

The history of Europe seen from the North

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The Nordic or Scandinavian countries represent variations on general European patterns of state and nation-building and political culture. Denmark and Sweden rank among the oldest and most typical of nation-states together with France, Britain and Spain and should be studied with the same questions in mind. Today, however, a sort of trans-state common Nordic identity coexists with independent national identifications among the Scandinavians. Nordic unity is regarded as a viable alternative to European culture and integration by large numbers of the populations. There has never existed a ‘Scandinavian model’ worthy of the name ‘model’. Because of a series of changes in great power politics in the 18th and 19th centuries, the major conflicts in Europe were relocated away from Northern Europe. This resulted in a virtual ‘neutralization’ of the Scandinavian countries north of the Baltic Sea. Today, the much promoted ‘Nordic identity’ reveals itself only through the nation-states. The ‘Association for Nordic Unity’ (*Foreningerne Norden*) was set up in 1919 only after all five Nordic countries had achieved independent nationhood: Norway in 1905, Finland in 1917, and Iceland in 1918 (the latter only as home rule to be followed by independence in 1944). The very different roads to independent nationhood among the Nordic countries and the idea of a common Nordic identity can be traced back to its beginnings in the 19th century

Eidora Romani Terminus Imperii (The river Eider is the frontier of the Roman Empire). Thus runs an inscription which, from 1671 to 1806, was to be found in the southern wall of the Danish town of Rendsburg right on the river Eider, today’s North Sea Canal.¹ The inscription was removed in 1806 when the Holy Roman Empire was formally dissolved on the order of the French Emperor Napoleon. The Danish monarchy seized the moment and formally incorporated the duchy of Holstein into the Oldenburg monarchy, if only for eight years, until the peace settlements in Kiel and Vienna that ended the Napoleonic

Wars and re-established the German Confederation, including Holstein – but not Schleswig.

The river Eider marked the border between the two duchies of Holstein and Schleswig, which both had been gradually incorporated into the composite Danish monarchy in the 18th century as a consequence of the struggle with the Danish arch-enemy, Sweden. The struggle over these duchies determined the course of Danish history for several centuries, and maybe even today, as the inferiority complex inflicted on Danish political culture through the defeat by the German states in 1864 over the future of the duchies still, to a large degree, determines Danish attitudes to its southern neighbour in particular, and European integration in general. This particular national experience, though, is not the topic of the present analysis. But the fact that Denmark and the other Nordic or Scandinavian countries never belonged to the Holy Roman Empire is important for the understanding of the different political traditions that today melt together in the European Union.

A major debate ever since the setting up of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1950 and the European Common Market in 1957, has turned around the degree of supranational decision-making power in the community. Should it develop into something similar to a federation, a sort of United States of Europe or should the basis of the cooperation be the unchallenged sovereign nation states? In reality this debate has been solved by the latest expansion of the European Union by eight Central and East European states and the formulation of the new treaty constitution for the EU. All of the newcomers to the EU will probably jealously guard their newly acquired national independence. The European Union will most probably develop into what several European politicians somewhat paradoxically have labelled a 'Federation of Nation States' (see the more detailed argument in Ref. 2). Yet, we should never neglect the importance of the very different historical experiences of the European states.

Regardless of the important differences in size, all of the states in Europe, today, have come to take the shape of nations. This goes also for the former communist states in Central and Eastern Europe. As an unintended consequence of Hitler and Stalin's otherwise intended mass purges during and after World War 2, these countries have become efficiently 'ethnically cleansed' of their Jewish, German and many other national and religious minorities. For the first time in history states such as Poland, Lithuania and the Czech Republic are almost nationally and ethnically homogeneous. It was done in horrible ways and the end result is not necessarily appealing, but the result in terms of unquestioned victory for the principle of homogeneous nation states cannot be denied.

The same has happened in Western Europe. In the older and established nation states these processes have taken a very long time and the horrors of former 'ethnic cleansings' have been forgotten. But other countries, mainly smaller states, now

as result of the structural pressures of the integration process have become national. This is even the case for a state like Luxembourg. Historically a leftover from the rise and national integration of France and Germany, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg today has even developed a national language, Letzeburgisch. Originally ruled in German and French, the citizens of Luxembourg – because of support from the European authorities – have developed a national dictionary and in 1984 declared their German dialect a national language. The same seems to be happening in the Republic of Ireland with the rise of the number of persons who claim to be prolific in the other official language, Erse. This does not imply that English will disappear in Ireland, not at all. But contrary to the situation in 1973 when Ireland joined the European Community, when the Irish language seemed to be on the verge of disappearing, the trend has been reversed. This is partly due to the efforts by the European Bureau for the Advance of Lesser Used Languages, which has been based in Dublin since 1983.³

Seen from today, the victory for the principle of the nation state looks like a given fact. Yet, as late as the turn of century in 1900, most Europeans lived in multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-cultural states of basically two types. Examples of the first kind were the Russian, the Ottoman and the Habsburg empires. Arguably the Prussian monarchy and its successor the German Empire of 1871 too may be placed in this category together with the multinational kingdom of Spain (Castile with its Catalan, Galician and Basque dependencies). In all these cases several European language groups and cultural communities lived in compact, contiguous homelands within one state. The second kind of states consisted of more or less homogeneous territorial nation-states in Europe with so-called colonial empires extended overseas. In the 18th century the British, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch had such colonial dependencies.

These latter are often called empires, but the overseas empires of colonies should not be confused with real empires with frontiers and a unified political structure. As the colonial empires ran into troubles they experimented with different aspects of the political attributes of empires but this only amounted to mere window-dressing. The core lands of the United Kingdom could in some ways be regarded as an empire, if seen from the so-called 'Celtic fringe'.⁴ More precisely, though, this is to interpret it as a composite state comprising the islands of Great Britain and (since 1800) Ireland. As a result of the lessons learned during the war with the American colonies in the 18th century (the third British revolution), not even the elites in the British Empire had anything amounting to political rights in the centre. The inhabitants were subjects of the crown regardless of their status. The second French colonial adventure in the 19th century likewise was called an empire. This was all the more surprising as the metropolis from 1870–75 was a Republic (the Third). Apart from some half-hearted attempts

neither this nor other European colonial conglomerates were empires in any precise, political sense.

During the 19th and 20th centuries, nationalist movements supported by the self-interests of the victorious Western powers and Wilsonian-inspired idealism in foreign affairs have overturned these multi-national empires. They were dissolved into national states primarily at the end of the First and Third World Wars (I define the Cold War as a real war and the demise of the Soviet empire and the Soviet Union 1989 to 1991 as the victory of the US-led alliance). The European overseas empires, on the other hand, appeared in the beginning of this process to be going from strength to strength, and the belief in the civilizing mission of Europe and North America was widely accepted. The French won a new empire in Africa and Indochina whereas the British greatly expanded their possessions. Other European states followed: the Italians in East Africa, the Belgians in Congo, and the Germans in South-West and East Africa. The Japanese conquered Korea and some of China. The United States annexed the Philippines and Puerto Rico and set up effective protectorates in Cuba and Panama. The advance of these European empires all over the world looked to the majority of Victorians as irreversible as the dissolution of the multi-national empires in Europe. Yet, the whole edifice was undone with astonishing speed in a few decades after 1945. The main reason for this was that they were not empires in the real sense of the word.

The rapid dismantling of the colonial empires is an argument in favour of drawing a clear distinction between real – i.e. political – empires and the misnamed colonies. Unfortunately, in English and French it is impossible to distinguish between the two types of political organizations. The situation is a little better in German (and Danish) where we have two concepts, *Reich* and *Kaisertum*, but only a little better. The term Empire ought to be reserved for supra- or pre-national states with universalist pretensions. All known empires have been mainly landlocked or organized around a sea with definable limits – for example the Mediterranean as *the mare nostrum* of the Romans. The notion of frontier is the important feature, though, not the landlocked character. If continuous communication can be conceived in different ways, the geography in itself is not of determining importance.

The influential liberal-conservative historian, Lord Acton, editor of the *Cambridge Modern History*, was a great lover of political freedom and a great enemy of nationalism. According to him, ‘The combination of different nations in one State is as necessary a condition of civilised life as the combination of men in society. ... It is in the cauldron of the State that the fusion takes place by which the vigour, the knowledge, and the capacity of one portion of mankind may be communicated to another. Where political and national boundaries coincide, society ceases to advance, and nations relapse into a condition corresponding to

that of men who renounce intercourse with their fellowmen.’⁵ In his slightly quaint Victorian language Acton defined the difference between an ethnical and a political definition of the state as follows: ‘The difference between nationality and the State is exhibited in the nature of patriotic attachment. Our connection with the race is merely natural or physical, whilst our duties to the political nation are ethical. ... Patriotism is in political life what faith is in religion, and it stands to the domestic feelings and to homesickness as faith to fanaticism and to superstition.’ Acton concluded with the prophetic words: ‘The greatest adversary of the rights of nationality is the modern theory of nationality. By making the State and the nation commensurate with each other in theory, it reduces practically to a subject condition all other nationalities that may be within the boundary.’ According to him the nation-state does not necessarily represent the apotheosis of democracy although it seems historically to have been the most fertile breeding ground and even precondition for it. This point of view is supported by the Paris based American columnist William Pfaff on the dangers of nationalism from 1993.⁶ He has an interesting chapter on the differences between empires and nations. Pfaff reaches the conclusion that empires and nations differ in kind and not just scale. Empires tend to incorporate many national and ethnic groups and have expanding (or shrinking) frontiers; they are inclusive rather than being exclusive and thus are suitable political vehicles for religious civilizations. The modern world, however, seems to demand nations.

With the exception of the Soviet empire, all European empires have at one time or another claimed inheritance of traits from the Roman Empire, either the *Imperium populi Romanum* of the Republic or the *Imperium Romanum* governed by the Emperor Augustus and his later Christian successors. The First World War put an end to Europe’s landlocked empires, the Ottoman, the Austro-Hungarian, and the Prussian. Tsarist Russia only survived because it took on a token Marxist internationalism and thus survived in Bolshevik disguise until 1991. Generally, most empires have been relatively benevolent towards their subjects, whereas nation states have been able to extort much more from their citizens in terms of taxes, casualties in wars, and fanaticism. This does not imply that empires are more kind social organizations. Their benevolence testifies rather to their relative weakness, whereas nation states have been able to command greater sacrifices precisely because of their strength and legitimacy stemming from their internal coherence. But is military efficiency really the only criterion on which to judge societies?

The European failure of universal empire

The absence of a centrally controlled empire is the most basic characteristic of the European civilization. However, one should not completely disregard the

notion of universal empire in comparative analyses of European identity. After all, most of the large groups of people in history have been organized in empires, and the empires had grown in size in the High Middle Ages when Europe began to organize space and territory in a whole new way, in sharply demarcated territorial states and nations.

What really needs explaining, as regards Europe, is why a thriving empire did not evolve inside her borders after the fall of Rome as it did in China, the Middle East, Persia and India. Even though it was close at times, from Charlemagne to the Habsburgs, none of the great European empire-builders were able to swallow all their competitors on the relatively small continent. Even the powerful Charles V backed by all the resources of the Spanish Americas, failed in 1555 with the Peace of Augsburg, where the principle of *cujus regio, eius religio* (the religion of the ruling prince should be the religion of his land) won out. The idea of one universal empire in Europe was definitively militarily defeated with the defeat of the Great Armada in 1588. Charles V's son, Philip or Felipe II of Spain, in 1588 mobilized a huge navy and army against Queen Elizabeth I of England. It failed, as we know, but modern research has made it clear that it was a very close run thing, indeed. If the Spanish fleet had not been shipwrecked in a hurricane, the Duke of Alba's war-hardened troops would most likely have cut through England like a knife through butter (see the now classic account by Parker⁷). Furthermore, such a military success would have mobilized the still strong Catholic forces in England. In truth, 1588 is one of the great turning points of European history.

Later, the Habsburgs again failed to establish hegemony in Central Europe in the Thirty Years War, first and foremost because of intervention by the Swedish King Gustavus II Adolphus in league with Cardinal Richelieu of France in one of the unholy, interest-based cross-alliances typical of European politics since the Middle Ages. Instead of an empire with clear-cut allocation of competence, Europe became a system of states in unstable balance, a system where change in one element affected the others like billiard balls. This system of sovereign territorial states with permanently changing alliances is called the Westphalian System, after the peace settlement at Westphalia in 1648 when the German states were internationalized and the modern principles of relations between sovereign territorial states were founded. This result is vital to an understanding of the industrial, technological, democratic and national revolutions that have characterized Europe's development. Indubitably, the whole of Europe was neither modernized nor industrialized at the same time nor in the same way. Leadership came and went, different regions fell behind at different times, and earlier leaders of the race fell by the wayside. After a time, however, this very backwardness allowed a few of the losers to make a crucial leap ahead, as convincingly analysed by the Russian-American economic historian Alexander Gerschenkron under the phrase 'The Relative Advantage of Backwardness'.⁸

By pointing to the variations in the process of industrialization in the most important European countries, Gerschenkron made it clear that industrial laggards, precisely because of their backwardness, were able to develop substitutes for the conditions that characterized the original British industrial model. With the help of governmental intervention or financial banks, they succeeded in accumulating sufficient capital to 'take off'. Gerschenkron even has hinted that it could be an advantage to be a late starter as a country thus might be able to skip earlier stages of industrial development and go straight into the most advanced sector of its time. Gerschenkron thus has helped us understand industrialization in Europe as variations on a theme, not identical processes or slavish copies. It was the differences that were the secret of the dynamics of European society. The industrial revolution was not planned by a political and administrative centre, as would have been the case had the same thing happened in China. Had that been the case it would have been evolution, not revolution and Europe would not then have been 'European'.

The cost of this type of system is that it presupposes a balance of power in order to survive. And the balance must in the final instance rest on mutually recognized relative military strength. Investments in new military hardware are therefore made at a breakneck pace. That is the logic of balance of power, and wishful thinking will not change it. The years from 1500 to 1700 were the most warlike ever in Europe with regard to the percentage of years with open conflict, the frequency of war (one nearly every third year), and the average length, extent and intensity of conflicts. Spain and France were hardly ever at peace during the 16th century, and in the 17th century; the Austrian Habsburgs and Sweden were at war on average for two out of every three years, Spain for three out of every five, Poland and Russia for four out of five, and the Ottoman Empire practically constantly.⁹ Contrary to the usual assumptions, the weapons race turned out to be an economic advantage, if not for the population as such, at least for the states involved. The 'new military history research' of the 1960s and 1970s has demonstrated how the serious administrative and logistical problems posed by the need to build fortresses and warships and recruit and equip soldiers on a hitherto unknown scale caused a revolution in the form of government, from which the modern state was born in the 18th century.¹⁰ This 'military revolution' to a very large degree also helps explain the development of the work-discipline, management and technological discoveries that made possible the Industrial Revolution from 1780 onwards.

In contrast to decentralization within a system of states, an empire is able to control the economy centrally. It cannot be said a priori which system is best. Europe's example shows, however, that seen over a period of time, centralization seems to be less effective. Empires normally become unstable in the long run, regardless of how stable they may seem when seen in a shorter perspective.

Universal empires never made it to Northern Europe. *Eidora Terminus Imperii Romanum*, i.e. the absence of universal empire and the early predominance of sovereign state nations, thus may be taken as the ‘Northern’ lesson for the history of Europe. In formal terms the Scandinavian countries never came under the sway of the universal emperor and were thus examples of the Westphalian system of a (shifting) balance of power between competing territorial states almost before the peace of Westphalia in 1648. In the 19th and 20th centuries the Nordic monarchies gradually gave way to territorially and subsequently nationally defined states and are today the very epitome of the (European) nation state.

‘Norden’ as a historical region* and a mental construct

Seen from a geographical and geopolitical point of view, the majority of the Nordic countries undeniably belong to the Baltic area. At the same time they are certainly situated in the Northern part of Europe. Nevertheless, over the last 150 years, the three Scandinavian countries, Denmark, Norway and Sweden have tended to downplay the Baltic and the European component of their national identifications. Many Scandinavians, social democrats as well as liberals, have perceived the ‘Nordic’ political culture, social structure and mentality as fundamentally different from that of the rest of Europe. An indication of this attitude is the use of *Norden* instead of ‘Northern Europe’ in these countries. *Norden* is perceived as something non-European, non-Catholic, anti-Rome, anti-imperialist, non-colonial, non-exploitative, peaceful, small and social democratic. In short, the Nordic peoples have perceived themselves as having no responsibility for Europe’s exploitation of the rest of the world and have spent a good part of their international efforts trying to make up for the wrongdoings of their fellow Europeans towards the Third and Fourth Worlds. Hence the activist role played by these states in the United Nations in collaboration with the Netherlands, Canada, the Republic of Ireland and a few others. Still today, for many Scandinavians, the secret to economic and political success in this remote and sparsely populated part of Europe lies in keeping distance from all the neighbouring powers – Germany and Russia in particular. There is some truth in this lesson from history if one looks at the periods of great power confrontations, but the mentality also testifies to a rather naïve lack of understanding of the real background for the amazing success story of the Nordic nations in the 20th century.

Sweden withdrew from European power politics after the disastrous defeat in 1709 at Poltava and gradually replaced its imperial ambitions with those of a

*‘Historical region’ can be understood in two ways: either as a traditional landscape or province from the period before the modern nation-states and their subdivisions or as a transnational region signalling common history for a group of nations and states. Here the term is used in the latter meaning.

smaller nation-state. Yet, the state still harboured revanchist ambitions against the rising Russia, which led to war in 1788–89. The resulting stalemate, however, led eventually to total defeat in 1808–09 and the loss of the half of the Swedish state to Russia. Under Russian patronage this province together with eastern Karelia was reorganized as Finland. It is equally true that Denmark – the House of Oldenburg or *Kron zu Dennemarck* as the composite state was called in Low German (*plattdeutsch*) – was reduced to a medium sized power in 1814 with the loss of Norway. Yet, the multi-nation-state of Denmark-Schleswig-Holstein and Lauenburg was still a player in European power politics until 1863, albeit often in a rather amateurish way. This naïve amateurism eventually led to the catastrophe in 1864 and the reduction of Denmark to the very epitome of a small state, but only then and pretty much because of its own mistakes. Even today, when Denmark is undeniably the ultimate small state, it has not completely relieved itself of the burdens of the former empire, the Faeroe Island and Greenland. Denmark as a nation-state is at the same time Denmark the Commonwealth, representing three separate nations in the world community.

The formerly subject nations, Norway and Iceland, have profited from the relative lack of great power interest in this Northern European periphery in different ways and have developed their own separate identities and successful sovereign states. Even the Faeroe Islands and Greenland have been able to realise their own national identities and set up separate states with home rule in union with Denmark because of the relative lack of interest by the great powers in this area. Yet, there are important exceptions to the general rule of non-involvement of the Nordic countries in European affairs. Finland has been affected by the major European conflicts to the same degree as the small Baltic countries south of the Finnish Gulf. The main difference is that Finland has been luckier, partly due to its more solid and unified social and national base backed up by a more advantageous geographic situation *vis-à-vis* Russia. Apart from the occupation of Norway and Denmark in the Second World War by Germany (and Iceland, Greenland and the Faeroe Island by Britain and the United States), the rest of the Nordic area, due to geography and political choices, has successfully kept out of most European conflicts since these countries learned their lessons early in the 19th century.

The fortunate geopolitical situation of the Nordic countries, though, is no achievement of their own. They were left more or less alone when, after the Napoleonic wars, the major conflicts between the great powers moved to other areas. Even the Soviet hegemony in the eastern Baltic from 1945, fortunately, did not bring the Nordic countries into the centre of international politics. Because of their fortunate geographical position, the overwhelming majority of Scandinavians were able to live through the Cold War without really noticing that they were involved in a major conflict, consequently, the populations have not yet realized

that they were on the winning side. If noticed at all, the new confusing state of affairs after 1989 is often deplored and many almost long to be back in the bad, but predictable, old days of Cold War confrontations.¹¹

Because of this isolationist mentality the majority of Swedes and Danes, contrary to the Finlanders,[†] have tended to ignore the Baltic character and determinants of their common history. Iceland and Norway, on the other hand, after the entry of Finland and Sweden into the European Union in 1995 have begun stressing their Atlantic character more and more. To a degree the same is the case in the Faeroe Islands, which regardless of their union with Denmark have stayed out of the EC and now the EU. Greenland too has opted out of the European Union and presents itself more and more as a leader among the indigenous peoples of the earth. If Greenland has any geopolitical affiliations apart from Denmark it seems to be with the Indians and Inuits of Canada and further west. The rise of the European Union and the fall of the Soviet empire have ended the approximately 150 years of nationalist blindness to the geopolitical imponderabilities in Northern Europe.

This blindness has also characterized most political and cultural historians with a few notable exceptions. *Norden* still awaits its Fernand Braudel, i.e. a historian who is able to depict the *longue durée* of this European region. Maybe it will turn out an impossible task because of the geographic differences among the Nordic countries. The Baltic area can be seen as functionally equivalent to the Mediterranean, but the Baltic area is only a part of Scandinavia or Norden, albeit a very substantial part. A truly comparative history of the region should for example analyse the common characteristics of the two border areas, Schleswig and Karelia. They share a similar historical experience in the sense that both provinces have been carved out of their original allegiance and for long periods have been attached to neighbours with a different language and, in Karelia, a different religion. Yet some traits of the original, social structures have survived and surface every now and again.

Such a surfacing of a regional identification with the former province of Schleswig in disguise of an affiliation to the party for the Danish national minority seems to be under way at present in the Bundesland of Schleswig-Holstein. The rights of the Danish minority south of the border as well as those of the German speakers to the north are well established and both groups seem to be firmly established within their respective states. In Karelia, the situation is much less settled. Most of the Finnish-speaking, Orthodox Karelians settled in eastern

[†]Note that I deliberately use the term 'Finlander' for a citizen of Finland. Finland officially comprises Finnish speakers as well as Swedish speakers. The latter are a small minority of 7% but the nation is bi-lingual and bi-national. A Finn is a Finnish speaking citizen of Finland whereas a Swedish speaking Finlander normally is referred to as a 'Swedish speaking Finlander' or simply and less precise as a 'Swedish Finn' (see Refs 12 and 13).

Finland after 1944 and do not want to return to the former Soviet, now Russian, autonomous republic of Karelia. Yet, some changes of the border, mainly regarding the affiliation of the old Swedish town Vyborg, might be under way as a result of the weakening of Russia.¹²

The British historian David Kirby has attempted to write what no Nordic historian has ever been able to do, an integrated political and social history of Northern Europe organized around the question of the dominance over the Baltic Sea (in Latin *Dominium Maris Baltici*) from 1500 until the present day.^{13,14} Because of his Baltic perspective, the Atlantic half of *Norden*, Norway, Iceland, the Faeroe Islands and Greenland have been omitted. This choice runs counter to the popular ideology of a common Nordic identity but makes a lot of geopolitical sense. Modestly, Kirby in the preface to the first volume, claims that he is no Braudel and primarily has written a general introduction to the history and controversies of the Baltic region. In fact, he has given us much more. At times he comes close to a Braudel with more interest than the French master for the importance of international politics and traditional dynastic politics, all consequently set against a background of solid social and economic history. There is not a lot of *longue durée* in Kirby's analysis but an extremely interesting description of the interplay of the many different national histories of which he masters the languages, Finnish, Swedish, Danish, German, Russian and Polish. The following analysis is highly indebted to Kirby's all-embracing perspective.

One Nordic model or several nation-states?

Norden (literally the North) is a concept that evokes unequivocally positive associations for almost everyone in the Nordic countries, connoting notions of a community of values that transcends boundaries of language and culture. But when did the concept of *Norden* actually emerge? What is the nature of the relationship between *Norden* as a mental construct and the geographical realities? From a strictly geographical point of view one ought to talk of Northern Europe rather than *Norden*. For Danes in particular, however, this has the major drawback of locating Denmark as a part of Northern Germany, an area from which Danes normally have tried to distinguish themselves. Despite the popular appeal of the notion of Nordic unity, the relationship between an assumed common 'Nordic' identity and the sovereign nation-states of which *Norden* actually consists remains basically unclear for the inhabitants of this North European periphery.

Today, the five independent Nordic nation-states Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Iceland, together with the autonomous regions, the Åland Islands, the Faeroe Islands, Greenland and soon the Sami nation in northern Sweden and Norway perceive themselves as small, peace-loving and solidly democratic countries. Until the breakdown of the Communist block, the model of the 'Nordic'

welfare state represented a third way between the two dominant superpowers and their attendant ideologies. This is no longer the case. Indeed, one may have one's doubts as to whether a 'Nordic model' in the proper sense ever existed at all. Scandinavians have never seen themselves as representatives of one consistent and distinctive social model; national differences always seem to have too important.

The notion of *Norden* as a conscious Social Democratic alternative to the continental European class struggles between bourgeoisie, workers and peasants first emerged abroad with the American journalist Marquis Childs' classic work from 1936,¹⁵ and has culminated with Gösta Esping-Andersen's analyses of the Nordic welfare states as different variations on a parallel Social Democratic strategy,^{16,17} He distinguishes between three versions of 'welfare capitalism': the social democratic, the liberal and the conservative. The social democratic character of the Nordic welfare state has recently come under criticism by an American comparative historian of the younger school¹⁸ as well as by others. Regardless of the national differences, nobody has denied the almost paradigmatic character of the universal welfare state in the Nordic countries.

Despite the untenability of the notion of a specifically Nordic model it is an indisputable fact that the Nordic countries have gone through a more harmonious process of modernization in the 20th century than most other countries in Europe. Thanks to the compromises of the 1930s, Norway, Sweden and Denmark proved largely immune to the temptations of Nazism and fascism,¹⁹ a fact which is even more true in the post-war period. Despite current financial problems, the Nordic countries still provide a shining example of social order and internal democracy, exemplary not only for the insiders, but also for surprising numbers elsewhere in the world, and with good reason. The Nordic countries, irrespective of the existence or otherwise of a Nordic model, function more smoothly than the majority of societies. The problem, however, is that a majority in the Nordic countries have embraced the notion to such an extent that it appears to view the mythical notion of Nordic unity as forming a contrast to Europe. To take a realistic view, however, Nordic history and culture represents but one variation on what are common European patterns and themes, a variation which, due to a wide range of geopolitical conditions, has resulted in small, nationally homogeneous, socially democratic, Lutheran states. But it is a variation, nevertheless, on common European impulses.

Norden and Scandinavia are by no means synonymous, although they are often used as if they were interchangeable. The 'Northern countries' to which Tacitus referred in his treatise '*Germania*' were not Scandinavia but the whole of Northern Europe.²⁰ The word '*Scandinavia*' first occurs in Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* as a misspelling of *Scaninavia*, the name given to the province Skåne, which Pliny believed to be an island. Only in the 18th century was the name Scandinavia

adopted as a convenient general term for the whole of the region to which Skåne belonged. The name is sometimes used in a limited sense for the peninsula shared between Norway and Sweden. This terminology makes some geographical sense but has very little historical meaning. Until 1658, a large part of what is now Sweden was in the Danish Kingdom, and from 1380 to 1814, Norway was also ruled by the Danish king. Because of these facts the term Scandinavia is most often used with reference to the three ‘old’ Nordic countries, Denmark, Norway and Sweden. *Norden*, on the contrary also incorporates Finland, Iceland, the Faeroe Islands, the Åland Islands, Greenland and the emerging Sami nation in northern Norway.

If the peninsula of Jutland and the Danish islands are seen as part of ‘Scandinavia’, it is because the concept is understood in a politico-historical rather than a geographical-geopolitical sense, as is evident from the history of the designations themselves. Conversely, the matter of just how precise the apparently exact distinction between *Norden* and Scandinavia actually is may be a matter for discussion. The Danish historian Kristian Hvidt who dislikes the concepts ‘Norden’ and ‘nordism’ has argued that the ostensibly exact term ‘Scandinavia’ is actually just as imprecise as *Norden*. Scandinavia is just an old name for the modern Swedish province of Skåne (Scania), etymologically referring to the shallow waters where ships may run aground, the Skanör in Øresund, whose waters in medieval times were rich in fish.²¹

The concept ‘Norden’, on the other hand, also has an ambiguous history. In the 18th century the ‘Northern tours’ undertaken by gentlemen of leisure usually embraced Poland and Russia, as well as Scandinavia proper. According to David Kirby, journals with the prefatorial adjective ‘Nordische’ appeared from Hamburg to St. Petersburg – the ‘Palmyra of the North’. The German historian Leopold von Ranke elevated both Karl XII of Sweden and Peter the Great of Russia to a Pantheon of ‘Northern heroes’.¹³ With the rise of an independent notion of a ‘Slavic’ Eastern Europe, however, Northern Europe and Eastern Europe were gradually separated. Yet, until the reorganization of the British Foreign Office in the Second World War, Russia as well as Poland were included in its Northern Desk. Whether that is the reason for disastrous misjudgements is another thing. The fact remains that in the traditional European optic of international affairs Russia was a Northern country on an equal footing with its Swedish foe and Danish ally rather than an Eastern country until this century.

All this leads to regarding that Scandinavia may be just as appropriate as *Norden*. Yet, the argument meets with resistance, particularly with Finland. As in Norway, where the very mention of the word union calls to mind suggestions of the period 1814–1905, the Finns recall the last century when they were a part of the Russian Empire and completely forgotten by the rest of the ‘Scandinavian’,

i.e. the Swedish North. Likewise, neither the Icelanders nor the Faeroese feel included by the term Scandinavia. For these reasons it would seem to make sense to maintain the established term *Norden*, even if it does present major problems in English and touch the wrong chords in German.

‘Nordisch’ was the term used by the pan-Germanic dreamers of the last century in reference to the ‘true’, unspoiled Germanic peoples of *Norden* and was later utterly discredited by Nazism. Today, younger German scholars refer to their subject by way of opposition to the Germanic ideology as ‘Skandinavistik’, despite the fact that the discipline also incorporates the study of Finnish and Icelandic language, literature and society. The question of where to place Greenland and the Greenlandic language, not to mention Lappland and the Sami, remains unclear at the major universities outside *Norden*. Only in Canada has the study of Greenland been accorded independent status as the hitherto only example of the people of a so-called ‘fourth world’ country having established their own nation-state with its own language, flag and other symbols. If this success continues for Greenland, then the Nordic bond will, viewed rationally, inevitably be weakened in the long term.

If the applied designations are ambiguous, the historical sense of community between the countries is no less ambivalent. If one is to be honest about it, the major part of Nordic history is characterized by conflict and attempts by the one country to dominate the other(s), just as has been the case in every other part of Europe. Nonetheless, or perhaps even for this very reason, a conception of *Norden* as a potential great power able to engage even Russia and Germany did thrive for a brief period in the middle of the last century. This Scandinavianist vision was materialized in a somewhat perverted form in the shape of a museum in Stockholm bearing the auspicious name *Nordiska museet* (Nordic Museum), although the imposing name concealed little more than a Swedish local-heritage museum with a smattering of Swedish royalism and anti-Danish sentiment thrown in. In the entrance hall the visitor is confronted by an enormous, intimidating granite statue of Gustav Vasa, the call to *Warer Swenska!* (Be Swedish!) carved unambiguously into its base. The obvious intention was to strengthen the Swedish nation-state, but nothing less than ‘Nordiska’ would do in an age in which what was at stake was the unification of the Nordic states (minus Finland) and, primarily, the consolidation of Swedish supremacy over Norway. The same thing would have happened with respect to Denmark had the Scandinavianists in the 1850s succeeded in their plan to place the Swedish king on the Danish throne. As it turned out, nothing came of the plan, the Danes eventually preferring a king of German descent. Moreover, the Swedish-Norwegian state was to keep well out of it when the Danish-Schleswig-Holsteinian multi-nation-state under its amateurish National Liberal leadership got itself messed up in a war with the German Confederation in 1864.²² A war which, incidentally, led to the

rise, not only of the modern nation-state of Denmark, but also of modern Germany.

The rise of the modern nation state in *Norden* today seems inevitable and 'natural'. The union between Sweden and Norway was dissolved relatively peaceably in 1905. Finland was established as a separate Grand Duchy under the Russian emperor in 1809 and gained full independence in 1917. Iceland broke away from Denmark in two phases in 1918 and 1944 during wars in which relations were suspended, effectively preventing Denmark from placing obstacles in the way. The Faeroe Islands gained their autonomous status in 1948, Greenland its in 1979, and the Sami will no doubt soon follow suit. The Åland Islands were by international ruling accorded status as a self-governing part of Finland in 1921 as compensation for not having been allowed to join Sweden. It will appear from the above that *Norden* consists of independent nation-states all with their own quite different histories. From where, then, does the conception of a common identity transcending national boundaries originate?

The Nordic or Scandinavian countries represent variations on general European patterns of state and nation-building and political culture. Denmark and Sweden rank among the oldest and most typical of nation-states together with France, Britain and Spain and should be studied with the same questions in mind. Today, however, a sort of trans-state common Nordic identity coexists with independent national identifications among the Scandinavians. Nordic unity is regarded as a viable alternative to European culture and integration by large numbers of the populations. There has never existed a 'Scandinavian model' worthy of the name 'model'. Because of a series of changes in great power politics in the 18th and 19th centuries, the major conflicts in Europe were relocated away from Northern Europe. This resulted in a virtual 'neutralization' of the Scandinavian countries north of the Baltic Sea.

Today, the much-promoted 'Nordic identity' reveals itself only through the nation-states. The 'Association for Nordic Unity' (*Foreningerne Norden*) was set up in 1919 only after all five Nordic countries had achieved independent nationhood. The very different roads to independent nationhood among the Nordic countries have been investigated and the idea of a common Nordic identity traced back to its beginnings in the 19th century. The European Union, today, after the latest enlargement with ten countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean, seems to be moving resolutely towards what has been called a federation of nation states. Although logically a contradiction in terms, such an understanding of Europe actually fits very well with the traditions and political cultures of the Nordic countries. Whether this means that they will move closer to the centre of EU politics in the future, remains to be seen.

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