

EUROPE FORUM TURKU 2018 AND THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS 2019



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Summary

The first Europe Forum Turku was organised at the end of August 2018. The event brought together experts from politics, economy and the academia to discuss current questions and future challenges of Europe and European integration. Since the Forum was designed as an open, public event, it also provided a platform for intensive discussions and knowledge exchange between the experts and the public.

This publication tackles the legacy of the first Europe Forum in Turku. A special attention is paid to the year 2019, also called Europe's "super year", and its possible implications.

Yhteenveto

Ensimmäinen Turun Eurooppa-foorumi järjestettiin elo-syyskuun vaihteessa 2018. Tapahtuma kokosi yhteen eri alojen asiantuntijoita niin politiikan, talouden kuin tutkijayhteisön piiristä keskustelemaan avoimissa yleisötilaisuuksissa Euroopan ja EU:n ajankohtaisista kysymyksistä ja tulevaisuuden haasteista.

Tässä julkaisussa pohditaan Eurooppa-foorumin antia sekä erityisesti Euroopan ja EU:n näkymiä supervuodeksikin kutsutun vuoden 2019 näkökulmasta.

Europe Forum Turku between the Past, the Present and the Future

Kimmo Elo

Introduction

The first Europe Forum in Turku (www.europeforum.fi) organised by the end of August 2018 was a great success. The event itself welcomed not only representatives of the Finnish political elite, but also ordinary people to debate Europe and European issues. From this point of view a central objective of the forum – to narrow the gap between the citizens and the European Union (EU) – was fulfilled. At the same time, however, it is clear a single Europe Forum cannot solve those problems the EU and Europe are currently struggling with.

The first forum evidenced the need for a broad, science- and fact-based discussion forum around European integration. Although the Forum itself can be justified by the rather low quality of Finnish public debates on and around the EU and Europe, there are better arguments as well, highlighting the importance of such a public forum. First, we are living in a post-factual age characterised by the decline in importance and weight of fact-based, scientific argumentation. Second, the populist rhetoric actively seeks to mix fact with fiction in order to confuse the public. And third, disinformation and fake-news campaigns seek to undermine the legitimisation of our democratic system and to strengthen distrust in political establishment and decision-making. Despite the almost exponential growth of information and data available, the polarisation between well-informed and non-knowledgeable citizens has significantly increased. The results are visible in the social media, where like-minded people tend to get together in their own bubbles and echo chambers.

In his opening remark Kalervo Väänänen, rector of University of Turku, underlined the leading role of the universities in the fight against ignorance and unawareness. He also highlighted the role of the universities in public discussions and debates. Against this background, the Turku Europe Forum can be seen as a continuum of the

development that started in Turku already in the late 1980s in the form of Turku European Academy and Europe-Institute. These two projects help us to understand the role and importance of Turku as the “embryo” of academic debates and research on European integration.

“Project Europe”: European Academy and Europe-Institute

Prior to the 1980s European integration had been subject to public debates in Finland during the EEC negotiations in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. Economic issues played a central role also in the mid-1980s, as Junior Chamber of Commerce Turku started its European Academy as a part of a larger three-years “Project Europe”. The project was launched in 1987 by Mr. Anders Blom and Mr. Visa Nurminen, both young and active European enthusiasts. The project gained support from the local newspaper Turun Sanomat, especially its editor-in-chief Mr. Jarmo Virmavirta.

The establishment of a dedicated research institution – “Europe-Institute” – was from the very beginning part of the “Project Europe”. The institute should strengthen academic discussions on and around Europe. Despite their close connection to the “Project Europe”, the Academy and the Institute were run as parallel projects. A key figure in bridging these two projects became Dr Esko Antola at University of Turku. Antola’s memorandum on the goal-setting, tasks and resources of this Europe-Institute offered well-founded starting points for the future development. The plan outlined an institution with a strong academic profile, but at the same time it included tasks the contemporary academic world calls “public interaction”. It is worth being noted that the institute was not – at least not primarily – a political project seeking to promote Western European integration among Finnish politicians. Instead, the institute should strengthen knowledge of Europe and European integration by academic means.

Turku was the geographical choice, because the academic preparation committee, which consisted of the rectors and vice-rectors of University of Turku, Turku School of Economics and Åbo Akademi University, considered Turku as the main hub of academic research on European integration in Finland. Rapid changes in European political landscape in the first half of 1989 sped up the preparation process, resulting in the establishment of the Europe-Institute in April 1989. In this initial phase the

Institute gained both financial, technical and operative support from the European Academy, helping the young Institute to consolidate its status as one of the key actors in national European debates in Finland.

The activity of the European Academy was terminated in the early 1990s. In this phase the Europe-Institute achieved a central position among Finland's national debates on Europe. This leading role was strengthened in the post-Cold War context, as Finnish political elite started to map Finland's future scenarios. Joining the European integration was one of the options on the table and there was a strong demand on up-to-date, academic analysis. The Finnish state leadership's decision to apply for a membership in the European Community (since 1995: the EU) had a direct impact on the Institute's activities. Although the academic track was still dominant, the policy dimension gained in importance and supported the public visibility of the Institute.

Despite its rather strong and influential role the Europe-Institute never succeeded in gaining an economically strong and independent position. The Institute's activities were overshadowed by Finland's deep depression in the early 1990s. Additionally, although the decision to integrate the Europe-Institute into Turku School of Economics in 1993 strengthened the Institute's academic connection, it was the kiss of death for its functional independence. These two aspects are, with the benefit of hindsight, the two sides of the same coin: the integration into Turku School of Economics resulted from the financial difficulties of the Europe-Institute, but these difficulties were, in turn, a result from the deep depression of the early 1990s.

Europe Forum Turku in Historical Context

The short life of the Europe-Institute ended officially on 1 December 1998 as the Europe-Institute and the former Institute for Eastern Trade were fused into the new Pan-European Institute. Since then, European integration studies have been carried out by other academic and public institutions in Turku. The above-mentioned Pan-European Institute still exists and has a strong focus on Russian economy. At University of Turku, the Faculty of Law has a strong and influential profile in European law, whereas the Faculty of Social Sciences offers non-degree studies in European studies and has, since 1 August 2018, an own senior researcher in

European integration studies in the Centre for Parliamentary Studies. Outside the academia Centrum Balticum has a strong profile and project portfolio in questions related to the Baltic Sea region.

Thus, Europe Forum Turku is well embedded in the current academic and non-academic landscape around Europe and European integration. In fact, as a forum bringing together academic and non-academic actors in a public space the Europe Forum Turku carries on the core practices of the Europe-Institute: intellectual fruits of the academic study on European integration should be made available for the public. This is the best medicine against unawareness and ignorance. That University of Turku is committed to the Europe Forum Turku tells a lot about the academia's growing anxiety about the wide-spread ignorance and unawareness of European affairs among the public. These worries were already there as Junior Chamber of Commerce Turku started its "Project Europe" in the late 1980s.

Four months after the first Europe Forum Turku, in December 2018, we should direct our attention to the next Europe Forum Turku in 2019. At the end of August 2019 we will know the results of the European Parliamentary elections, we should have an idea how the new European Commission would look like, and the first two months of Finland's EU presidency will be over. But I am quite convinced, that all the big problems the EU is currently facing – migration, climate change, "ring of fire" of the neighbouring regions, Donald Trump – have not vanished, nor been solved. The demand for open, controversial, critical, solution-seeking discussions on and around European integration will not vanish until the end of August 2019.

At the same time, however, it would be a mistake to expect that the academia could provide ready-for-implementation solutions for actual political and economic problems. The task of academic scholars is to help us to understand the problems, to separate the important from the unimportant, and to shed light on factors behind different phenomena. Further, scholars can be expected to be able to provide decision-makers with strategic knowledge, but it is the task of the politicians to make the best out of this knowledge. This is exactly what the Europe Forum Turku should become – a public, open platform for knowledge exchange where scholars and public actors can debate topics and themes of European integration.

The Europe Forum Turku has all the possibilities to become a leading national forum with a strong international bias for high-quality debates on European integration. However, in order to succeed in this, the Forum must be supported by financial and intellectual investments in European integration studies. Without this kind of investment in academic research the Forum would lose its most important pillar – a research community capable of following scholarly debates, public debates and European policy-making to figure out the most important topics and questions to be discussed during the three days in Turku.

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EU at Crossroads in Run-Up to European Election Year and Next Five-Year Agenda

Maria Blässar

State of the Union

In his State of the Union speech in September 2018, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker emphasised the importance of the coming twelve months for Europe. We must offer all Europeans a strong perspective for the future. The current state of affairs in Europe and the rest of the world is coloured by uncertainty, confusion and insecurity. Brexit, the challenges posed to international trade, the rise of populist governments and far-right parties, climate change and migration are only a few of the issues that might make the future look dark for many Europeans. And yet, uncertainty always leaves room not only for hope, but also for action.

The on-going discussions on the future of Europe will culminate next spring in Sibiu, Romania. The Heads of State and Government of the then 27 European Union Member States – most probably without the UK – will gather there in May 2019 for an unofficial meeting of the European Council to prepare the EU's Strategic Programme for the years 2019-2024. The summit in Sibiu will set the tone for the next five years of the EU. This is likely to be the first time the leaders will meet after Brexit, and their last meeting before the upcoming European Parliament elections. The summit in Sibiu will focus on concrete steps towards a stronger, more united and more democratic Union that delivers on the issues that really matter to Europeans.

To have the necessary resources, Europe needs a modern and balanced long-term budget for the years 2021-2027. The budget should be tightly geared to the Union's priorities and offer tangible answers to the challenges of today and tomorrow. Therefore, the Commission proposes to modernise the budget by boosting funding in key areas including innovation, the digital economy, climate action and the environment, migration and border management, and security, defence and external action. At the same time, Cohesion Policy and the Common Agricultural Policy will

continue to play a vital role for Europe's future. In our view, the proposal strikes the right balance between three broad areas of spending – agriculture and maritime policies, cohesion policy and other programmes vital for Europe's future. In order to have all new programmes up and running by 1 January 2021, the Commission proposal would have to be adopted by the European Parliament and the Member States by the end of 2019, a tall order.

After Sibiu, the European Parliament elections will be held in all Member States in late May 2019. These elections, also known simply as the “European elections”, will determine not only the shape of the next European Parliament, but will also lead the way for the appointment of the next European Commission. The result of the elections will be crucial for the choice of the next Commission President. May 2019 will mark the culmination of the orientation debates held in Europe in the last few years. The next European elections will be the single most important way a citizen can influence the future direction of where we go from here, together as Europeans. The EU leaders will have an obligation to deliver on their promises to Europeans. Meanwhile, we citizens will also have a responsibility to bear.

Looking beyond crisis management

Over the past few years, Europe has seen its worst economic, financial and social crises since World War II: from the euro crisis and the situation in Greece to the 2015 migration crisis and the rise of terrorism in Europe, Russia's annexation of Crimea, the sea change in US foreign policy brought by the election of Donald Trump as US President, the rise of populism around Europe and the world, the Brexit process and friction with some EU Member States in terms of respecting the rule of law. The list is formidable and has placed Europe under extreme pressure during the past years. "Challenging" is in fact an understatement when describing the reality that the European Parliament and the European Commission have faced during the current mandate.

These difficult circumstances that we have survived point to the resilience of the European Union – contrary to what many observers expected. We have succeeded in bringing Europe back from the crisis zone. The economy is growing and the employment rate in Europe is higher than ever before. The levels of migrants at the

European borders have diminished, and much more focus is being put on the root causes of migration, for example in Africa. The unprecedented negotiations on the departure of the United Kingdom from the EU have been difficult, to say the least, but have nevertheless been handled in an organised manner. The European citizens trust the EU more than in years.

Although we could celebrate our achievements, we must stay focused on the future. We still have major issues to tackle in the EU and reforms to carry out, including structural economic reforms. We also need to find common solutions for a manageable and fair way to handle migration. No Member State can do this on its own. The exceptionally strong unity that the Member States have showed during the Brexit negotiations should be transmuted into a positive agenda for the EU.

The EU should look for sustainable solutions and move forward from crisis mode. We should act to reform the Union while the sun is still shining, and stop waiting for the next storm to arrive. We should fix our roof as soon as it stops raining, not when the next storm is already upon us.

Furthermore, the European Union needs to reinforce its role in the world. Europe should step up its efforts to provide for its own security and defence. At the same time, the EU has a responsibility to keep defending a rules-based international trade system and leading the way in mitigating climate change. Here, the EU can make a genuine difference and show the way forward. If the EU does not advocate these principles, using its economic power and soft diplomacy for leverage, then who will?

The world around us has changed. We have neighbours that do not necessarily want to see us succeed. This should bring us closer together inside the EU, instead of leading us to drift further apart. To bind us together and to defend our values, European democracy needs to be reinforced. Citizens and decision-makers should be brought closer together. The past few years have seen the rise of new political forces and challenges to the status quo. We need to address these developments in the run-up to the European elections. The EU seems to be at a crossroads, where the next twelve months, the result of the elections and the form of the new European Parliament and the European Commission will point the way for Europe's new direction.

The EU at a crossroads

When discussing EU matters, it is easy to drift away from the ordinary citizen's perspective and to focus on the Brussels bubble, a show run by the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, the European Commission, and the mysterious European elite. This kind of thinking should be challenged more openly. The European Parliament, the most directly democratic European institution, is elected by ordinary European citizens, not by elites of any kind. In May 2019 it is up to us Europeans alone to decide who will lay down the rules of European cooperation and the way forward.

According to a Eurobarometer survey published in September 2018, 68 % of EU citizens believe they have benefited from EU membership. 62 % have a positive attitude to their home country's EU membership. According to the polls, the three most important themes on which the EU can deliver are migration, economy and growth and youth employment. These results are encouraging, but this is not enough. The European project should be inviting and interesting to all citizens, not only two thirds of us.

The EU is essentially a peace project based on solidarity, a sense of community and trust. It was created to provide mutual benefits, economies of scale and stability for all Europeans, in the form of a Single Market, a single currency and freedom of movement, just to mention a few. Sadly, however, European countries are currently drifting in different directions. Brexit is one of the most tragic examples of this development. As we approach the next European elections, we need to reflect upon our past and current reality.

A more fragmented Europe

It has been claimed that Europe is currently breaking up into two opposing camps. To put it somewhat simplistically, a more global, liberal and solidary Europe is challenged by a protectionist, closed and nationalist Europe. In recent years, Europe has seen a wave of populism and the rise of far-right parties. Nationalism and protectionism have been on the rise not just in Europe, but elsewhere around the world as well. Closed borders and looming trade wars tell us that globalisation and

its inevitable consequences are seen as potential threats rather than as new opportunities. This is a worrying trend, since populist and extremist parties usually look for easy answers to complex questions, thereby making it even more difficult to reach balanced and sustainable solutions.

It is easy to judge populist politicians as delusional or petty. Sometimes such criticism is justifiable. But it is important to identify the source of the surge of populist parties and beliefs. We do not live in a vacuum. Europeans are looking for new faces and solutions. Old coalitions and old ways of thinking and doing are being superseded by alternative answers. This trend is something we need to address, not hide from. What could we actually learn from it? How could we give more attention to the people who regard nationalism and protectionism as the best guarantees of safety? Should we not address these fears and insecurities, and focus on finding ways to dispel them for good?

Voter turnout in the 2014 European Parliament elections was low, especially among young Europeans. Average turnout among all age groups was 42 %. Among young Europeans, aged 18-24, only 28 % voted. Low turnout is a sign that European matters are not considered to be as important as national politics, although EU politics equally concerns everyone, just at a different, broader level. Although low turnout and scant interest are worrisome, this again provides an opportunity for self-reflection. What can we do better, how can we communicate the importance of the EU more effectively? Especially young Europeans all around the EU should be encouraged to vote for their own future.

A European Union that speaks with one voice

Traditional European values – openness, equality, tolerance and the rule of law – are fundamental to our existence. The European Union is built on these principles, and they are a prerequisite for any State to join our Union. Unfortunately, European values are being challenged from the inside. The ruling parties in some of our Member States consider that the fundamental values the EU is built on are not so essential anymore. As President Juncker stated in his State of the Union 2018 speech, respecting our common rules and the rule of law are not optional.

These developments of the past few years are troublesome. When the rule of law is compromised, we must protect and defend it on the institutional level. However, it is not only up to our institutions to defend our values and way of life; it is also the responsibility of the citizens of the EU. In these times, reinforcing democratic processes is crucial. Voters around Europe should be encouraged to participate in determining their own future and in strengthening our value-based society. It is essential to recognise that speaking up and voting next spring will be crucial in terms of our future direction. This time around, it will no longer be enough to sit back and watch. We need to take action to make sure that our values and democratic societies are defended.

The European Union is a team. It is as strong as its weakest link. The EU is at its strongest when it speaks with one voice. Especially in EU foreign policy, unity is the best, indeed the only way to show strength and influence others. In the course of this year, we have seen various threats to our core societal infrastructures in the form of cyber-attacks. The fundamentals of a multilateral and rules-based world trade system have been challenged. If the EU is not there to be the one to protect these values, who will?

Defending our way of life and a fair rules-based world must extend to our own Union. If we want to promote a fair, inclusive and equal societal model globally, we will have to secure it at the European level as well. A Europe that speaks with one voice should embrace the concerns of all people in the EU, not just the fortunate ones. An inclusive and transparent EU is a prerequisite for a functioning and democratic Europe. This applies to all age groups and nationalities, especially to young Europeans.

Changing power relations in Europe and in the upcoming European elections

Power relations in European and national party politics are changing. Leading European parties are being challenged by new forces. The traditional alliances of centre-right and social democratic parties are being compelled to look for new ways to attract voters, while populist, far-right, liberal and green parties are gaining

ground in national politics. These trends will be reflected in the European elections next year.

One interesting issue is the role of French President Emmanuel Macron in the European elections. His prominent allies and their new political force are likely to have direct consequences for the formation of the new European Parliament and the new European Commission. Macron's En Marche movement has vowed to forge an alliance with the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) in the European Parliament. This could result in diverting power from the current ruling coalition of the conservative pro-European European People's Party (EPP) and the Socialists and Democrats (S&D).

It will also be interesting to observe the actions of the Italian Government in the upcoming elections. It is still unclear with whom the leading parties of Italy will affiliate themselves in the European Parliament. The rise of populist and far-right parties at the national level will probably manifest itself on the European level as well. This could have the potential to change the power relations inside the European Parliament. These developments should be deeply analysed inside the European parties and in Member States. The outcome of the elections will have an impact also on the formation of the College of the next European Commission. Every Member State will still have a Commissioner, approved by its government in power. Next autumn, we will have a sense of what the new College of Commissioners will look like as a result of the new political setting in Europe. The rise of populism could ultimately lead to a more fragile and less functional set-up of the European Commission in a way that is unprecedented in the history of the EU.

It is highly likely that the current composition of the European Parliament will change. This will be an opportunity both for the parties and for the voters. The traditional parties should reflect deeply on how to remain credible in the upcoming elections. The rising new forces have less reputational legacy from past politics and can provide – at least superficially – attractive ideas and solutions to those who are sceptical of the older political establishment. Still, the voter will have the most important say. Whom do I trust to protect my interests in the long run, really? Who will have the right to steer our direction for the next five years?

Go cast your ballot!

Six months before the European elections, Europe is at a crossroads. Which way to go? It is up to us to decide. All Europeans have a say, and the best way to raise our voice is to vote. I particularly wish to encourage all young EU citizens to take a stand and vote. We are about to determine the future of the young generations. If there is something we can learn from the events of the past few years in Europe, it is that the time for sitting back, watching and letting things just happen is over. Whatever kind of Europe you want to see, please make your voice heard next May.

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2019: the Nordic region at the European crossroads

Matilda af Hällström

Introduction

The coming year 2019 has been called pivotal and a year of reckoning for the EU. It is the year of European Parliament elections and the year of Brexit. The EU is under pressure from the outside and from the inside: rule-of-law and climate change, migration and Russian actions in the East. As the EU is shouldering up to a challenging year ahead, it becomes increasingly clear that the implications of the heavily debated future of Europe will affect all actors involved.

The year 2019 will also be a turning point for the Nordic region – the decisive moments in the EU also impact Nordic cooperation. This article highlights three central events in 2019: Brexit, the European Parliament elections and the Finnish presidency of the EU Council. These changes are a window of opportunity for the Nordic cooperation in the EU. Prior to looking at these three occurrences, let us first delve into the complexities of Nordic-EU relations.

Nordic-EU relations: a complicated relationship

The Nordic region stands at the European crossroads with some heavy baggage. The region consists of a patchwork of memberships and relations to the EU, ranging from complete non-members (Greenland, Faroe Islands) to EEA-members (Norway and Iceland) to the EU members; Denmark (opt-outs galore), Sweden (prudent member) to Finland (deep integration). There is a high level of differentiation in the relationships to the EU.

Furthermore, the Nordic cooperation has a complicated history with the EU. The Cold War was the Golden era for the Nordics, with significant political, economic and social integration, despite some drawbacks. In many ways, the Nordic region was

depicted through its difference to Europe;¹ when Europe was divided, the Nordic region was united. When Cold War bipolar order created barriers for integration in Europe, it simultaneously allowed for Nordic cooperation to develop in “soft” areas, leading to a progressive, affluent and integrated Nordic region. The Nordic model was desirable and the region was portrayed as exceptional and superior.²

The Nordic cooperation took a hard hit with the end of the Cold War. The structures that had allowed for the flourishing Nordic cooperation disappeared. In the 1990s the cooperation was deemed by many as redundant, when the EU fulfilled the functions that the Nordic cooperation had previously held: economic and political integration, promotion of welfare and equality as well as peace. Schengen replaced the Nordic Passport Union and the Single Market the Common Nordic Labour Market. What further exemplified the perception that the EU was replacing Nordic cooperation were the referendums in the Finland, Norway and Sweden in the 1990s: for many a citizen the choice was portrayed as either EU or Nordic cooperation. Since then, the institutions of Nordic cooperation have grappled with the implications of European integration. Could 2019 change that?

Brexit: the rediscovery of “Europe of the regions”

The fact that Brexit will have an impact on the Nordic countries is certain. The importance of the UK to all the Nordic countries cannot be stressed enough – in many ways, the UK has been central in shaping the Nordics’ relationship with the EU. Exactly for this reason, Brexit should also be viewed through the Nordic perspective. The Nordic-UK-EU relationship can be traced far back. When the UK applied for membership to the EC (European Communities) in 1961, so did Denmark and Norway. When French president **Charles de Gaulle** vetoed the British membership, Norway and Denmark withdrew their applications. The scene replayed itself in 1967. The Nordic countries’ policies toward European integration were influenced by the respective countries’ relationship to the UK. The relationship to the UK trumped the Nordic countries relations to European integration. In 1960, three of

¹ Browning, Christopher S. & Joenniemi, Pertti (2012): From fratricide to security community: re-theorising difference in the constitution of Nordic peace. *Journal of International Relations and Development* 16(4), 483–513.

² Browning, Christopher S. (2007): Branding Nordicity: Models, Identity and the Decline of Exceptionalism., *Cooperation and Conflict* 42(1), 27–52 (here: 18).

the Nordic countries were founding members of the European Free Trade Agreement, along with the UK. This served two purposes for the Nordics; to create further economic ties to the UK, and to create a platform which could balance the EEC, from which one could trade with the EEC.³ In 1973, Denmark followed the UK all the way into the EC, Norway stopped at the doorstep, a result of a negative referendum result.

The UK and the Nordic countries have shared a critical approach to European integration, without succumbing to populist tides. With perhaps the exception of Finland, the Nordic voice in the EU can be identified as one of Euroscepticism.⁴ The Nordic countries have been coined “reluctant Europeans”. Norway’s electorate has rejected EU membership twice. Denmark has held seven referendums on EU treaty changes, of which two have been rejected. Even today, Denmark has a unique position in the EU, with four formal opt-outs (security and defence, justice and home affairs, European Monetary Union and citizenship). The Swedish electorate has rejected the euro in 2003. Denmark has followed the UK in its European path, from applications to opt-outs – but we will hardly see a Dexit in the years to come. However, the Nordic countries have indeed lost a central ally.

Other regions in the EU have woken up to this stark awareness that Brexit will leave a power vacuum of sorts in the EU. Benelux is engaging in active regional cooperation vis-à-vis the EU, and the Mediterranean countries have been meeting in the “Club Med” format, to discuss European issues. The Visegrad-countries have increased their EU coordination to new heights, and they are also the only regional cluster to partake in the debate on the future of the EU.⁵ Despite numerous calls for Nordic positions on the future of the EU⁶, there have been no advances on this front. Brexit is regrettable for the Nordic cooperation, but it is also an opportunity for the Nordic countries to step up their game.

³ Howard Grön, Caroline, Nedergaard, Peter & Wivel, Anders (2015) *The Nordic countries and the European Union: Still the other European community*. Routledge, p. 21

⁴ Archer, Clive (2000) Euroscepticism in the Nordic Region. *Journal of European Integration* 22, 87–114.

⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary (2018) *V4 Statement of the Future of Europe*, January 2018 <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/v4-statement-on-the-180129>

⁶ Fjellner, Wallmark, Bendtsen, Klitskov, Virkkunen, Vartiainen i Dagens Nyheter 9.3.2018 *Norden måste visa enas front i EU-frågor* eller Penttilä, Hadzialic i Dagens Industri 15.1.2018 *Norden bör agera gemensamt i EU*

European Parliament elections: EU-Nordic parliamentary cooperation

2019 is also the year of European Parliament elections, which are held every five years. Today, there are no cross-political Nordic meetings between the MEPs. Since Finland and Sweden joined the EU, the Nordic MEPs have regularly met in Strasbourg. The purpose of these meetings was not to find common positions, but rather to exchange ideas and invite guest speakers.⁷ In later years, these meetings have included Baltic MEPs as well. In the past five years these meetings have been absent, despite the fact that only 20% of the Nordics running for European Parliament in 2014, said that they did *not* want an informal Nordic network in the European Parliament.⁸

Within the Nordic Council, the Nordic parliamentary cooperation, there has also been an increased interest in the EU and in the European Parliament. The Nordic Council planned to hold its plenary session in the European Parliament in 2015, but it was cancelled due to heightened terrorist threats. In 2016, the Nordic Council made the decision to establish a Brussels office, with the task of improving the networks between the Nordic Council and the European Parliament. On a parliamentary level, the Nordic cooperation on EU matters is less problematic. The Nordic Council, can as a parliamentary assembly seek closer contact with the European Parliament without tackling the membership/non-membership issue. This exchange between institutions of the EU and of Nordic cooperation can prove that the binary construction of a Nordic region which exists as parallel or in opposition to Europe can and should at last be abandoned.

Re-establishing Nordic meetings amongst MEPs and other relevant Nordic invited guests in Strasbourg should not be controversial. If the Nordic MEPs can accept that common meetings do not guarantee or even attempt to create common positions, then alternative added value of joint meetings may emerge. Knowledge is power in the EU, and so is knowledge about others' positions, even if they are different.

⁷ Karlsson, Andrea (2013) Nordiska och EU starkare tillsammans – En rapport om hur nätverket mellan Nordiska Rådet och Europaparlamentet kan stärkas. Nordiska rådets arbetspapper: 22 <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:702971/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

⁸ Magma & Yggdrasil (2014) *Enkätundersökning – nordisk tvärpolitisk grupp i EU-parlamentet* <http://magma.fi/uploads/media/default/0001/01/2a2b7aeef8e88828b6e17974d3c491785f77f914.pdf>

The Finnish presidency of the EU Council: a need for allies

Considering the deep political, cultural and economic ties between the UK and the Nordic countries, it may seem natural that British Prime Minister Theresa May accepted an invitation to speak at the Nordic Council session in Oslo in 2018. The address was exceptional, in that it was the first foreign parliamentary assembly that the Prime Minister addressed. She has multiple times rejected an invitation to speak to the European Parliament. In her address the Prime Minister said: "...there will be a strong Nordic voice in the EU Council when the United Kingdom has left – I can assure you."⁹

Disregarding the fact that the British Prime Minister, considering the circumstances, is perhaps not the most suitable guarantor for a Nordic voice in the EU, and further disregarding the fact that there has seldom been a Nordic voice in the EU, there might be a grain of truth in what she said. Due to Brexit, the Finnish presidency of the EU Council will be held 6 months earlier than planned, in the latter half of 2019.

The timing is remarkable. New Parliament, new Commission, new EU budget, and the reality of a post-Brexit EU. To further complicate matters, Finland will have a new government after parliamentary elections in April 2019. From a Nordic perspective, what is particularly interesting is the cooperation that usually takes place in connection with Finnish, Swedish or Danish presidencies of the EU Council. The awareness of the Nordic strength has always peaked with the preparations for respective presidencies (Sweden in 2001, Denmark in 2002 and Finland in 2006).¹⁰ As former minister, and Nordic Council politician Bertel Haarder often states from his experiences in the Council; when the Nordics do coordinate, they often get their way in multilateral forums.¹¹ If the Finnish presidency leads to more regular Nordic pre-meetings, it may lay the ground for a stronger Nordic voice in the EU.

⁹ May, Theresa (2018) Speech to the Nordic Council, 30.10.2018: <https://www.norden.org/sv/node/24907>

¹⁰ Grön et al., 2015, p. 56

¹¹ Haarder, Bertel speech at Nordic Council debate 30.10.2018 <https://www.norden.org/sv/node/24945>

Conclusion: Political will is the be-all and end-all

When Finland and Sweden joined the EU in 1995, the Danish Foreign Minister made a statement that their membership would not lead to a Nordic bloc in the EU.¹² At the time there existed a fear that regionalization would hamper European integration. Much has changed since 1995. The European Union has experienced fundamental changes to its structures, functioning and scope: thirteen new members, new legislative powers and the muddle-through of the financial crisis. Today, regional cooperation within the realms of the EU and beyond can, if anything, bolster the European project.

The EU is a Union of 28 (soon 27) Member States and the cooperation of three Nordic countries is not significant enough in the EU Council, where the number of votes determine. Many decisions are made based on unanimity, but even those where Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) is implemented, the Nordic countries do not have enough pooled votes to block a decision. The inclusion of the Baltics is therefore of added-value to the Nordic cooperation, which already often takes form in the NB6 format. In more informal settings, the inclusion of Iceland and Norway, cannot be detrimental. There have been a number of other initiatives, such as the Hanseatic League 2.0 with the three Nordic, and three Baltic countries as well as Netherlands and Ireland, who have engaged in defending common financial and economic interests.¹³ Finding allies and like-minded becomes increasingly important.

Brexit, the European Parliament elections or the Finnish presidency can be the long-awaited impetus for Nordic cooperation in the EU terrain. They set the scene in a favourable manner for Nordic cooperation, yet such cooperation is far from inevitable. Nordic cooperation in the EU requires first and foremost the political will of the Nordic governments to seek the added-value of such cooperation. The added-value manifests itself in the Nordic countries pragmatic approach, a palette of common values and the tendency to punch above their weight when they do cooperate. Whether the Nordic countries will find a common path at the European

¹² Jakobsen, P.V. (2009) Small States: Big Influence: The Overlooked Nordic Influence on the Civilian ESDP, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 47 (1), 85.

¹³ Kuusi, Piret & Raik, Kristi (2018) *The Nordic-Baltic Region in the EU: A loose club of friends*. Swedish Institute for European Policy Analysis, European Policy Analysis, p. 10.

crossroads depends on the Nordic governments, but also on the path chosen by the EU. 2019 will tell.

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