# Comparison of Finnish Defence and Foreign Policy Approaches – Discourses on Security Policy Stances and the Demilitarisation of the Åland Islands

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Abstract

This article analyses foreign and defence policy arguments in the Finnish parliamentary discourses after Finland's EU accession (2004–2017) related to the concepts of *military non-alliance, non-membership of a military alliance, as well as demilitarisation and neutralisation of the Åland Islands*. It examines how foreign policy and defence policy perspectives differ in the parliamentary debates and committee reports on the concepts. Finnish security policy has seen a gradual shift since the 1990s from *neutrality policy* through *military non-alliance* to the current n*on-membership of a military alliance*. In contrast, the acknowledgement of the *demilitarised and neutralised* status of the Åland Islands appears to remain extensive despite some critical comments from defence policy actors. The foreign policy approach emphasises a positive instrumental approach and acknowledgement of the concepts, whilst the defence policy approach views the concepts with either acknowledgment or as negative instruments allegedly hampering defence preparation.

Keywords

European Union; Finland; foreign policy; non-alliance; Åland Islands; international law

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## Introduction

This article tests the previous claim that in contrast to norm-emphasising foreign policy actors, defence policy actors tend to focus on strategic culture, which pays little attention to international commitments (Dewitt 2015). Whilst David B. Dewitt analysed the approaches of foreign and defence policy ministries towards the concept of human security in Canada, this article reviews the approaches in the Finnish Parliament towards the Finnish post-neutrality policy and towards the demilitarisation regime concerning the Åland Islands, a group of islands located in the Finnish Archipelago Sea. The article differentiates between foreign policy and defence policy approaches on the basis of whether the ministers and parliamentary committees represent foreign affairs or defence policy.

The security concepts analysed in the article include military non-alliance, non-membership of a military alliance, as well as demilitarisation and neutralisation. The former concepts have been used to define the Finnish security policy stances after abandoning the Cold War neutrality policy. Indeed, from the 1990s Finland has reformulated the policy into looser stances referring to non-membership in NATO. The demilitarisation and neutralisation of the Åland Islands, in turn, refers to the ban originating from the multilateral 1856 and 1921 conventions not to have any military personnel or equipment in the islands during peacetime (demilitarisation) or using the islands for war purposes during wartime (neutralisation). What is common to all the analysed concepts is that certain politicians have proposed changing both the foreign policy stances and the demilitarisation regime. The calls to restrict demilitarisation seem to mainly come from the defence actors, such as from the Finnish Defence Minister in office in 2015–2019 (e.g. Ykkösaamu 2016). Such calls rely on the claim that the Åland Islands are strategically important and thus vulnerable to an attack by e.g. so-called "green men". However, the Foreign Minister of the time representing the same Finns party as the Defence Minister defended the existence of the regime. This article analysed the questions to what extent can we observe differences in the defence and foreign policy approaches regarding arrangements restricting military activities, and what could explain them.

During the Cold War, Finland tried to remain out of the bipolar tensions by following a self-declared policy of neutrality, which meant that Finland did not officially take sides in the superpower rivalry (see e.g. Rainio-Niemi 2014). The end of the Cold War, in turn, was a "critical juncture" for Finland, whereby Finland sought to integrate into the European Union while simultaneously at least rhetorically giving up the Cold War period neutrality policy. Where the two have appeared controversial, it is neutrality that has had to adapt to the European environment: neutrality has been first formulated as military non-alliance and later as non-membership of a military alliance. In contrast, the case of the demilitarised and neutralised Åland Islands illustrates that the rhetoric is more stable when

the "institution" is based on multilateral legal agreements. However, instead of looking at the history of neutrality and non-alignment, this article aims at analysing still ongoing debates from the perspectives of foreign and defence policy approaches, which brings a new angle to the literature.

Another new aspect of the article is the comparison between the security policy concepts and the demilitarisation regime. The security policy concepts are important, since they reveal approaches towards foreign policy in issues such as restrictions on the use of military force as well as in transnational security arrangements, but it should be noted that Finnish security policy stances and the legal status of the Åland Islands are not directly related or dependent on each other. However, it is of interest to analyse security policy stances together with the demilitarisation regime, as both aim at restricting the use of military force, former with self-declared and the latter with multilaterally agreed arrangements. The analysed concepts are also relevant in the security policy debates in Finland. The security policy stances have been reformulated in the process of integrating into the EU. Although the demilitarisation of the Åland Islands is not a crucial part of security policy, it has also always been discussed while the government has presented its white papers on security and defence. The islands were demilitarised even before Finland became independent, which testifies to the permanence of the regime. In contrast to the self-imposed constraints in foreign policy, the international legal constraints are obviously much more binding. There are no similar comparative studies related to these security policy concepts relevant in the Finnish case, and this article aims to fill this gap while illustrating that there is no uniform view on the stances. A further justification for this study relates to the fact that the latest security policy stance introduced in 2007 and the impact of the deepening defence cooperation in the EU have not been analysed from a conceptual perspective, if barely at all.

It should be remembered that the demilitarisation and neutralisation of the Åland Islands stems from much further back than the Finnish policy of neutrality (or Finnish independence), which was only adopted as a pragmatic choice during the Cold War (see e.g. Palosaari, 2011). This may explain why it was relatively easy to give up neutrality in Finland when compared to other so-called post-neutral EU member states that can no longer be considered neutral in the traditional sense (Ojanen, 2003). Finland has never had any security policy stances stipulated in its constitution, making it different from e.g. Austria with its post-war neutrality provision in its constitution (Liebhart, 2003). As a clear deviation from previous neutrality, the Finnish Constitution that entered into force in 2000 reflects the Finnish commitment to the West European value community and positions Finland as part of the West.

For Finland, military non-alliance was a principle adopted around EU accession, but *liittoutumattomuus* (*alliansfrihet* in Swedish) is translated, depending on the context, as either non-alignment or non-alliance in English. Despite the deliberate strategy to choose a specific term in English and to frame it in a way that does not spur negative connotations, non-alignment and non-alliance can be interpreted to have, in the Finnish case, roughly the same meaning.

Previous academic studies on Finnish security policy concepts in the EU era mainly focus on narrative or loose discourse analytical methodology (e.g. Browning, 2008; Jokela, 2010; Palosaari, 2011), while here the focus is more on the actual concepts and different approaches to Finnish security policy. In his book, Christopher S. Browning (2008) was interested in the evolution of the Finnish identity of Finland in the context of historical narratives constructed in scholarly literature, whereas Teemu Palosaari (2011, 2013) has analysed the Europeanisation of Finnish foreign and security policies, arguing that Finland has both adapted to and actively influenced European foreign and security policies. The Europeanisation of Finnish security policy and related discourses have also been touched upon in other research, but without a particular focus on concepts (Rieker, 2006; Ojanen et al., 2000). The most similar approach to the one adopted in this study was in Juha Jokela's (2010) study on Finnish and British foreign policies from 1995 to 2001, wherein he was interested, *inter alia*, in the Finnish concepts of neutrality and non-alignment, arguing that it was the EU that facilitated the move into non-alignment.

In the following sections, I discuss the Finnish debates on the above-mentioned concepts. After outlining my methods and empirical material, I discuss foreign and defence policy debates on military non-alliance, non-membership of a military alliance as well as demilitarisation and neutralisation. Finally, I draw conclusions on how the security policy concepts are discussed in terms of foreign and defence policy approaches.

## 2. Methods and empirical material

While analysing the potential clash between foreign and defence policies (Dewitt, 2015), this article does not aim to describe "what happened" through the debates, but rather to analyse how the three security policy concepts (military non-alliance, non-membership of a military alliance, as well as demilitarisation and neutralisation) have been discussed once they have been adopted. I do subscribe to the views presented in the previous studies and consider that the Finnish foreign policy has become Europeanised to a large extent (e.g. Palosaari, 2011), the most obvious demonstrations of which are the reformulation of the neutrality policy into "non-membership of a military alliance", as well as the commitment

to mutual assistance and Permanent Structured Cooperation. One of the explaining factors between the different foreign and defence policy approaches may originate from the different strategic cultures that the actors are socialised in. Previous studies have found, for example, differences in cosmopolitanism and defencism in the Danish strategic culture, cosmopolitanism emphasising international cooperation and defencism emphasising national defence (Rasmussen, 2005). Similar tendencies can be found between the cosmopolitan-oriented foreign policy approach and the defence-oriented defence policy approach outlined in the following sections.

The empirical material of the article consists of government reports and parliamentary documents and debates, as well as statements by the Defence and Foreign Ministers regarding the stances in the Finnish media. Since 1995, the government has issued Government Reports on Security and Defence Policy to the parliament. The empirical material of this article consists of all white papers during 1995–2017, varying from 45 to more than 100 pages, parliamentary debates related to the papers, as well as foreign affairs and defence committee reports on the white papers. The white papers are published roughly every four years and are prepared mainly by the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Defence Ministry, the Ministry for Interior Affairs, and the President of the Republic, while consulting a parliamentary monitoring group (since 2004). In the parliamentary process of the white papers, the paper is sent to either defence or foreign affairs committee for report, and before submitting the report the other committee (and possibly also some other committees) provides a statement to the primary committee. The choice of the primary committee is also important to observe, as we are interested in the emphasis put on defence or foreign policy aspects.

In addition to the white papers and committee reports and statements, I also categorised how the three concepts were utilised in parliamentary debates, particularly by defence and foreign affairs ministers and by the representatives of the defence and foreign affairs committees. After locating the relevant concepts in the white papers, committee documents and plenary minutes, I intensively read the contexts in which they were used in order to gain a general picture on the debates. In my categorisation, the foreign policy approach was represented by speakers from the foreign ministry and the foreign affairs committee, whilst the defence policy approach originated from the defence ministry and the defence committee.

As shown in Table 1, I look at what sorts of claims have been made in order to change the neutrality policy, military non-alliance, and the demilitarisation of the Åland Islands. The concept of an external shock as a potential change agent has been borrowed from institutionalist literature, referring to changes occurring in the surrounding environment (e.g. Cini 2014). As a result of gathering the debates on the different concepts, two wide

categories emerged: I have categorised the approaches based on whether they acknowledge the concept in question or whether they view it as an instrument that can be used for certain purposes. Furthermore, both views were utilised in either negative or positive light; whether the acknowledgement of an issue views the issue as negative or positive, or whether an instrument is seen as a beneficial one or as producing negative effects by e.g. hampering defence preparation. Before outlining the results of the analysis in the next sections, the following table introduces the main concepts of the article and the observed approaches towards them.

**Table 1. Finnish change of security policy concepts**

| Concept | External shock as a potential change agent | Government stance | Foreign policy approach | Defence policy approach |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Military non-alliance | EU membership | Neutrality reformulated as military non-alliance | Positive instrument | Negative acknowledgement |
| Non-membership of a military alli-ance | Mutual assistance and solidarity clauses of the EU | Non-alliance reformulated as “not a member of a military alliance” | Positive acknowledgement | Positive acknowledgement |
| Demilitarisation and neutralisation | Deterioration of the security environment in the Baltic Sea | Assurance that Finland sticks to its commitments | Positive acknowledgement | Negative instrument |

## 3. From neutrality to military non-alliance – foreign policy approach and positive instrumentality

Neutrality policy was a central and instrumental piece of Finnish foreign policy during the Cold War, but officially dismantled as Finland was about to join the European Union. As argued by Teemu Palosaari, neutrality was a way to show to the world that Finland was an independent state, although bound by the Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (FCMA) Treaty with the Soviet Union (Palosaari, 2013b, p. 360). Neutrality was perceived as a way for Finland to economically align with the West during the Cold War, but had to be abandoned while becoming a full-fledged member of the European Union. Some sort of continuity was, however, maintained through replacing neutrality with military non-alliance.

In 1994, Finnish government politicians decided to define the stance as "militarily non-allied" in English. According to a former diplomat Hannu Himanen, choosing the English term "non-allied" related to the contaminated nature of "non-aligned" due to the Non-Aligned Movement (Himanen, 2003, pp. 25–26). Non-alliance was perceived as enabling Finnish participation in the European Union without emanating suspicions about the contents of the stance (Finnish Government, 1994).

In the 1990s, the defence policy approach seemed to consider non-alliance a constraint for defence preparation, whilst the foreign policy approach emphasised it as part of a foreign policy identity. The new military non-alliance stance was particularly discussed in the parliament in relation to the first Government Reports on Finnish Security and Defence Policy of 1995 and 1997. The common thread in the reports was that military non-alliance was not seen to place any restrictions on Finland in its EU policies. In the 1995 report, military non-alliance was argued *not* to constrain Finland from pursuing Finland's EU membership aims, delivering on commitments, participating in Common Foreign and Security Policy, and in international crisis management (Prime Minister's Office Finland, 1995). At this point, neutrality was still referred to in the debates, but most politicians had already acknowledged the new stance (Finnish Parliament, 1995). Most politicians discussed the Cold War policies in a positive tone but emphasised that the juxtaposition of the Cold War had ended, due to which new policies had to be adopted. Some politicians still referred to Finland as neutral, such as foreign minister Halonen (SDP): "neutral countries – I have already listed them here: Finland, Sweden, Austria, possibly Ireland. I think the possibility of these countries to demonstrate their significance also in the EU and Western Europe is rather good at the moment" (Finnish Parliament, 1995, pp. 2331–2332). The foreign minister thus assimilated Finland with other neutral countries. Defence minister Taina (National Coalition Party), in turn, stated that "we are a militarily non-allied country, which has been stated many times in the white paper" (Finnish Parliament,

1995, p. 2307). The report on the white paper had been discussed in the parliamentary committee for foreign affairs, which implies that the report was mainly seen as a foreign policy issue. The committee reports discussed, *inter alia*, how military non-alliance was compatible with crisis management operations, a field that became much more visible in the politics of the 1990s. The Defence Committee opposed the government proposal on rapid deployment forces, claiming that Finland may lose its leeway in traditional crisis management operations (Finnish Parliament Defence Committee 1995). The Foreign Affairs Committee, in turn, emphasised continuity with the role of a military non-allied state by stating that "the committee considers the use of civilian staff as a particularly suitable participation method for a military non-allied country" (Finnish Parliament Committee for Foreign Affairs 1995, p. 16). The foreign policy stance reflects military non-alliance as part of a positive instrument for foreign policy identity, whilst defence policy put more emphasis on negative acknowledgement of being incompatible with rapid deployment forces.

Similar approaches could be observed also in the debates concerning the subsequent 1997 report, where military non-alliance was seen as an either-or defence solution: "a defence solution may be based either on military alliance or non-alliance" (Prime Minister's Office Finland, 1997, p. 47). In the debate on the report, the Finnish stance of military non-alliance appeared incompatible with certain choices (negative acknowledgement), as the Defence Minister Taina (Coalition Party) put it: "because our stance is military non-alliance, we cannot support the integration of WEU" (Finnish Parliament, 1997, p. 2392). Finland was thus officially against the integration of the Western European Union (WEU), a European military alliance, into the European Union. In this case, too, the Foreign Affairs Committee provided a report, which considered that military alliance and credible defence constitute the security policy line, presenting the concept as a positive instrument. The Defence Committee, in turn, stated that "military non-alliance puts high demands for Finnish defence ability" (Finnish Parliament Defence Committee, 1997).

The 2001 white paper, in contrast, received a report from the Defence Committee, with a statement from the Foreign Affairs Committee. It was Defence Minister Enestam (SFP) who presented the report in the preliminary debate, declared that "credible national defence ability adapted to the security environment is also a prerequisite for Finnish military non-alliance" (Finnish Parliament, 2001). By the new millennium, the security and defence policy reports had become more defence-oriented and the foreign minister was not even present at the preliminary debate. The Defence Committee stated in its report that "the Defence Committee emphasises that acts related to the reception of assistance must be in compliance with military non-alliance" (Finnish Parliament Defence Committee, 2001), thus presenting a negative acknowledgement that may be incompatible with certain

choices. The Foreign Affairs Committee, in turn, proposed that the 2004 white paper should assess the significance of military non-alliance in a changing security environment, thus suggesting the instrumental nature of the stance that can be changed (Finnish Parliament Committee for Foreign Affairs, 2001).

From the foreign policy perspective, military non-alliance often appeared as a foreign policy instrument enabling leeway in external policies (see also Ojanen et al., 2000, p. 248). This was also stated in 1997 by the Finnish Foreign Minister of the time, Tarja Halonen (SDP), together with her Swedish counterpart: "non-alliance is an instrument, not a goal as such" (Hjelm-Wallén & Halonen, 1997). Finland and Sweden had joined the European Union two years earlier with Austria, and non-alliance was thus presented as something that is not a necessary element of Finnish security policy.

*Finland in the country group opposing deeper European defence cooperation*

In the European Union, neutrality and non-alliance were particularly discussed topics when the constitutional treaty and later the Lisbon Treaty, including the mutual assistance provision, were drafted. The Lisbon Treaty constituted, effectively, a merger of the EU and the military alliance WEU, which Finland opposed, as visible also in the comment of Defence Minister Taina above. In the EU's treaty negotiations concerning the assistance clauses, the militarily non-aligned Member States (Finland, Sweden, Austria, Ireland) convened and proposed that the mutual assistance clause be reformulated in the form that Member States "may request" aid rather than states being obligated to provide aid (Ojanen, 2005, p. 410). They issued a letter to the President of the Council of the European Union stating that "formal binding" would not be compatible with the security policies of these countries (Conference of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States 2003). Eventually, the mutual assistance clause (42(7)) of the Treaty on European Union was complemented with a provision that "[t]his shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States". The problems with regard to the treaty were brought up particularly by the Irish politicians in their assurances of maintaining their policy of military neutrality (Devine, 2011, p. 354), and a Protocol on the concerns of the Irish people was also appended to the treaty. The Protocol stated that the CSDP "does not prejudice the security and defence policy of each Member State, including Ireland, or the obligations of any Member State" (Protocol on the concerns of the Irish people on the Treaty of Lisbon, 2013). Although these aspects illustrate that non-alliance concerns were taken into account, it has been important for Finnish politicians to assure that non-alliance does not constrain the Finnish leeway in the EU.

The Government Report of 2004 again described Finland developing "its defence capability as a militarily non-allied country", whilst Sweden was mentioned as a non-

aligned country (Prime Minister's Office Finland, 2004). The debate did not draw parallels with Sweden, but focused on whether the role of NATO had become more positive as a crisis management organisation after the Cold War (Finnish Parliament, 2004). It was again the Defence Committee that drafted a report on the white paper, which regarded that military defence should be organised and developed from the perspective of Finland as a militarily non-allied country (Finnish Parliament Defence Committee, 2004). In contrast, the Foreign Affairs Committee criticised the fact that "the white paper does not specifically assess different interpretations of the dimension of [EU] security guarantees for militarily non-allied states" (Finnish Parliament Committee for Foreign Affairs, 2004, p. 11). The defence approach considered thus in the negative acknowledgement vein that defence should be organised in line with a military alliance, whereas the Foreign Affairs Committee suggested that potential EU security guarantees could have an impact on the stance, seeing it as an instrument that can be amended. In this first period we can see how the emphasis shifted from a foreign policy approach to the defence policy approach, and towards a negative acknowledgement of military non-alliance that should be adapted to defence needs.

## 4. From non-alliance to non-membership of a military alliance – defence approach assuming a larger role with positive acknowledgement

Since 2007, the foreign policy stance introduced by the Finnish Government is *sotilasliittoon kuulumaton* (*tillhör ingen militär allians*), that is, not a member of a military alliance. With the already formulated mutual assistance and solidarity clauses in the EU, the 2007 government in Finland wanted to further narrow down the concept of non-alliance, perhaps in order not to give the impression of having constraints in its European policies. Between 2007 and 2017, the National Coalition Party, with a rather positive approach towards NATO, has always been in the government (dominant party in 2011–2015), which may contribute to the discourse focusing more on possible NATO membership than on participation in EU defence. In their Government Programme, the 2007 government decided to describe Finland's position as *sotilasliitoon kuulumaton*, not belonging to any military alliance (Finnish Government, 2007, p. 9). However, not even the government of the time utilised the new concept consistently, but non-alliance was still present in the discussions. The non-membership stance has effectively no other connotations than not being a NATO member, and it also allows Finland's closer military cooperation in the EU. In line with seeing the stance as an instrument, the Finnish national stance was adapted to the changing environment by replacing military non-alliance with a description of the state of affairs, which poses no policy constraints and can thus be more easily abolished

altogether. This is probably the farthest that Finland can move while maintaining some continuity.

Even after the decision to reformulate the stance, military non-alliance appeared in government papers, and the 2007 Government Program itself called for an assessment of the effects of "military alliance and military non-alliance" (Finnish Government, 2007, p. 8). "Military non-alliance" thus seemed to be used in two different ways: one related to the Finnish foreign policy stance in general, and the other related to not being a member of NATO.

To gain an insight into the debates after introducing the stance of "not a member of a military alliance", I went through references to neutrality, non-alliance and non-membership in the parliamentary debates in the 2007 Government Program and in the 2009–2017 Government Reports, that is, after the concept changed. As can be seen in the table below, both concepts seemed to have almost an identical role in the discourses, which implies that the politicians did not consider the foreign policy stance to have really changed, unlike when dismantling neutrality. Sometimes, neutrality appeared in the debates as a past policy, which some parties longed for and other parties considered a former policy with no real contents. The main concerns for the revised formulation came from the left-wing parties, particularly the Left Alliance, worrying about eventual closer relations with NATO. As the table below shows, members of the same parties utilise different terms, and there was little consistency inside the parties.

**Table 2. Views related to military non-alliance or "not a member of a military alliance" in parliamentary debates on security and defence from 2007 to 2017.**

| Military non-alliance valid | Non-membership of an alliance valid |
|---|---|
| • increases security (Left Alliance)<br>• not a precondition for stability (SFP)<br>• complements national defence (Finns)<br>• cannot rely on external aid (Centre)<br>• ESDP narrows down, but exists (SDP)<br>• to stay outside military contexts (SDP)<br>• mediating capacity in the Arctic Council (Left Alliance) | • has served our security well (Centre)<br>• continuing non-membership (Christian Democrats)<br>• improves possibility to stay outside military conflicts (Left Alliance)<br>• requires security guarantees from the EU (National Coalition Party)<br>• EU countries are allies (National Coalition Party) |

Defence and security policy approaches seemed to positively acknowledge the new stance. Unlike in 2001 and 2004, the 2009 white paper was this time sent to the Foreign Affairs Committee for report. Both the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committees repeated the restrictions posed by the non-membership stance: "As a country that is not a member of a military alliance, Finland does not utilise external military assistance as the basis for military planning" (Finnish Parliament Committee for Foreign Affairs, 2009, p. 9; Finnish Parliament Defence Committee, 2009, p. 35). It seems that after the stance had changed politicians no longer considered that the stance had to be explained – Finland simply is not a member of any military alliances and thus cannot count on external aid.

The concept of non-alignment appeared in the translation of the 2012 report, although the Finnish-language non-membership term (*sotilasliittoon kuulumaton*) remained the same. It was also assured that no impediments should exist for possible alignment (Prime Minister's Office Finland, 2013, p. 78). The 2012 white paper was again sent to the Foreign Affairs Committee for report, and both the Foreign and Defence Committees stated that "as a country that is not a member of a military alliance, Finland still sets high demands for military security of supply" (Finnish Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee, 2013, p. 20; Finnish Parliament Defence Committee, 2013, p. 11). The only difference was that the Foreign Affairs Committee had deleted the word "exceptionally" before "high demands" from the formulation of the Defence Committee. As in 2009, we see that the two stances appeared very consistent, reflecting a positive acknowledgement of the stance. It seems that the differences between foreign and defence policy approaches in terms of the security policy stance have become minor after 2007, perhaps also because the foreign policy approach dominated the debate, the Foreign Affairs Committee being the primary committee.

*New government promotes EU defence cooperation and is more open towards NATO*

Despite its non-membership stance, Finland became an active promoter of EU defence cooperation (especially Permanent Structured Cooperation) along with the 2015 centre-right government. The government also seemed to want to provide more emphasis on the defence policy part and decided to issue separate foreign and security as well as defence policy reports. The 2016 Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy unanimously stated that "Finland is a country which does not belong to any military alliance", but "maintains the option to seek membership" (Prime Minister's Office Finland, 2016, p. 17). Non-membership was thus presented as only the status of the time, and did not influence any future decisions taken by the government. As can be observed, Finland has defined its foreign policy stances as principles that can be dismantled and that do not prevent Finland from seeking NATO membership. However, military non-alliance and

non-membership stances seemed to be employed interchangeably. For example, in 2016 Prime Minister Juha Sipilä "correctly" described Finland as not a member of a military alliance ('sotilasliittoon kuulumaton', Finnish Parliament, 2016a, p. 26), but also stated that "military non-alliance (*sotilaallinen liittoutumattomuus*) and its continuity is the government's stance" (Finnish Parliament, 2016a, p. 33). At least for former Prime Minister Sipilä, these concepts seemed to refer to the same issue. In fact, the same discrepancy can be observed in the documents of the parliamentary committees. The Defence Committee stated in its statement to the Foreign Affairs Committee that one of the strategic choices included in the Finnish defence solution is "military non-alliance" (Finnish Parliament Defence Committee, 2016, p. 7). In contrast, the Foreign Affairs Committee stated that the basic elements of the Finnish line of action include "non-membership of a military alliance" (Finnish Parliament Committee for Foreign Affairs, 2016, p. 7). Both thus acknowledged the stance that Finland is not a member of a military alliance, but whilst the Defence Committee considered it a part of the Finnish defence solution, the Foreign Affairs Committee attributed it as the Finnish line of action. The defence approach was thus more instrumental than that of the foreign policy approach.

The non-membership stance was thus positively acknowledged in both approaches with regard to the two latest white papers. In the Government Defence Report published in February 2017, it was deemed important that no impediments for eventually joining NATO exist: "Finland continues to take into account the prospects for defence cooperation and interoperability and ensures the elimination of any practical impediments to a possible membership in a military alliance" (Prime Minister's Office, 2017, p. 17). It indeed seems that non-alliance and non-membership stances are used interchangeably. The previous stance of military non-alliance (*sotilaallinen liittoutumattomuus*) still appears in government discourses, perhaps due to the clumsy formulation of the current non-membership stance. The Defence Committee referred to Finland and Sweden as two militarily non-allied countries in its report (Finnish Parliament Defence Committee, 2017, p. 26), whilst the Foreign Affairs Committee only stated that "the Finnish defence is based on national defence solution and non-membership of a military alliance" (Finnish Parliament Committee for Foreign Affairs, 2017, p. 4). Whereas neutrality has been effectively dismantled from the debates, military non-alliance and non-membership stances did not seem to differ in contents. The new stance was no longer an instrument but positively acknowledged as a state of affairs, though the defence approach paid more attention to it being a choice rather than just the state of affairs.

## 5. Demilitarisation and neutralisation – defence approach reflects negative instrumentality, foreign policy approach reflects positive acknowledgement

While approaches towards security policy stances seem to become more consistent in defence and foreign policy actors relying mainly on positive acknowledgement of the stances (despite discrepancy in the use of the terms), the approaches towards the demilitarised and neutralised Åland Islands is different, as can be observed here. Demilitarisation and neutralisation refer to constraints on the conduct of military activities that can have both a political and a legal meaning. In this article, I deal with the legal meaning, as the focus is on the demilitarisation and neutralisation of the Åland Islands based on international law. In other words, these principles pertaining to the islands are stipulated in international agreements and the status of the islands can even be described as part of customary international law. It should be noted that the demilitarisation of the Åland Islands is not stipulated in the Finnish constitution, but it is a question of international and customary law. It seems that the inherent premise in the Finnish foreign policy is to comply with international law and to promote a rules-based order, which makes it natural to hold onto the obligations related to the Åland Islands. Although the agreements also involve questions of interpretation, their interpretation is limited due to their origin in several multilateral agreements. This did not prevent the Defence Minister from criticising the status of the islands in 2016.

The demilitarisation stems originally from the 1856 demilitarisation agreement between Russia, Great Britain and France, and neutralisation refers to the 1921 League of Nations Convention, which stipulates that the territory of the islands cannot be used for any military activities or war-like purposes during a war. A 1940 bilateral treaty with Russia on demilitarisation also binds Finland, but Russia is not party to the 1921 Convention. When Finland joined the European Union, a Protocol on the Åland Islands was appended to the Accession Treaty, "[t]aking into account the special status that the Åland islands enjoy under international law". Moreover, in the Lisbon Treaty (2009) amending the basic treaties of the European Union, it was stated that the Åland Protocol would continue to apply.

The demilitarisation and neutralisation thus originate from binding agreements rather than from political decisions. Still, Finnish politicians have used discursive strategies to state what these concepts mean for the Finnish security policy. The table below reveals, however, that the Åland Islands do not feature prominently in the Finnish foreign policy debates. One reason for this may be that in the traditional political discussion the demilitarisation and neutralisation of the Åland Islands seem to constitute a recognised status where discursive strategies do not play a role. Another reason may be that politicians try to evade discussion on the matter in order to prevent the status being questioned, or

simply consider the issue rather irrelevant in the security policy debate. In other words, the Åland Islands seem not to have been successfully politicised by those criticising the status as those supporting the status claim that it is an issue that cannot be questioned. The MPs thus have not bought the argument that the status of the Åland Islands would be a matter of contingency, i.e. with room to manoeuvre politically (Palonen 1993, p. 13).

**Table 3. Demilitarisation and neutralisation in the Finnish Government Reports on Security and Defence Policy[1] in committee reports and parliamentary debates on those reports.**

| Year | Pages | "Åland" or "Ahvenanmaa" in Government Reports on Security and Defence Policy | "Ahvenanmaa" in Committee Reports and Statements | "Åland" or "Ahvenanmaa" in debates |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1995** | 45 | 0 | 0 | 13 |
| **1997** | 92 | 4 | 0 | 17 |
| **2001** | 102 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| **2004** | 175 | 0 | 8 | 28 |
| **2009** | 142 | 1 | 11 | 12 |
| **2012** | 121 | 3 | 5 | 35 |
| **2016** | 34 | 1 | 3 | 7 |

[1] The numbers in this table are based on the Foreign and Security Policy Report published in June 2016. Åland was not mentioned in the Defence Report published in February 2017. The 2016 report is thus different from the others, since it only focused on foreign and security policy.

In the Finnish parliamentary debates, demilitarisation is usually connected to positive matters, such as enabling stability in the Baltic Sea and continuity with regard to Finnish compliance with international law. There have hardly been any attempts to discontinue demilitarisation in the parliamentary debates, but some critical comments have been presented. Most of the negative approaches to demilitarisation have taken place in the media rather than in the parliamentary context. That said, although the official government discourse has assured maintenance of the status, there have also been some threat-related entries in the Government Reports on Security and Defence Policy and committee documents. In the 1997 report, demilitarisation was seen from the defence policy approach as a constraint for defence preparation: "Defence of the Åland Islands is based, to a large extent, on the mining ability of the marine forces, since no defence preparation may take place in the demilitarised zone" (Prime Minister's Office Finland, 1997, p. 57). The status was acknowledged in a negative manner (no defence preparation allowed), and the approach was more defence than foreign policy oriented.

Demilitarisation was not mentioned in the 1995, 2001 and 2004 reports, which could be interpreted to imply that the status was not considered to be relevant in Finnish security and defence policy decisions. The choice of avoidance was justified by Finnish politicians in the parliamentary debates with the claims that there were no changes in sight for the status. Although the 2004 report did not mention the Åland Islands, the sole Ålandic MP requested the committees to take a stand on the status in their discussions (Finnish Parliament, 2004). Indeed, the Foreign Affairs Committee did mention demilitarisation in their statement, stating in a positive instrumental vein that "Åland is a demilitarised and neutral [sic] area, which the Committee considers an arrangement contributing to increasing security and confidence in our region" (Finnish Parliament Committee for Foreign Affairs, 2004, p. 21). The Defence Committee acknowledged the status in a positive tone by mentioning two demilitarisation agreements, those from 1921 and 1940, and stating that both agreements bind all parties, including Finland (Finnish Parliament Defence Committee, 2004).

The 2009 report mentioned demilitarisation explicitly as not restricting Finnish defence cooperation, while it also emphasised that the status is "recognised": "[t]he Province of Åland Islands has a recognised status under international law. The special status of the province does not prevent Finland from intensifying defence cooperation within the European Union and in international organisations" (Prime Minister's Office Finland, 2009, p. 70). The same was reiterated in the 2012 and 2016 reports in a slightly different form, and it is relevant to question why demilitarisation needed to reappear in the reports. The answer probably relates to the assurance that demilitarisation poses no constraints for defence cooperation in the EU, which was intensified after the Lisbon Treaty came into force in 2009. This is similar to what was observed with regard to the changed security policy stances: Finland should have extensive leeway in defence cooperation.

Regarding the 2009 Government Report, the Foreign Affairs Committee also acknowledged the Åland demilitarisation, while mentioning that it was not discussed as a separate question in the white paper. Instead, the report of the committee stated in a positive instrumental vein that: "the arrangement concerning the Åland Islands' position contributes to maintaining peace and stability in the Baltic Sea area", again emphasising the nature of the status as a positive instrument (Finnish Parliament Committee for Foreign Affairs, 2009, p. 5). In contrast, the Defence Committee stated that "it is good to clarify how the special position should be taken into account in different kinds of future military crisis situations in order for the authorities to be adequately prepared" (Finnish Parliament Defence Committee, 2009, pp. 16–17). Both parliamentary committees thus emphasised that security risks must be addressed, but in the framework of the positively acknowledged demilitarisation obligations. This reflects the fact that demilitarisation has a dual nature, the diplomatic and the strategic military nature (see also Spiliopoulou Åkermark, 2017).

Despite demilitarisation mainly being discussed as not constraining defence cooperation, clear differences can be approached between the foreign and defence policy approaches. In October 2016, for example, the Finnish Defence Minister Niinistö announced being prepared to discuss changes in the status due to the constraints it poses on defence preparation within the unstable situation in the Baltic Sea (Ykkösaamu, 2016). He also reiterated in a parliamentary debate on the status that "it is very challenging to defend Åland as it is demilitarised" (Finnish Parliament, 2016b, p. 1). Other Government Ministers and the President of the Republic denied that any changes were foreseen, and the status was also confirmed in a Parliamentary Committee Statement in November 2016 (Finnish Parliament Committee for Foreign Affairs, 2016). As Foreign Minister Soini from the Finns Party stated in the same debate: "Finland's line is the same that has existed for a very long time and I think it is a good one. We respect international agreements; we hold onto what has been agreed. This is a point of honour for Finland" (Finnish Parliament, 2016b, p. 3). As visible in the comment, holding onto old agreements was even seen as a question of honour. Whereas the Defence Minister considered the agreements a burden for defence preparation in the same debate, the Foreign Minister regarded them as a question of honour, and this division between defence and normative concerns is visible also in other debates on the status.

This much reported media debate was, however, not reflected in the debates on the 2016 white paper. The parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee specified in its report that other states had not questioned the status and it was in the Finnish interest to guarantee the demilitarised status and respect international agreements, as well as also having responsibility for its defence (Finnish Parliament Committee for Foreign Affairs, 2016, pp. 8–9). Perhaps due to the vivid media debate, the committee thus confirmed demilitarisation as a positive instrument in Finnish foreign policy.

The Åland Islands did not appear in the 2017 defence report at all, but the statement of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the parliament considered it worth mentioning with a very similar formulation as that of the previous report. The Defence Committee, in turn, did not discuss demilitarisation in its report (Finnish Parliament Committee for Foreign Affairs, 2017, p. 4; Finnish Parliament Defence Committee, 2017). This also emphasises the nature of the demilitarisation as an issue of foreign policy, not of defence policy.

Interestingly enough, the Defence Minister Niinistö made the only negative instrumental statement regarding demilitarisation, but he remained in the opposition against the positive instrumental views of the foreign policy approach. Critical statements on demilitarisation are not new (Poullie, 2016), but it was new that the proposal on dismantling demilitarisation is based on the claim that tension has increased in the Baltic Sea, a claim not considered by others to be relevant for compromising international agreements. Unlike with regard to the security policy stances, the European Union can hardly be considered a reason to question the status. Indeed, even NATO countries include demilitarised areas, such as the Norwegian Svalbard archipelago (Koivurova & Holiencin, 2017). The demilitarisation of both archipelagos is regulated by a League of Nations Convention from 1921 and the obligations of Finland and Norway vis-à-vis the regions are similar, but the remoteness from mainland Norway and its sparse population seem to make the issue less sensitive in terms of national defence.

In contrast to the changing Finnish foreign policy stances, the demilitarisation and neutralisation of the Åland Islands appear to constitute stable concepts, whose form or contents are not seen as posing constraints for European cooperation. Demilitarisation is mostly considered not to constrain defence cooperation, though arguably challenging defence preparation. The risk of constraints posed by demilitarisation does not appear major, but holding onto obligations appears a question of honour from the foreign policy perspective, which seems to trump the defence approach focusing on the challenges in defence preparation. The upholding of demilitarisation also reflects the respect for international agreements and constitutes a part of Finnish foreign policy. It is arguably in the foreign and security policy interest of Finland that all countries comply with international agreements – an asset for a small country.

## 6. Conclusions

The debates on the reformulation of security policy stances reveal interesting differences between the foreign policy and defence policy approaches. The foreign policy approach was the only one to positively approach security policy stances from an instrumental perspective, whilst the defence policy approach merely acknowledged the stances either negatively or positively. However, since 2007, the foreign and defence policy approaches have come closer to each other, both acknowledging the status of non-membership in a military alliance, though the defence approach is more instrumental. In contrast, a difference was visible in the case of the Åland Islands, where defence policy and foreign policy approaches varied in the sense that the foreign policy approach considered demilitarisation a positive instrument contributing to stability, while the defence approach has recently reflected it as a negative instrument hindering defence preparation.

Security policy concepts are not easily removed from political debates, and even the politicians themselves have usually argued that the actual policy has not changed, which shows the importance of continuity. The security policy stances illustrated how the reformulated concepts were presented as instruments or factual states of affairs that form the basis of the Finnish defence solution. The fact that the stances have not been abolished in total suggests that non-change is considered a value and a consistent policy line is positively acknowledged.

Demilitarisation and neutralisation in the Ålandic case seemed the only concepts, which remained unchanged despite criticism from the defence policy approach. The foreign and defence policy continuity is remarkable in the case of the Åland islands – even though the world around has changed tremendously, the status remains the same. The Defence Minister tried to exploit the concern over the allegedly deteriorating security situation in the Baltic Sea while requiring changes in the status, but did not succeed. This illustrates that governing politicians may not try to push any politics by referring to ostensible security threats, but they do not necessarily reflect the collective view of political leaders.

Continuity seems to be strongest in the case of legal obligations, but demilitarisation also appeared as a positive instrument contributing to stability. Interestingly enough, the foreign minister simultaneously argued that it is an honour for Finland to hold onto the old agreements, but that the agreements do not prevent any future defence cooperation; old commitments are held onto, but they should not prevent future commitments. Joining the European Union seems not to have been a sufficiently great change to necessitate discussion on amending the status, although it did prompt changes in the security policy stances. Indeed, if the European Union (or NATO membership) do not put pressure towards revising the agreements concerning the demilitarised and neutralised status of the Åland Islands, the status is likely to remain as it is. Of course, one could also question

whether continuity stemming from the time of the Cold War can be maintained even if the old concepts were held onto; the world is constantly changing, and the understanding of concepts varies all the time.

As a final note, it is important to observe how the recent debate about changing the demilitarised status of the Åland Islands has capitalised on the perception of a more tense security situation, providing a justification to compromise international agreements. This attempt at "securitising" and thus politicising international agreements and commitments is a worldwide political tendency. However, the fact that the attempt did not succeed shows that such claims can be contested. Simultaneously, with regard to the security policy stance, the foreign and security policy approaches seem to have become more consistent, thus also strengthening the government's message abroad. Consistent and continuing foreign and defence policy are obviously an asset for a country, especially for a small one.

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