministeriö, Helsinki, 2016. URL: [https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/79159/IP1601374\\_UM\\_Nato-arvioFI\\_13371.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/79159/IP1601374_UM_Nato-arvioFI_13371.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y) (access date: 26.09.2018).

<sup>16</sup> In: Mikhailov, D. Politika nacionalnoi bezopasnosti Severnykh stran posle okonchaniya Holodnoi Voyny: problem i perspektivi Severnogo sotrudnichestva (National security policies of the Nordic Countries after the Cold War: issues and perspectives of Northern cooperation) URL: [http://old.nasledie.ru/politvne/18\\_10/article.php?art=29](http://old.nasledie.ru/politvne/18_10/article.php?art=29) (access date: 12.03.2020) (in Russ.).

<sup>17</sup> Malyshkin, A. RF v koltse “druzej”: Shvecija i Finlandija zadumalis o chlenstve v NATO [“Encircled” by friends: Sweden and Finland are thinking of joining NATO]. URL: <https://ria.ru/world/20140903/1022627620.html> (access date: 26.09.2018) (in Russ.).

former head of the EU Military Committee and Defense Minister of Finland, General Gustav Hägglund, actively supported the idea of joining NATO. In 2004, he presented the idea of turning the common foreign policy of the EU into a “European pillar” of NATO. While the “American pillar of NATO”, according to Hägglund, was to be engaged in global struggle against terrorism, the “European pillar” was to ensure the regional crisis management<sup>18</sup> [1]. Finnish researcher Christen Pursiainen believes that admission of the country to NATO is necessary since Finland indirectly supports the idea that Russia and NATO are opponents. According to Pursiainen, NATO membership will give the country new opportunities for further integration of Russia into Western institutions: being outside NATO, Finland also remains outside the development of relations between NATO and Russia and therefore cannot influence significant number of factors directly related to its security [1, p. 27]. However, the official position of Helsinki is that of non-alignment with military alliances.

A well-known Finnish politician, one of the candidates during presidential elections in 2018, Matti Vanhanen, welcomed the partnership and discussion on closer cooperation between Finland and NATO, but emphasized that it would not be a step towards the membership in the alliance<sup>19</sup>. Finnish President Saule Niinistö and former Minister of Foreign Affairs Alexander Stubb are both actively promoting the NATO membership idea. In his interview in 2014, Stubb stated that he was the one who personally supported membership of the country in NATO, but did not think that it was the moment for it. The fact that only 25% of Finns approved this idea was very important<sup>20</sup>. Finnish President Saule Niinistö believes that the early 1990s seemed to be a good time for joining NATO, but the opportunity has since passed<sup>21</sup>. At the same time, Erkki Tuomioja, Minister of Foreign Affairs between 2011 and 2015 gave this evasive assessment of the country’s possible NATO membership: “according to the Government official strategy, Finland is not a member of any military alliance, but it cooperates with NATO and maintains the possibility of applying for membership<sup>22</sup>.”

The Finnish advocates of NATO membership put forward a number of arguments, the first of which is national security. According to them, even under the threat of losing some of its sovereignty, the country should seek protection

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<sup>18</sup> Sierla A. Suomen mahdollisen Nato-jäsenyyden vaikutukset. Suomen ulkoasianministeriö. Helsinki, 2007. URL: [editex.filmuut\\_julkaisut/4931](http://editex.filmuut_julkaisut/4931) (access date: 26.09.2018).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> In: Yermolayeva, N. Finlandia ne budet vstupat’ v NATO [Finland will not join NATO] // Rossijskaya gazeta. 30.09.2014. URL: <https://rg.ru/2014/09/30/finlandiya-site-anons.html> (access date: 26.09.2018) (in Russ.).

<sup>21</sup> Tasavallan presidentti Sauli Niinistön uudenvuodenpuhe. 01.1.2015. URL: <http://presidentti.fi/public/default.aspx?contentid=319058&nodeid=44810&contentlan=1&culture=fi-FI> (access date: 05.10.2016).

<sup>22</sup> Budut li Shvecija i Finlandija v NATO? [Will Sweden and Finland join NATO?]. URL: <https://topwar.ru/33690-budut-li-shveciya-i-finlyandiya-v-nato.html> (access date: 26.09.2018) (in Russ.).

from the more powerful political player. To this end, a number of Finns believe terrorism and imperial ambitions of Russia to be the main threats to international security [12; 13]. The second argument stipulates that joining NATO can raise the status and significance of Finland. Conversely, the authors of the monograph *Northern Europe: Region of New Development* believe that Finland and Sweden ascension into NATO can significantly reduce the ability of these countries to play significant role in the European Union. The present system of regional and sub-regional cooperation (above all, the cooperation with Russia) may also suffer as a result of such development [14, p. 418—440].

The political establishment of Finland also has critics of the country's tentative NATO membership. They believe that it will turn Finland into a convenient base for Alliance's military infrastructure close to the Russian border. Many Finnish politicians maintain that NATO wants its non-member partners to more actively participate in crisis management and decision-making programs so that the Alliance could have more trained military specialists in complicated missions. The former Finnish ambassador in the Russian Federation, Heikki Talvitie, believes that the country's admission to NATO would not lead to security improvement, because Western countries are not really interested in the defense of the Finnish territory. The size of the hypothetical help from the Alliance, as well as preparedness of other member states to provide it, are subjects to doubts. Therefore, it would be unreasonable for Finland to start a confrontation with Russia, having such an illusory security guarantees from NATO. While not doubting the long-term benefits of joining the Alliance, Heikki Talvitie argued against this process speeding up, since it would spell complications on the border with Russia<sup>23</sup>.

In the meantime, significant efforts have been made to involve Finland in the North Atlantic Alliance [15]: the armed forces and weapon systems of the country have been changed according to NATO standards, while practical interaction skills of the troops have been developed during joint military exercises and in the framework of the Partnership for Peace program. In 2013, wishing to emphasize good relations with the NATO, Finland ordered various types of missiles and additional equipment from the USA for a total of \$277 million<sup>24</sup>. Admiral Juhani Kaskeala said that the Finnish army was fully ready to join NATO; this statement, made by the former commander of the Finnish army in 2001-2009 confirms that there are no guarantees that "freedom of alliances" means eternal neutrality [6; 16].

In their foreign and defense policies, both countries wish to maintain cooperation with NATO in order to keep stability in the Baltic region: "NATO is the only international organization which is capable of holding the military crisis

<sup>23</sup> Talvitie, H. *Finlandii net neobhodimosti vstupat' v NATO "iz principa"* [Finland has no intention of joining NATO "out of spite"] ("Keski-suomalainen", Finland). URL: <http://apn-nn.com/90527-510357.html> (access date: 26.09.2018) (in Russ.).

<sup>24</sup> *Budut li Shvecija i Finlandija v NATO?* [Will Sweden and Finland join NATO?]. URL: <https://topwar.ru/33690-budut-li-shveciya-i-finlyandiya-v-nato.html> (access date: 26.09.2018) (in Russ.).

management and handling peacekeeping operations”, and “NATO expansion has increased the level of security of the territories adjacent to Finland” [17, p. 28]. Many Swedish politicians emphasize that not a single major European state should unilaterally dominate in Northern Europe, and the presence of the United States is thus seen as a counterbalance to such an occurrence. Furthermore, both countries welcome various “non-military” cooperation with NATO: e.g., in minimizing environmental footprint of military activities, conducting peacekeeping operations, or in responding to crises [10]. The Partnership for Peace program is of particular importance for Finland and Sweden, since the central part of cooperation is connected with the increasing interoperability of the participating armed forces for improved success of joint operations<sup>25</sup>. It is important to emphasize that operations under the Alliance command with the participation of partner countries are recognized as primary response to the possible European crises within the foreign policy doctrines of both Nordic countries under consideration, although the EU with its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) is also seen an important tool in this regard.

In the early 2000s, Swedish and Finnish support for transatlantic solidarity increased, especially after the events of September 11, 2001. Finnish and Swedish foreign ministers declared that “if an EU member state were under a terrorist attack, both Finland and Sweden would undoubtedly provide appropriate assistance”<sup>26</sup>. Both countries made steps in this direction by proposing improvements in the functions of the Council of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership in order to address this threat. Neither Helsinki nor Stockholm consider an alternative to NATO when it comes to the demands of war on terrorism.

What is certain is that Finland and Sweden will only join NATO if they feel a real threat. In the early 1990s Swedish Foreign Minister Margaretha af Ugglas stressed that non-alignment policy was only a means, but not an end in itself<sup>27</sup>. Yet this is the furthest the Swedish government has gone in its official statements to date. Despite the repeated declarations being made by both conservatives (from the Moderate Coalition Party, *Moderaterna*) and liberals (*Liberalerna*) about the necessity to join NATO, the government firmly follows its formal line.

The Social Democrat Erkki Tuomioja, who from 2011 to 2015 served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Finland, believes that his country should consider the possibility of closer military cooperation with Sweden. The integration of

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<sup>25</sup> Petrov, V., Ognev, A. Programma NATO “Partnerstvo radi mira” [NATO’s Partnership for Peace program] (2013). URL: [http://factmil.com/publ/strana/avstrija/programma\\_nato\\_partnjestvo\\_radi\\_mira\\_2013/54-1-0-351](http://factmil.com/publ/strana/avstrija/programma_nato_partnjestvo_radi_mira_2013/54-1-0-351) (access date: 26.09.2018) (in Russ.)

<sup>26</sup> Kantokoski, O. Sotrudnichestvo stran Skandinavii i Finlandii v sfere borbi s mezhdunarodnim terrorismom [Cooperation of Scandinavian countries and Finland in the war on international terrorism]. URL: [http://www.kunstkamera.ru/lib/rubrikator/03/03\\_05/978-5-88431-162-6/](http://www.kunstkamera.ru/lib/rubrikator/03/03_05/978-5-88431-162-6/) (access date: 26.09.2018) (in Russ.)

<sup>27</sup> Poplavsky, A. Formirovanie politiki bezopasnosti Norvegii i Shvecii v 1990-e g.g. [Development of Norway’s and Sweden’s security policies in the 1990s]. URL: <http://www.evolutio.info/content/view/907/215/> (access date: 26.09.2018) (in Russ.)

air and sea defense systems of the two countries is proposed to be one of the areas of cooperation<sup>28</sup>. Today many politicians in Finland and Sweden declare that military cooperation between the two states is the main priority of their defense policy. It is too early to talk about the emergence of a new military bloc, but the Swedish-Finnish interaction is likely to lead to the creation of a legally defined defense alliance. The image of Russian foreign policy as “hostile” or “aggressive” may serve as a trigger to such a process. For example, the Commander-in-Chief of Swedish armed forces<sup>29</sup>, General Michael Bydén directly stated that the possibility of conflict between NATO and Russia had rapidly grown. During his visit to Lithuania in February 2016, he emphasized that “the arrival of NATO military equipment to the region during the Russian demonstration of willingness to use military means to pursue its political goals” makes conflict and provocations more likely<sup>30</sup>.

At the moment the Swedish Ministry of Defense is studying legal implications of signing such an agreement with Finland. The former Prime Minister of Finland, Matti Vanhanen, is confident that the creation of such a union can serve as the main component for further development of the joint security apparatus. He supports the point of view that it is essential to be very careful in matters of war and peace. Finland, says Matti Vanhanen, can never be sure that, if necessary, its neighbor’s resources will be at Finnish disposal especially if cooperation with Sweden takes place on a voluntary basis. Vanhanen is also convinced that a defense alliance between the two countries cannot even be possible unless the two states have a shared foreign policy. Only in this case a true union between two national states is feasible, says he<sup>31</sup> [18, p. 1177]. A bilateral treaty and a defensive alliance, in his opinion, would allow to overcome various uncertainties of the future, as well as to outline the framework for using common resources.

The Chairman of the Defense Commission of the Swedish Parliament, Allan Widman, believes that the government of Sweden, first of all, needs to identify long-term prospects for Swedish-Finnish cooperation. The Liberal Party (*Liberalerna*), of which Allan Widman is a member, generally supports the creation of a military alliance, which is considered to be a step towards a possible NATO membership. The Moderate Coalition Party (*Moderaterna*) support this position, urging the government to create a roadmap for Sweden to join NATO. The Moderates believe that the amendments to the NATO-Sweden Host Nation Support

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<sup>28</sup> Bondina, V. Finlandia i Shvecija mogut sozdat’ novy voenny sojuz: protiv kogo? [Finland and Sweden to possibly create a new military alliance: against whom?]. URL: <http://gpolitika.com/evropa/finlyandiya-i-shveciya-mogut-sozdat-voennyj-soyuz-protiv-kogo.html> (access date: 26.09.2018) (in Russ.)

<sup>29</sup> The Commander-in-Chief of the Swedish armed forces (Swedish: Överbefälhavaren) — is a highest ranking military officer in Sweden, or Swedish Chief of Defense in NATO’s terminology.

<sup>30</sup> In: Bondina, V. Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> In: Malyshkin, A. Ibid.

agreement (2014) to be proposed today still leave the kingdom isolated, unprotected and without any guarantees that the Alliance will help in case of war. This treaty already allows NATO to send troops across the territory of Sweden, but only in peacetime. The document also allows for the participation of NATO forces in military exercises within the territory of Sweden. At the moment, some changes to this document, for example those allowing the Alliance troops to move across the country not only in peacetime but also in the case a military conflict, are being considered by the Swedish politicians.

However, two-thirds of the citizens of both states believe that military issues should be solved independently from the other country. At the same time, approximately every fourth of the citizens is in favor of a common defense policy of the two states<sup>32</sup>. According to Swedish experts, the reason for such beliefs in their country is not the distrust for its neighbor, but a generally shared skepticism towards military blocs. Apparently, the same can be said about the Finns.

This conclusion is confirmed indirectly by the attitude towards NATO. More than half of the Finnish citizens participating in the survey about the issue are convinced that cooperation with NATO should not be extended. In Sweden, approximately the same number of citizens express the same views. In both countries, about 40% of those surveyed are in favor of deepening cooperation with NATO<sup>33</sup>. Sociologists believe that the number of supporters of NATO membership has increased after the Crimea merged into Russia, but people holding such views still remain a minority. The voices of the “Atlanticists” appear only at the level of certain parties or as personal opinions. For instance, Swedish liberals from the Center Party (*Centerpartiet*) propose to reconsider the neutral status of the country. However, as noted above, the political elites of both countries continue to demonstrate restraint in this matter<sup>34</sup>.

The balance in Northern Europe in general and in the Baltic region in particular will change if Finland and Sweden, with their highly developed military potential, join NATO. The line of contact between Russia and NATO member states will run across the entire northern part of Europe from the Barents sea to Kaliningrad and Pskov [6]. Russia will have to develop different scenarios for carrying out of its policies towards the Baltic sea states and the North Atlantic Alliance, to consider its options for resolving the issue of guarantees of its own security, including mutually beneficial conditions for the countries of the region<sup>35</sup>. Regular mutual state visits of the presidents of Russia and Finland prove that the process of forming of a new political course is underway. Considering the Baltic states admission to NATO and emergence of NATO troops in close proximity to

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<sup>32</sup> In: Malyshkin, A. Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> In: Yermolaeva, N. Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Muilu H. (2016). Miten Suomen ja Ruotsin Nato-selvitykset eroavat toisistaan? URL: <http://yle.fi/uutiset/3-9155066> (access date: 27.02.2020).

<sup>35</sup> Zharsky, A., Korshunov, E. Severnye sosedi: proshai neitralitet [Northern neighbors: goodbye, neutrality]. URL: <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/5540> (access date: 26.09.2018) (in Russ.).

St. Petersburg, the Finnish factor is to become the decisive one for security in the North-Western Russian frontiers. It is also crucial to maintain free exit from the Gulf of Finland, unimpeded sea communication with the Kaliningrad region and the Atlantic Ocean, as well as the possibility for laying of gas mains under the Baltic Sea.

When asked about the possibility of Finland's joining NATO, the Russian President Vladimir Putin replied, "This issue comes up so often in various political and public circles in Finland. You are well aware of our attitude towards the expansion of military-political blocs in general and to that of the North Atlantic Alliance in particular. We do not think it will help to enhance security in the world. Finland is a full member of the Western community of countries and a member of the European Union. Bringing NATO's military infrastructure closer to Russian borders by expanding it into Finnish territory will not improve relations between our countries, but what is more important is that today's threats are mostly in the area of fighting terrorism, drugs trafficking, human trafficking, organized crime, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the means of their delivery. We can only resolve these problems by working together and outside blocs. As far as I know, the Finnish leadership shares this view. Still, the final choice is up to the Finnish people and leadership"<sup>36</sup>.

Former Prime Minister of Finland, and a candidate for presidential elections of 2018, Matti Vanhanen, believes that joining NATO would be a "genuine choice" for Finland, despite the fact that Russian risks would be counted in<sup>37</sup>. In his opinion, Finland's interest in NATO has been spiked by Russia's actions and subsequent aggressive behavior in the region. Timo Soini, the current Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland, emphasizes the importance of common security and defense policy of the EU, but at the same time, in his opinion, the very possibility of his country joining NATO should serve as a background for that<sup>38</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

The discussion on the possibility of admission of Finland and Sweden to NATO faced the following issues in the political establishments of the two countries:

1) Stockholm and Helsinki strategy in pursuing contacts with the Alliance: both countries have tight connections with NATO through programs, cooperation

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<sup>36</sup> Latukhina, K. Putin predupredil o posledstviyah vstuplenija Finlandii v NATO [Putin warned of the consequences of Finland's joining NATO]. URL: <https://rg.ru/2016/07/01/putin-predupredil-o-posledstviiah-vstupleniia-finlandii-v-nato.html> (access date: 26.09.2018) (in Russ.).

<sup>37</sup> In: Bondina, V. Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> In: Domínguez Cebrián B. No veo la necesidad de un Ejército europeo. El País (22.01.2018). URL: [https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/01/18/actualidad/1516296250\\_831321.html](https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/01/18/actualidad/1516296250_831321.html) (access date: 20.02.2020).

boards, joint operations and attempts to participate in both executive and decision-making institutions. The fight against terrorism appears to be the corner stone of these efforts. Despite that, the NATO membership on its own is not considered acceptable, albeit in the long term. Both countries make bilateral cooperation in defense a higher priority. Yet, Finnish political leaders have recently expressed an opinion that NATO membership is a “necessary”, but “missed” opportunity. Sweden, on the other hand, follows the “freedom of alliances” principle strictly. Cooperation within the EU defense structures appears to be a priority for both countries, despite its role as a catalyst for “creeping integration” into NATO;

2) Main advocates and opponents in governments and political parties: in general, right-centric and liberal parties have shown themselves as supportive of NATO membership. In Sweden these are the Moderate-coalitionist party (*Moderaterna*), the Center party (*Centerpartiet*) and the Liberal party (*Liberalerna*); in Finland it is the National coalition party. Social democrats and nationalist parties oppose tentative NATO membership, positioning it as an additional obligation to their countries with a minimal coverage of possible expenses;

3) Positions of military command and military potential: both countries had completed rearmament and restructuring of their Armed forces according to the NATO standards. Military command of both countries in general claims the maximum level of preparedness to NATO admission. Here, the difference between Sweden and Finland lies in military industry potential: while Sweden is able to cover the needs of its Armed forces with its own facilities and minimal arms import, Finland depends on military imports. The position of Stockholm is connected to its military industry extension and positioning the country as independent from major international players. For Finland, on the contrary, the position of Russia is a factor the Finnish military command and government need to consider as a sensitive one, despite their active participation in NATO initiatives and programs;

4) Tentative referendum on NATO membership appears to indicate political defeat of the Alliance advocates. It is based on the sociological surveys, and on the General elections results: NATO advocates from the Moderate Party (*Moderaterna*) lost a majority in Riksdag, while the Swedish Democrats turned out to become the third party in the parliament due to the protest voting. These factors indicate grounds for political breakup in the Swedish elites;

5) General perspective on NATO membership in both countries: in both cases it is presented as a “long-lasting perspective”. Instead of underlining the military power of the Alliance, both Stockholm and Helsinki put an emphasis on crisis management and preventive diplomacy, as accompanied by EU defense initiatives. The issues of the *de-facto* “freedom of alliances” have moved to the background, making the “creeping integration” into NATO structures possible. So the formal “freedom of alliances” of either Sweden or Finland, especially when it comes to relationships with Russia, seems illusory from that perspective.

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