Introduction: The Nordic Countries and the German Question after 1945

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This article introduces Scandinavia (or the Norden, as the region is sometimes called) and describes the position of the five Nordic countries, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, during the Cold War. The Cold War created a new political situation in the Nordic region, and to some degree divided the Nordic countries between East and West and also on the German question. The introduction analyses how the Nordic countries dealt with Germany – that is with the two German states, the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic, and also describes the role of the Soviet Union and how it tried to influence the Nordic stance on the German question.

In the 1950s the Scandinavian or Nordic countries, owing to their geographical proximity to the two newly established German states, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR), seemed to be much more directly confronted by the 'German question' than other parts of Europe,[1] particularly as the East German government and the Soviet Union regarded the three Scandinavian states – Denmark, Norway and Sweden – as the weak links in the chain of Western capitalist countries that refused to recognise the GDR as a separate and sovereign state. The Scandinavian countries were consequently subjected to particularly intense East German political activity and propaganda, and also came under pressure from the Soviet Union, which believed that the Nordic countries'

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1 On Scandinavian–German relations after 1945 see the collection of articles edited by Robert Bohn, Jürgen Elvert and Karl Christian Lammers, *Deutsch-skandinavische Beziehungen nach 1945* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000).

Contemporary European History, **15**, 4 (2006), pp. 443–452 © 2006 Cambridge University Press
doi:10.1017/S0960777306003481 Printed in the United Kingdom

apparently less hostile attitude towards the GDR might encourage them to favour the Soviet stance on the German question. The West Germans, on the other hand, feared that the Scandinavian states might yield to the pressure and recognise the GDR.

It could in fact be said that in the 1950s the 'German question' frequently boiled down to the issue of the status and legitimacy of the GDR, which was a central issue in the Cold War. Some of the Scandinavian countries, however, connected the German question with the status, and consequently the rearmament, of West Germany.[2]

This anxious preoccupation with the situation in neighbouring Germany might seem to justify the assertion that the attitudes of the Scandinavian countries were central to the German question. In reality, things were less simple: after Europe, including the Nordic region, was split by the Cold War, Scandinavian attitudes towards the two German states had to be viewed in the wider context of the East–West conflict. But the German question was for a long time the core of that conflict, and from 1949 and especially after 1954 the recognition of the GDR was the core of the German question. In other words, while the Nordic countries were central to the German question, they had to deal with it in a wider framework determined by the Western great powers and the Soviet Union.[3]

This introduction will provide some general information on Scandinavia (the 'Norden') and discuss the position of the Nordic countries between Germany and the Soviet Union.

The Nordic region in international politics

While 'Scandinavia' is primarily a geographical concept, since 1945 the Nordic region has consisted politically of the five states of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The Scandinavians themselves frequently use the term 'Norden', which connotes some form of community, a nexus of common attitudes and experiences that characterises the region and sets it apart from other parts of Europe in terms of culture and society rather than geography and history. Above all it is seen as signifying a special form of state and society, the 'Nordic model' of a welfare state based on universalism, high taxation and a large public sector.[4] In 1952 'Norden' acquired actual organisational expression with the establishment of the Nordic Council (*Nordisk Råd*), the official agency for co-operation between the parliaments and governments of

2 On the status of the GDR see Thomas Wegener Friis and Andreas Linderoth, eds., *DDR & Norden. Østtysk- nordiske relationer 1949–1989* (Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 2005); Ulrich Pfeil, ed., *Die DDR und der Westen. Transnationale Beziehungen 1949–1989* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2001). On the West German reaction see Dirk Levsen, *Eine schwierige Partnerschaft. Die Bundesrepublik-Norwegen 1949–1956* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1993); William Glenn Gray, *Germany's Cold War. The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany 1949–1969* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); and on the 'German question' see Wilfried Loth, ed., *Die deutsche Frage in der Nachkriegszeit* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1994).

3 Cf. Pfeil, *Die DDR*. On the Cold War see Odd Arne Westad, ed., *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory* (London: Frank Cass, 2000).

4 See the entry 'Norden', in *Den Store Danske Encyklopædi* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1999), Vol. 14, 240–1.

Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and (from 1955) Finland. The Nordic Council meets once a year and has a permanent presidium.[5]

This attempt to establish a Nordic community did not live up to the high expectations with which it began. Perhaps it succeeded socially and culturally, creating, for instance, the Nordic passport union, a common labour market and many cultural, social and scientific initiatives and institutions; but it did not do so politically. This was due not only to national history and differences, but above all to the realities of the Cold War. Owing to the Cold War and its bipolar division of Europe the Norden never became a political or military unit, because its five constituent countries were divided between West and East: Denmark, Iceland and Norway aligned themselves with the Western bloc, Sweden remained neutral, and Finland was friendly towards the Soviet Union.

Efforts to establish an economic community, the Nordek, also failed in 1970 because of Finnish doubts and Soviet hostility, but also because Denmark and Norway aspired to join the European Economic Community (EEC). On the other hand, in many international organisations and diplomatic matters the Nordic countries were perceived, and tried to act, as a single unit.

Internationally, in terms of power politics, the Nordic countries were and still are minor powers that, until 1945, were neutral. However, their proximity to two often aggressive European great powers, Germany and Russia, has meant that their recent history has been to a very considerable degree dependent on German and Russian attitudes and policies vis-à-vis Scandinavia. The Nordic states found themselves in the classic small-nation situation, overshadowed by larger, more powerful neighbours[6] that constituted a potential threat to their national security and territory. As a result, their foreign policy was largely determined by the need to protect themselves against those powers. Until 1945 the chief threat was perceived as coming from Germany, but after the Second World War it shifted from Germany to the Soviet Union, which in a way assumed Germany's role vis-à-vis the Nordic and Baltic regions. Even after this shift of focus, however, the German 'threat' lingered for a time as a political and psychological problem.

Until 1945 Germany, as the leading European great power, had played a dominant and hegemonic role in northern Europe, including Scandinavia. Denmark and the other Nordic countries had grown accustomed to a position in Germany's back garden – not only by reason of geographical proximity but also in terms of politics, economics and trade. Ever since its unification in 1871 Germany, militarily and politically strong and frequently aggressive, had threatened the security of the Nordic countries, above all its small neighbour state Denmark, and that of the Baltic countries as well. This, in a nutshell, was the 'German problem'.

5 The Faroe Islands and the Åland Islands joined the Nordic Council in 1970, Greenland in 1984.

6 A situation sometimes referred to as 'Finlandisation' or, with reference to Denmark and Nazi Germany, 'Denmarkisation': cf. Hans Mouritzen, *Finlandization: Towards A General Theory of Adaptive Politics* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1988).

Despite their generally similar perceptions, the Nordic countries were not unanimous in their response to the German question even before 1945, and much less so afterwards, when Germany was divided and Scandinavia became subject to Soviet pressure. Then came the Cold War, which split Norden itself between West and East. The question now before us is what this situation meant for their relations with Germany and later with the Soviet Union, the new dominant power in northern Europe, including the Baltic region.

From the German problem to the German question

The military defeat and unconditional capitulation of Nazi Germany, followed by the fall and dissolution of the Nazi state in May 1945, seemed to offer a definitive solution to the German threat to the security and peace of Europe. In the recent past that threat had been brutally obvious, especially in view of the radical Nazi project of a '*Neuordnung Europas*' or '*Europäische Neuordnung*' (New European Order) to be imposed by a war of aggression and conquest. It was a threat that the victorious Allied powers were determined to remove. Germany was occupied by Allied forces, its army was dismantled and the whole country was placed under strict foreign political and military control. No time limit was imposed on these measures: the solution to the German problem was to be a permanent one.[7]

Very soon, however, the leading Allied powers – the United Kingdom, the United States and the Soviet Union – began to disagree over Germany's postwar future. Even before the Cold War brought these powers into conflict with one another they found it hard to agree peace terms for the defeated nation; in fact the Western powers – the United Kingdom and the United States – and the Eastern giant – the Soviet Union – ended by seeking separate solutions to the question of Germany's future and de facto divided its territory. Thus the 'German problem' became the 'German question' which was to dominate European politics and the Cold War in Europe until the end of the 1950s. In fact, it was to remain on the European political agenda until the end of the 1980s, when the Berlin Wall fell and the second German state, the GDR, disintegrated, ceased to exist politically and in October 1990 was united with the Federal Republic.[8]

The core of the German question was the existence and status of the second state on German territory, the GDR. The position of Scandinavia in this regard was exceptional: two of the Nordic states were geographically close to the GDR and were thus directly confronted with it as an independent state, while a third, Finland, as a virtual satellite of the Soviet Union was politically and culturally close to the East German state. Nothing comparable existed elsewhere in Western Europe.

Although after its defeat in the Second World War Germany, as one nation, ceased to exist politically and formally, it continue to exist geographically and

7 Cf. Hermann Graml, *Die Alliierten und die Teilung Deutschlands 1941–1949* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1988); Wolfgang Benz, ed., *Deutschland unter alliierter Besatzung 1945–1949/55. Ein Handbuch* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1999).

8 Cf. Graml, *Die Alliierten*; Loth, *Die deutsche Frage*.

geopolitically, economically and psychologically. Situated at the heart of Europe, with nine European states as neighbours, it was still vital to them all in terms of economics, trade, communications and politics. Hence the German question – what should become of Germany and what role it should be allowed to play – was of concern to most European states, and not just for security reasons. It was in their national interests to have Germany back as an active sovereign state. If that was the view of Belgium and the Netherlands, for example, the argument applied with no less force to the Nordic states of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden.[9]

The geographical and strategic positions of these four states vis-à-vis Germany were dissimilar. Whereas Denmark actually bordered Germany (a border that had been disputed since 1920), the other countries did not; yet Sweden and Finland, in particular, had close and vital connections with it. Geography had always played an important part in Nordic history, above all that of Denmark: its history had been inseparable from that of Germany since the eighteenth century, and it was Denmark that was most affected by the dramatic shift in the balance of power when, in 1871, Germany established itself as a great and powerful national state with geopolitical ambitions. As history was to show, being close to Germany was risky.[10]

Despite their dissimilarities, all four Nordic countries had traditionally perceived a united and powerful Germany as a problem. After the defeat of Denmark in the Danish–Prussian war of 1864, which led to the loss of the province of Schleswig, Denmark felt the dominance of Germany so acutely that from its perspective the 'German problem' could be described with equal accuracy as 'the Danish problem' (Deutschland als Problem Dänemarks).[11] The smaller state was more or less forced to adopt a pro-German foreign policy and a stance of benevolent neutrality; only thus could it preserve some sort of independence. The other Nordic states had the same problem to a lesser degree. Things became worse in the 1930s, when the aggressive revisionist foreign policy of Nazi Germany targeted Scandinavia in particular. Denmark was forced to enter into a non-aggression pact in 1939. The other countries were under less pressure, but German aggressiveness during the Second World War brought it home to them, once again, that a powerful, well-armed and aggressive Germany would always be a sword of Damocles hanging over them, and indeed all small states. The Nordic states were among the first victims of Nazi aggression in the War: Denmark and Norway were attacked and occupied as early as April 1940. Norway came under direct German rule, while Denmark was merely 'peacefully occupied', as the Germans put it. Sweden was not attacked, but remained benevolently neutral throughout the war; Finland fought with Germany against Soviet Russia in 1940 and continued to be supported by German forces until it surrendered to the Red Army in 1944. All four countries, in fact, suffered the

9 Iceland became an independent state in 1944, but will not be dealt with explicitly here.

10 Cf. Steen Bo Frandsen, *Dänemark – der kleine Nachbar im Norden. Aspekte der deutsch- dänischen Beziehungen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1994).

11 Hence the title of Troeks Fink's study of Danish foreign policy since 1864, *Deutschland als Problem Dänemarks. Die geschichtlichen Voraussetzungen der dänischen Aussenpolitik* (Flensburg: Christian Wolff Verlag, 1968).

traditional fate of small states confronted by a great power when the aggressive words of 1939 turned into the real aggression of 1940: only Norway received any assistance to help them defy that power. Denmark's non-aggression pact with Germany was patently not worth the paper it was written on.[12]

The occupation of Denmark and Norway left deep wounds and a profound and entrenched distrust of Germany. Fortunately the capitulation of Nazi Germany in May 1945 put an end to the intended 'New European Order' and the three occupied countries were liberated. The subsequent demilitarisation of Germany and the Allied occupation changed the political situation fundamentally: by summer 1945 Germany had ceased to be a state and was completely at the mercy of its enemies. From the Scandinavian point of view this turned the 'German problem' into the 'German question'. Germany had disappeared temporarily as sovereign state, and perhaps permanently as a great power; but it did not cease to be a political problem, nor did distrust of all things German vanish in the smaller European states. Where did this leave Germany in the understanding of the Nordic states? There was more than one answer, as we shall see. Denmark in particular, thanks to its frontier with Germany, perceived Germany as a political problem, but above all as a psychological one.

After Germany's defeat, all the members of the Allied coalition, including Norway and Denmark,[13] were in 1945 invited to contribute to the debate over its future, presenting their desired terms and visions of peace. The fifty or so states involved were virtually unanimous in their wish to see German military power dismantled and Germany permanently demilitarised and thus eliminated as a political and military threat to their security, indeed their existence. Some of the small allied states, including Denmark, Norway, Belgium and the Netherlands, were even invited to assist in the occupation and control of Germany.

The emergence of Soviet Russia as the dominant power in northern Europe

The struggle to defeat Nazi Germany had brought the Soviet Red Army and the Soviet Union into the heart of Europe. It was the Red Army that liberated eastern Europe and even the Danish island of Bornholm; and it conquered Berlin, conferring on the Soviet Union the prestige of victory. Thus in 1945 the powerful communist state might seem to have taken the place of Germany as the hegemonic power in Europe. But its 'liberation' of eastern Europe had resulted in the creation of a Soviet bloc behind what Churchill famously called the 'iron curtain'; and the Soviet Union appeared aggressive and expansionist to many West Europeans and Scandinavians. The Cold War, which could be seen as the US response to Soviet expansionism, was soon to overshadow all Europe.

Although victorious, the leading Allied powers could not agree on a permanent peace with Germany. Their growing political and ideological differences and divergences, particularly those between the United States and the Soviet Union

12 Cf. Henrik S. Nissen, ed., *Scandinavia During the Second World War* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1983).
13 Sweden remained neutral until the end of the war, while Finland, a former ally of Germany, made peace with the Allies in 1946.

which were soon to culminate in the Cold War, led to the break-up of the peace negotiations and precluded a permanent solution to the German problem. Thus the Cold War, and the partition of Germany between East and West, may be said to have contributed to creating the German question and maintaining it on the European agenda. There were now two Germanys to deal with, not one.

From 1949, when German sovereignty was again permitted, the two Germanys – the FRG, set up in the Western zone of occupation, and the GDR in the Soviet-dominated East – both became independent states. Neither power bloc would formally recognise the 'other' Germany. From 1949 until the late 1970s this division of Germany constituted the problem; thereafter it was seen rather as the solution.

The creation of rival power blocs in Europe and the ongoing Cold War had a significant impact on Nordic politics and neutrality. The Prague coup, Soviet pressure on Finland and the Berlin blockade of 1948 increased fear of the supposed threat from the East, and the Soviet Union replaced Germany as the greatest perceived threat to the security of the Scandinavian countries. The Danish Foreign Minister, H. C. Hansen, spelled this out in 1954: owing to the shift in the international balance of power the smaller European states, including Norden, had to accept that the old bogeyman to the south was now a potential and necessary ally in the defence against the new threat from the east.[14] West Germany, in other words, had now to be perceived as an important partner and ally. Accepting this perception, Denmark, Norway and Iceland renounced their neutrality and joined the new US-dominated defence organisation, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Finland's position was very different: it found itself in the opposing power bloc and in 1948 signed a 'treaty of friendship' with its great neighbour the Soviet Union, forcing it to accept Soviet military bases and to find a modus vivendi alongside the Soviet-dominated Eastern power bloc, though without formally being allied with it or becoming part of it. Only Sweden preserved its traditional neutrality, not least out of concern for the fate of Finland; it did not ally itself with either of the antagonistic power blocs, although, as we shall see, it tended to lean towards the West rather than the East.

The Nordic countries were not totally cut off from one another by the Cold War; for instance, the Nordic Council, established in the 1950s, provided a forum for mutual consultation and co-operation. Nonetheless, from 1949 it was clear that their primary allegiance was no longer to the Nordic brotherhood or community, symbolised by the five flying swans, but to their diverging political and security arrangements and alliance obligations. For Denmark and Norway this meant NATO, whereas Sweden and Finland preserved something of the old Nordic neutrality, in theory at least. However, all the Nordic countries, as perceived potential weak links in the capitalist chain, came under heavy political pressure from the Soviet Union.

14 Quoted from Karl Christian Lammers, *'Hvad skal vi gøre ved tyskerne bagefter?' Det dansk- tyske forhold efter 1945* (Copenhagen: Schønberg, 2005), 124.

The postwar Nordic states between Germany and the Soviet Union

The dramatic changes in the international system after the end of the Second World War had serious implications for the former small and neutral states in Europe, including those of the Nordic region.[15] Germany's elimination as a great power, and its replacement by the Soviet Union, had profound implications for the Baltic region in particular. It is important to remember that in 1945 it was by no means clear that the disappearance of a powerful and aggressive Germany would be definitive. It was, however, clear that the Soviet Union had emerged from the war as a budding superpower. The brutal advance of the Red Army had been followed up by Soviet expansion into eastern Europe and a dramatic enlargement of the Soviet sphere of influence. Even Bornholm, Denmark's Baltic outpost, came under Soviet occupation for a year following its 'liberation'. The Soviet Union under Stalin continued to feed the disquiet and uncertainty in the Baltic region: what was its ultimate goal? When would it end its inexorable political advance? The communist coup in Czechoslovakia in February 1948 made the question yet more urgent and intensified the fear of the threat from the east throughout western Europe, especially in the Nordic countries. Thus the antagonisms of the Cold War were to an extent focused on the Baltic Sea. How did the Nordic countries assess this perceived threat from the east, and how did they react?

It seemed clear, from the Scandinavian viewpoint, that the political and military expansion of the Soviet Union had completely upset the balance of power in the Baltic. The Danes, H. C. Hansen explained in 1954, were emotionally opposed to West Germany's accession to NATO and to German rearmament, but in the new political climate Denmark would just have to get used to being in a multilateral alliance with Germany.[16] Now, in the 1950s, the former foe had become an ally, and the new, or at least potential, foe was the expansionist Soviet Union.[17]

Another consequence of the new state of affairs was that whereas prior to 1945 international politics had been approached in a fundamentally bilateral way, the new approach was multilateral, through proliferating new organisations such as the UN, the European Council and NATO. And this applied as much to the German question, which bulked so large in the 1950s, as to anything else. The Nordic countries approached that question in the light of their international obligations. While as a generalisation this holds true, however, the attitudes of the Nordic countries

15 Cf. Jacob Sverdrup, *Inn i storpolitikken 1940–1949, Norsk Udenrigspolitiks Historie* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1996), vol. 4, 201–2; Thorsten Borring Olesen and Poul Villaume, *I blokopdelingens tegn 1945–1972, Dansk Udenrigspolitiks Historie* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2005), vol. 5, 21–2.

16 Lammers, *'Hvad skal vi gøre'*, 124.

17 On the role of the Soviet Union see Knut E. Eriksen and Helge Pharo, *Kald Krig og internasjonalisering 1945–1965. Norsk Udenrigspolitiks historie* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1997), vol. 5, 193–4; Bent Jensen, *Bjørnen og haren. Sovjetunionen og Danmark 1945–1961* (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1999); *Danmark under den kolde krig. Den sikkerhedspolitiske situation 1945–1991* (Copenhagen: Dansk Institut for Internationale Studier, 2005), vols. 1 and 2.

must once again be nuanced. Denmark was still haunted by its past as Germany's smaller neighbour and victim; the other Nordic countries were not, or not nearly as much.

In the 1950s there were in fact two 'German questions': the rearmament of West Germany and the recognition of the GDR. (During this phase of the Cold War the reunification of Germany was patently not an option.) The differing political alignments of the four Nordic countries profoundly affected their stances on both German questions. How were they to deal with and treat the two states? Were both of them legitimate? Were they to be regarded as equal and with equal rights? And could both of them be internationally recognised? Whereas (except for Finland, which constitutes a special case) relations with West Germany were relatively unproblematic, those with the smaller, Soviet-supported GDR were anything but, especially for its two near neighbours, Denmark and Sweden.

It might have been expected that after their previous experiences with a strong and united Germany, the Nordic countries would positively welcome its division into two states. In reality, however, their attitudes were determined by other considerations, not least West Germany's policy on the national question. In view of the complicated international situation, the Scandinavians were not entirely free to decide their own policies vis-à-vis Germany; on the contrary, they were highly dependent on and bound by their political and alliance allegiances. Norway and Denmark, as members of NATO, were bound by two NATO resolutions, the first in 1950 and the second in 1954, which recognised West Germany as a legitimate and democratic state, supported its policy of reunification, and consequently prohibited formal political contacts with the GDR. Sweden strove to maintain a degree of independence, but decided to accept the Western stance and in diplomatic terms recognised only West Germany – although it was very obliging in its practical dealings with the GDR. Finland was close to the Soviet Union and thus forced to live with the GDR, but cleverly avoided recognising that state diplomatically by refusing to recognise the FRG as well.

This is the essential background to the analyses of Nordic attitudes to the German question in the articles which follow. To sum up, Denmark and Norway were aligned with the Western bloc, Sweden was neutral and Finland was closely tied to the Soviet Union. These alignments left the Nordic countries little room for independent initiatives, as was shown for example with regard to the rearmament of West Germany: for historical reasons it would have been controversial in any case, at least in Denmark and Norway, but the situation was vastly complicated by pressure from the Soviet Union.

The German question had other elements as well. As early as the 1950s political initiatives were being taken in Western Europe to deal with that question. It was an important aspect of the earliest moves towards West European integration: West Germany joined with five other states to constitute first the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and subsequently the European Economic Community (EEC). This raises an important question, which is discussed in this special issue: why, if

European integration was seen as a way of solving the German question by binding West Germany (at least) indissolubly into a Western European union, did the Nordic countries not rush to join in? Was it out of fear that these projects were nothing more than German hegemonic plans in a new disguise[18]?

18 Among the Danes, for example, there was a fear that the development which had started with the ECSC could mean a 'short cut' to a West-German-run 'Fourth Reich', although, of course, other political considerations also played a role. See Lammers, *'Hvad skal vi gøre'*, 95, and Olesen and Villaume, *I blokopdelingens tegn*, 254.