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Book Note

Bailes, Alyson, J.K. Gunilla Herolf, and Bengt Sundelius, eds. 2006. *The Nordic Countries and the European Security and Defence Policy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-929084-0 (hb). xiv + 427 pp. Price: £40.00.

Reviewed by Pertti Joenniemi [14 May 2007]

The Nordic countries (Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Sweden and Finland) have traditionally been known for their special way of doing things, including in the sphere of international relations. They have been recognized for efforts of bridge-building, belief in internationalist solidarism, and Third Worldism. Above all, they have been regarded as exemplary models for emulation, not least as far as the building of “security communities” has been concerned. During the years of the Cold War, the Nordic countries could brand themselves as peace-loving and rational. However, a broader recognition of a distinct Nordic brand has clearly been undermined with the melding of Nordic and European practices and processes.

The book edited by Alyson Bailes, Gunilla Herolf, and Bengt Sundelius testifies that this is certainly the case in the sphere of security and defense policies. Being increasingly compelled to project themselves into Europe, the new emphasis on “Europeanness” appears to be a considerable challenge to all of them – particularly to Iceland and Norway as non-members of the EU but also to the three EU member states, Denmark, Finland, and Sweden. Switching from critics of power to Europe-makers, also in the field of military affairs, appears to be cumbersome.

Some accommodation seems, however, to be underway. The value of independent and active small-power strategies has been downplayed in favor of the role as actors and components within a larger European collective. Options have been opened up, with the EU defining itself as a normative power employing rather soft approaches, including in the sphere of external affairs. The Nordic EU member states have all been pushing for strengthening the EU’s competence and capacity to contribute to international security management. They wish to see a further strengthening and widening of the Union’s role in terms of both the instruments used by the EU and the geographic reach of its peace-building activities. They have started to “think big” as some of the authors put it and are not doing badly at all in terms of an active input into the CFSP/ESDP process.

The book covers extensively the various institutional aspects of the issues tackled and is, for the most part, permeated by a geostrategic logic. Although some of the authors clearly arrive at the conclusion that the more profound questions and answers are located in the sphere of identities, these issues remain side-lined. One contribution deals with the question whether the Nordics could and should contribute to the development of conflict mediation in the EU context, but in general the applicability of the Nordic legacy and heritage has been disregarded. It would have been interesting to juxtapose the Nordic experience of community-building – one almost void of security arguments – with that of the EU in which the salience of security considerations appears to be growing.

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