

# A friend in need or a friend indeed?

Finnish perceptions of Germany's role in the EU and Europe

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A FRIEND IN NEED OR A FRIEND INDEED?

FINNISH PERCEPTIONS OF GERMANY'S ROLE  
IN THE EU AND EUROPE\*

**Tuomas Forsberg**

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## Introduction: Finland's Positive View of Germany

Finland is often seen as a country whose view of Germany has traditionally been more positive than that of the average of the European countries. According to an opinion poll that was conducted in 1996, 42 % of the Finns have a positive view, 47 % a neutral and only 6 % a negative view of Germany and Germans.<sup>1</sup> This positive attitude is not only a result of the large amount of cultural and trade contacts or societal similarities, shared Lutheran religion and German roots of Finnish political thinking but derives also from the historical experience that Germany has been willing to help Finland in bad times. Although this view is not necessarily correct when judged against the historical record and although it is not unanimously shared by all Finns, it provides the necessary starting point when assessing Finland's view of Germany in today's Europe.<sup>2</sup>

Against this background, it is understandable that the basic relationship between Finland and Germany in the post-Cold War Europe has been tight and amicable. Finland has regarded Germany as its close partner and has had no major objections to Germany's central role in the Union. The political leadership often points to the great amount of shared interests and similarities in political reasoning. This pattern deviates clearly from the Cold War period during which the political relationship suffered from the division of Germany, and from the Soviet Union's suspicions about Finland approaching West Germany.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Suomen Kuvalehti*, 15 November 1996. A survey on attitudes towards foreigners in Finland reveals that Germans are the most well-liked nationality after Scandinavians, British, Ingrians and White Americans to immigrate to Finland or to marry with a Finn. People from the Mediterranean countries, Eastern Europe, Russia and outside Europe follow. Magdalena Jaakkola, *Maahanmuutto ja etniset asenteet. Suomalaisten suhtautuminen maahanmuuttajiin 1987-1999* (Helsinki: Edita 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Antti S. Vihinen, "Das Deutschlandbild aus finnischer Sicht: viel Positives, selten Negatives", in Günter Trautmann (ed.) *Die hässlichen Deutschen?* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1991). Speeches of Finnish politicians in Germany typically emphasise "the strong human, cultural and trade bonds which have over centuries connected our two countries". E.g. Tarja Halonen, "Integration is Security – a Finnish view on Europe", Speech in Frankfurt and der Oder, 26 February 1997. On the importance of historical experience, see for example a recently published and praised history of Finland that assesses the German Finnish relationship in following terms:

"Finland was one of the few countries whose relations with Germany were not burdened with difficult memories of the First or Second World War. On the contrary, both periods of brotherhood in arms had left a latent but deep feeling of a community of fate between the countries that was often experienced in bilateral connections." Henrik Meinander, *Tasavallan tiellä. Suomi kansalaissodasta 2000-luvulle* (Espoo: Schildts 1999), p. 512. A well-known columnist "Origo" offers one example of this image Finns have of Germans. He described the President's working day in an excerpt of his imaginary diary, when three state leaders had visited him during the same day (Nelson Mandela, Yasser Arafat and Gerhard Schröder did visit Ahtisaari on 15 March 1999) in following terms: "It was much easier to chat with Gerhard. The Germans are Lutherans as we Finns are and we have had good experiences a couple of times from cooperation in our past." Origo, "Päiväkirjasta", *Helsingin Sanomat*, 17 March 1999.

<sup>3</sup> See Tuomas Forsberg, "Finnland und Deutschland" in Burkhard Auffermann – Pekka Visuri (eds), *Die Nordischen Staaten und die deutsche Herausforderung* (Nomos: Baden-Baden 1995).

Underneath, however, the picture of Germany in today's Finland is not always that rosy. There are two kinds of sources for a negative attitude. First, a negative image of Germany as an aggressive country also exists in Finland. That image is based partly on the own historical experiences, foremostly the war in Lapland, and partly on the general post-war stereotypes of Germany that have spread to Finland both through the Soviet as well as through Anglo-American media. Second, there is the more general suspicion about all great powers, which is not based on any direct experience of Germany's domination. Rather, the fear of Finland's subordinated position to one big power (the Soviet Union) during the Cold War has now been transferred to another (EU – Germany). The critique on government's policy towards Germany that has every now become visible in the public debates is usually based on the combination of these two mental constructions.

The recent changes of the capital city, the government coalition as well as the political generation in the post-unification Germany were mostly seen as positive developments in Finland. Basically, *Berliner Republik* has raised more expectations than fears about the future role of Germany in Europe and about the bilateral German – Finnish relationship. The change of the capital city was perceived as bringing Germany closer to the Baltic Sea and the North. The growth of Germany's political and cultural influence was seen as working also in Finland's favour. Initially, the assumption that Germany might become more self-assertive, was regarded as a healthy historical corrective and not as a reason for worries. For example, Germany's demands for reducing its net-payments to the EU budget, its claim for a seat in the UN Security Council or its redefined military role were generally approved by Finns. Nevertheless, the Finnish EU presidency started with a lesson that the new Germany's self-assertiveness may cause unforeseen problems in the bilateral relations. The so-called language dispute that concerned the interpretation in the unofficial meetings opened many eyes in this regard. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* reported, for example, that the attitude towards Germany changed overnight.<sup>4</sup> The controversy was settled amicably and the leading politicians reassured that the basic relationship has not suffered from the incident. Nevertheless, the episode left with some mixed feelings about the future in particular because the relationship between big and small member states is regarded as one of the sensitive questions of the upcoming inter-governmental conference of the EU.

## The World Wars: The “Myth” of Germany as the Saviour of Finland

Due to history, the Finnish view of Germany is much more positive than that of most other European countries. Apart from the tight cultural and trade connections, at two crucial occasions Finland has also been a military partner of Germany. The Finnish government has twice welcomed German troops to the Finnish soil. Finland was oriented towards Germany during the First World War. Finnish freedom fighters served in the German army and the red-governed Helsinki was “liberated” by the German Baltic Sea division during the Finnish Civil War in 1918. The White Senate subsequently chose even a German prince Friedrich Karl of Hessen to be King of Finland. With the defeat of Germany in that war, however, the orientation became null and void. During the Second World War, Germany was Finland’s co-warrior and arms supplier in the joint combat against the Soviet Union, but politically Finland tried hard to avoid the impression that it was following Germany’s Nazi doctrines or was just a German satellite. Although some people dreamt of Finland’s place in a Europe dominated by Germany, Finland succeeded in holding its own course to the extent that for example the United States never declared war to Finland. Nevertheless, Germany’s military assistance in the form of anti-tank weapons and Luftwaffe’s airpower was deemed as indispensable in stopping the Soviet counteroffensive in the summer of 1944. Both cases, therefore, have left elements in the way of thinking that Germany is Finland’s saviour that remained in the Finnish consciousness.<sup>5</sup>

Of course, neither the First nor the Second World War demonstrate that Germany had an altruistic interest in supporting Finland or that the relationship between Finland and Germany would have been built on an equal basis. In both cases, the Germans did not help Finland out of their benevolence, but they were defending their own interests and subordinated their policy towards Finland to their relations with Russia. Germans recognised the independence of Finland only after Lenin had done so in 1917. Finns also recall that before Hitler started to plan his Operation Barbarossa, he was willing to leave Finland to the Soviet sphere of influence and tacitly supported Stalin during the Winter War (1939-40). Both world wars during which Finland was leaning towards Germany also left a strong down side effect in some circles of the Finnish society. The German intervention in the First World War on the side of the bourgeois government was a blow for the Finnish Reds. The Second World War ended with a Finno-

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<sup>4</sup> Jasper Altenbockum, “Ein Land im ’Troztlater’. Wie die Finnen die Deutschen sehen?” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 4 September 1999.

<sup>5</sup> On the history of German-Finnish relations, see Robert Schweitzer, “Deutschland und Finnland”, in *Deutschland, Europa und der Norden* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner 1993) and Pekka Visuri – Tuomas Forsberg, *Saksa ja Suomi. Pohjoismainen näkökulma Saksan kysymykseen* (Helsinki: WSOY 1992)

German war in Lapland. The scorched earth policy conducted by the retreating German troops caused many bad memories in particular among the local population.<sup>6</sup>

Despite these down sides in the Finnish-German history of the first half of this century, the record is on the positive side. In Finland, there is no such fear of German domination based on historical experiences as in many central and eastern European states. The stereotype of German militaristic mind-set and the view of Germany's metaphysical guilt are more products of the Soviet and especially Anglo-American conceptions that have later spread also to Finland rather than self-born. Indeed, when gauging the layman view of Germany, one should not underestimate the impact of Western war movies and comics on younger generations; for them Germans are Nazis in the same way as Chicagoans are gangsters – yet, whether that stereotypical picture or the one of Germany as a modern, prosperous European country and a successful football nation dominates one's imagination is open to contest.

In any case, when retelling the story of Finland's "traditional friendship" or "a community of fate" with Germany, it is good to bear in mind that in neither historical situation Germany was the first choice for the Finnish politicians, but rather the second best choice. Germany was seen as the necessary balancing factor to Russia. The first choice during the First World War was Sweden; in the Second World War it was Sweden, Great Britain and France. Yet, in both cases, only Germany was willing and able to give the needed military support.

### **Division of Germany and the Cold War: "Turning the Back"**

Finland's view of Germany during the Cold War was dictated by the realities of the post-war situation rather than was Finland's own choice. After the lost war against the Soviet Union, one of the main sources of distrust in the Finnish-Soviet relations was (West) Germany's potential influence in Finland. The treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance of 1948 between Finland and the Soviet Union explicitly referred to German military threat and in 1961 the Soviet Union sent a note to Finland proposing common military consultations to match the "fascist" threat that was raising in (West) Germany. Thus, the impression of Finland being reoriented towards Germany was to be avoided at all costs.

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<sup>6</sup> Kari Virolainen, Elinikäinen taakka. Ikääntyneiden lappilaisten muistot vuorovaikutussuhteistaan jatkosodan ajan Saksan armeijan sotilaisiin ja neuvostoliittolaisiin vankeihin [Lifetime Burden. The Memories that the aged

Some observers have described the Cold War period in terms of “Finland turning its back to Germany”.<sup>7</sup> This trend was underlined by President Kekkonen’s seemingly difficult personal attitude towards the Germans. More than the Soviet invasion to Finland he feared that Germans might start a third World War. “I have said for years that West German rearmament is the greatest threat for a world war ... Blind are the Western statesmen who gave arms to West Germany”, he wrote in his diary in August 1961.<sup>8</sup> Suspicious of Adenauer’s policies, Kekkonen regarded French President Charles de Gaulle as his ideal leader of Europe. Only Willy Brandt and his policy of détente received some recognition from the side of Kekkonen. To some extent even his new, less anti-German approach in the changing political situation was based on a pragmatic advice given by de Gaulle: “It is always good to see the world as it is”.<sup>9</sup>

During the Cold War it was quintessential for the Finnish political leaders to uphold balanced relations to both East and West Germany in the name of Finland’s policy of neutrality. The net result was that political contacts were minimised. Until the German state treaties the official political relations between Finland and Germany were practically non-existent. During that period necessary diplomatic functions were taken over by commercial representations in both German states. A good example for the Finnish carefulness in German issues is the fact that the post of the representative in West Germany was moved from Cologne to the capital Bonn no sooner than in the late 1960s.<sup>10</sup>

Yet, in practical terms and especially underneath the official state level, the desired balance had been impossible to maintain. Trade relations with West Germany flourished but were in constant troubles with the East despite conscious efforts of creating a more balanced condition. The same can be said of cultural contacts, although the GDR tried to exercise cultural cooperation with the Finns. Certainly, the relative success the East Germans had in spreading their views into the wider societal circles in Finland can be counted on the fact that they were Germans. For example, the educational reform that was undertaken in Finland in the early 1970s was

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inhabitants of Lapland have of their relationships with the soldiers of the German Army and the Russian Prisoners of War under the Continuation War] *Acta Universitatis Lapponiensis* 27 (Rovaniemi: University of Lapland 1999).

<sup>7</sup> Erkki Karjalainen – Raija Valta, *Saksalaisten valtakunta* (Helsinki: Tammi 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Juhani Suomi, *Kriisien aika, Urho Kekkonen 1956-1962* (Keuruu: Otava 1992), p. 434.

<sup>9</sup> Juhani Suomi, *Taistelu puolueettomuudesta, Urho Kekkonen 1968-1972* (Keuruu: Otava 1996), p. 589.

<sup>10</sup> On the Finnish German history in the post-war era, see Dörte Putensen, *Im Konfliktfeld zwischen Ost und West. Finnland, der Kalte Krieg und die deutsche Frage* (Berlin: Berlin Verlag 2000); Timo Soikkanen “Aus einer Zwangslage zum aussenpolitischen Lehrstück. Finnland’s Deutschlandpolitik 1947-72”, in Edgar Hösch - Jorma Kalela - Hermann Beyer-Thoma (eds), *Deutschland und Finnland im 20. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 1999). Pekka Visuri – Tuomas Forsberg, *Saksa ja Suomi. Pohjoismainen näkökulma Saksan kysymykseen* (Helsinki: WSOY 1992); Yrjö Väänänen, *Finlandia Bonn* (Helsinki: WSOY 1991) and Paul Gustafsson, *Ritarikadun renki* (Helsinki 1999).



influenced by the GDR model. In the eyes of most Finns, it was however plain that West Germany was a modern wealthy society that played an essential role in European politics while East Germany was more of a curiosity. Yet, Germany remained politically strange. As long as German-Finnish relations caused suspicions in the Soviet Union, any closer political link to (West) Germany was a practical impossibility.

Encouraged by Brandt's *Ostpolitik* the German question was raised on the agenda in the early 1970s. The Finnish leaders faced growing domestic and Soviet pressure to recognise the GDR. On the other hand it was argued that establishing diplomatic relations with East Germany too early would provoke the Federal Republic and jeopardise Finland's chances to host the forthcoming CSCE conference.<sup>11</sup> In September 1971 Finland tried to solve the problem by suggesting a treaty with both countries, which would not only include mutual recognition and formal diplomatic ties, but also a clause on Finnish neutrality and German reparations for the 1944-45 war in Lapland. Although this initiative as such was not realised, Finland was in the end one of the first countries to recognise both the GDR and the FRG. Diplomatic relations were finally established in January 1973, after the German *Grundlagenvertrag* had been signed.<sup>12</sup>

### **German Unification and European Integration: Common Interests or Renewed Bandwagoning?**

Against the complex historical background and the internalised post-war doctrines of the sensitive balance of power in the Baltic Sea region, it is not a wonder that the Finnish reactions to German unification were mixed. In general, it seemed that Finns saw the unification being less dangerous than most other European nations. According to opinion polls, two thirds of Finns supported it.<sup>13</sup> The main problem was seen in terms of the possible instability effects in the European security constellation, and not in any direct threat from Germany. President Koivisto emphasised in his speech after the fall of the wall the constructive role of the Federal Republic in strengthening European security.<sup>14</sup> He also stated that Finland did not have any specific interests at stake in the German question that would differ from other European countries.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, many Finns had their bias in believing that neutralising Germany would provide

<sup>11</sup> Juhani Suomi: *Liennytyksen akanvirrassa. Urho Kekkonen 1972-1976*. (Keuruu: Otava 1998), p. 213-216.

<sup>12</sup> Seppo Hentilä, "Das Deutschland-Paket der finnischen Regierung 1971/72: Diplomatische Anerkennung - aber um welchen Preis?" In Hösch - Kalela - Thoma, *Deutschland und Finnland*; see also Putensen, *Im Konfliktfeld zwischen Ost und West* and Väänänen *Finlandia Bonn*.

<sup>13</sup> MTS Survey 1990, Ministry of Defence, Helsinki 1990.

<sup>14</sup> Mauno Koivisto, Speech at Paasikivi Society, 27 November 1989.

<sup>15</sup> Mauno Koivisto, *Witness to History. The Memoirs of Mauno Koivisto* (London: Hurst & Co. 1997), p. 157.

the most durable and acceptable solution to the German problem; only few people regarded Germany's full integration into NATO as the best option. Finns also typically wanted to discuss the German question in the framework of the CSCE.<sup>16</sup>

After the German-Soviet agreement of July 1990 at the latest the political leadership gave its unreserved acceptance and welcomed the development including Germany's continued membership in NATO. The attitude was relieved as one of the major security problems in the whole past of the independent Finland was solved: Finland did not need to choose between the Soviet Union/Russia and Germany but could approach Germany without fear of negative reactions from Moscow. In the view of one of the leading commentators on foreign policy issues in Finland, Max Jakobson, "all the suspicions in our relations with Germany were gone". A year before the fall of the wall Jakobson had predicted that with the perestroika in the Soviet Union, Germany may reunify in the future. He also regarded Germany as a motor of European development that Finland should follow.<sup>17</sup> Another expert on Germany, Pekka Visuri, argued that the traditional route to Europe via Germany has now been opened. Yet, he warned that Finland should still be careful not to be regarded as a satellite state and drawn into the European conflicts.<sup>18</sup>

In most comments in the press, Germany's increased power was mainly met with sympathy. Finns felt that Germany should not be ashamed of its power. They considered it only natural that Germany would think in terms of its own interests. Germany should not be artificially constrained or isolated, the neighbours should not make Germany smaller than it is in reality. A strong and unified Germany would benefit Europe as well as Finland.<sup>19</sup> Although some Finns expected a return of a German dominated Mitteleuropa, it was often reminded that European

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<sup>16</sup> See e.g. Paavo Lipponen, "Saksat yhdistyvät – Eurooppa yhdistyy", *Ulkopolitiikka* vol. 27, no. 1, 1990, p. 3; Pekka Visuri, "Historia ja geopolitiikka Saksan kysymyksessä", *Ulkopolitiikka* vol. 27, no. 1, 1990, pp. 12-17. See also Raimo Väyrynen, "Saksat tulevaisuuden Euroopassa", *Turun Sanomat*, 23 January 1990; Jaakko Itoniemi, "Yksi Saksa", *Suomen Kuvalehti*, 23 February 1990; and the views of Esko Antola, Martti Häikiö, Olli Kivinen, Alpo Rusi, and Ulf Sundqvist in Pertti Joenniemi (ed.), *Ulkopolitiikka murroksessa*. (Porvoo: WSOY 1990), pp. 60-74. The most critical view of the danger of the growth of German power was presented by the chairman of the "Rauhanpuolustajat" peace movement Dr. Matti Ruokola. In his view German aggressive nationalist mindset had not disappeared. See "Iso luuta lakaisi", *Rauhan puolesta* no. 4, 20 June 1989.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Max Jakobson, *Turun Sanomat*, 14 October 1990.

<sup>18</sup> Pekka Visuri, "Suomi, Saksa ja Eurooppa", *Uusi Suomi* 15.11.1991; see also Visuri – Forsberg (1992).

<sup>19</sup> See for example, "Suurlähettiläs Arto Tanner uskoo Suomen hyötyvän Saksojen yhdentymisestä", *Uusi Suomi* 16 July 1990, "Itä-Berliinin suurlähettiläs Arto Tanner: Saksalainen suurvalta syntyy lähelle Suomea", *Demari* 31 July 1990, "Yhtynyt Saksa on Euroopan etu", *Helsingin Sanomat*, 3 October 1990; "Luonnoton välivaihe Saksassa päättyi", *Uusi Suomi*, 3 October 1990; Jaakko Itälä, "Suuri Pien-Saksa mallia 1990", *Kanava* vol. 18, no. 7, 1990, pp. 468-471; Tuomas Forsberg, "Saksalaisuus uudessa Euroopassa", *Ulkopolitiikka* vol. 28, no. 2, 1991, pp. 15-23; Pentti Sadeniemi, "Saksa on itsensä kokoinen", *Helsingin Sanomat*, 5 February 1992; "Saksan pelko on viisauden alku?", *Aamulehti*, 25 January 1992.

integration had profoundly changed Germany's position in Europe. In Professor Hannes Saarinen's view, Germany had found its place in the European Union. "In the integrated Europe Germany cannot be a dominant giant, and neither does the present government attempt that".<sup>20</sup>

The expectations of unified Germany's role in the post-Cold War Europe were seen first in particular in terms of increased cooperation in the Baltic Sea region. During the years 1990-91 Finns cherished ideas of a new Hansa, a trade and cultural community around the shores of the Baltic Sea. It was hoped that the connection between the Northern and Southern shores of the Baltic Sea would become tighter. Germany's visible role in Baltic Sea cooperation was welcomed. But in most of these visions, Germany was regarded as an economic and cultural actor, and not a political one and special emphasis was given to the role of German Länder.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, the interest towards Germany increased also through Finland's drive towards European integration that culminated in the decision to apply for membership in the European Union in 1992. One reason for Koivisto's choice for Finland joining the Union was that Germany was more trustworthy a partner than the Nordic states.<sup>22</sup> It was soon understood that not only did Germany play the key role in the Union, it was also the best supporter Finland could get in the accession negotiations. In Brussels it was said, that the Finns were English-speaking Germans. According to Alpo Rusi, who was working as an official at the Foreign Ministry, "Germany [was] clearly looming as one of Finland's most crucial partners in the European Union". In his view "the historical linkage between Germany and Finland constitutes a political and strategic factor whose importance should not be underestimated in the new Europe of the future".<sup>23</sup> The Finnish expert on EU affairs, Esko Antola, predicted that Finland will "swim to Germany's camp". In his view Germany's leadership was managerial and based on skillful diplomacy and economic power. He maintained that Germany cannot dictate the course in Europe as also it is bound to the interdependence.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Hannes Saarinen, "Saksan mahti", *Maailmanpyörä* no. 3, 1995, pp. 17-19. Similarly, Professor Seppo Hentilä asserted that "Germany is firmly a part of the Western alliance and one of Europe's most stable democracies". Seppo Hentilä, "Saksa mahtuu taas nahkoihinsa. Iso ja keskellä", *Ulkopolitiikka* vol. 34, no 4, 1997, p. 25.

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. *Mare Balticum. Talouden ja kulttuurin meri* (Helsinki: Centre for Finnish Business and Policy Studies 1990). On the importance of the Baltic Sea cooperation, see also Paavo Väyrynen, speech at the Übersee Club in Hamburg, 15 January 1992; and "Suurlähettiläät: Itämeren merkitys kasvaa EU:ssa", *Helsingin Sanomat*, 6 October 1998.

<sup>22</sup> Koivisto, *Witness to History*, pp. 229 and 241.

<sup>23</sup> Alpo Rusi, "Finnish-German Relations and the Helsinki-Berlin-Moscow Geopolitical Triangle", in Dirk Verheyen – Christian Soe (eds), *The Germans and their Neighbors* (Boulder: Westview 1993).

<sup>24</sup> "Saksan helmaan", interview with Esko Antola, *Uusi Suomi*, 15 November 1991.

When Finns analysed Germany's role in Europe, they noticed many similar interests. Most importantly, upholding good relations with Russia and giving assistance to its reforms was deemed important for both Germany and Finland. In particular, Germany's approach to the situation in the Baltic states was seen as being much closer to Finland than that of the other Nordic states. Germany was also seen as an important actor in crisis management and European security and as a "soft power" representing more the traditional Finnish approach to security than Britain or France.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, environment and social policies were seen as areas of common interests. The major differences were, however, that Germany was nevertheless a great power and that Germans were much more supportive to deepening the integration in Europe than were the Finns. There were very few reasons, however, to resist Germany's new status in Europe. Due to the tantamount interests, increased influence of Germany in European and global affairs was welcomed. For example, Finland supported Germany's seat in the security council of the United Nations.<sup>26</sup>

Diplomatic contacts increased and the relations were normalised also in the field of defense.<sup>27</sup> The central role that Germany received in the new orientation of Finland and the other Nordic states towards the European Communities became visible in 1992 when Chancellor Helmut Kohl visited the meeting of the Nordic Council in Helsinki. The Finnish leaders and the press regarded Kohl as showing the future of Europe and respected his clear talk on European integration and NATO. It was Kohl's person that most clearly symbolised Germany's increased political role in particular in the context of European integration.<sup>28</sup>

Finland's renewed interest in Germany and the multiplied political contacts did not, of course, please all Finns. Some commentators recognised "the master's voice" in Kohl's statements.<sup>29</sup> A widely read political columnist with the pseudonym Kunto Kalpa, whose trade mark was that he defended the traditional post-war concepts of neutrality, accused the political elite of a too excessive enthusiasm for Germany. An incident during Kohl's visit to Helsinki was seen as a case in point. Speaker of the Parliament Ilkka Suominen intervened when a journalist asked a question dealing with the war reparations and replied on behalf of Kohl that the question was

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<sup>25</sup> Martti Ahtisaari, speech at the Dinner hosted by President von Weizsäcker, 22 November 1994; Ahtisaari, speech at the Übersee-Club in Hamburg, 25 September 1999.

<sup>26</sup> Heikki Haavisto, speech at the UN General Assembly, 26 September 1994.

<sup>27</sup> "Deutsch-finnisches Waffengeschäft. Rühes Visite normalisiert Militärbeziehung", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 13 June 1992.

<sup>28</sup> "Suomalaiset kiittivät Kohlin NATO-lausuntoa", *Helsingin Sanomat*, 7 March 1992.

<sup>29</sup> "Isännän ääni", *Ilkka*, 8 March 1992.

not appropriate.<sup>30</sup> In Kalpa's eyes, this was a sign of a renewed "Waffenbrüderschaft". In the context of the debate over Finland's membership in the EU the opponents sometimes saw Germany as the dominant power that would rule also over Finland.<sup>31</sup> In the view of MP Sulo Aittoniemi, Germany will dictate the terms and Finland will only become a periphery of a greater Germany.<sup>32</sup> A popular novelist Antti Tuuri, whose diary excerpts from his trips to Germany between 1992-95 were published in the weekly Magazine *Suomen Kuvalehti*, can also be seen as an example of the more reserved attitude towards Germany in Finland. He painted a picture of Germany as a xenophobic "Fourth Reich" where the mentality of people had not changed from that of the Nazi era.<sup>33</sup>

The view that Germany plays the key role in the process of EU enlargement turned out to be correct. The support Germans gave to Finland in particular in the last stage of the accession negotiations was deemed as indispensable. Without German intervention and advice Finland had been in trouble. When visiting Germany in December 1994, President Martti Ahtisaari thanked Germany for the activity that it had shown in the issue. According to Ahtisaari, Germany was willing to support Finland's objectives, although there were risks that other member states might have criticised it.<sup>34</sup> Lipponen, in turn, proudly referred to his German ancestors and his personal interest in Germany. During his visit to Bonn in 1996 Lipponen praised Kohl by describing him as the anchor of Europe and Kohl described the relations with Finland as "inexplicable good".<sup>35</sup>

Also after the accession, Prime Minister Lipponen's pro-European policy was accused of following too closely the Germans. The decision to join the EMU, in particular, was widely criticised on these grounds. The opposition leader Esko Aho of the Center Party criticised Lipponen of following the European mainstream. The Center Party MPs Sirkka-Liisa Anttila and Seppo Kääriäinen accompanied him by arguing in the parliament that the government was leaning towards Germany and disregarding Finland's true interests.<sup>36</sup> In a news paper interview, Kääriäinen accused Lipponen of bowing immediately when Kohl says something.<sup>37</sup> It seemed

<sup>30</sup> "Suomen ei päästänyt Kohlia vastaamaan Lapin korvauksista", *Helsingin Sanomat*, 6 March 1992.

<sup>31</sup> Kunto Kalpa, "Oikeistomieli nousee", *Keskisuomalainen*, 11 May 1992.

<sup>32</sup> "Saksan suuri mahti pelottaa vastustajia", *Helsingin Sanomat*, 17 March 1992.

<sup>33</sup> Antti Tuuri, *Neljännän valtakunnan vieraina. Matkoja Saksaan 1992-95* (Otava: Helsinki 1995).

<sup>34</sup> "Ich danke Deutschland – es war bereit, für uns zu leiden", Interview with Martti Ahtisaari, *Die Welt*, 21 November 1994.

<sup>35</sup> "Helmut Kohl: Suomen ja Saksan suhteet 'selittämättömän' hyvät", *Helsingin Sanomat*, 20 January 1996.

<sup>36</sup> Unto Hämäläinen, *Lännettymisen lyhyt historia* (WSOY: Helsinki 1998), p. 131. In the TV-debate in January 2000, the presidential candidate of the Center Party, Esko Aho also accused his rival, Foreign Minister Tarja Halonen of the Social Democratic party, of government's pro-German policy. 2. Kierros, YLE, 23 January 2000.

<sup>37</sup> "Ei pitäisi Suomessa panna maihin heti kun Kohl jotakin sanoo", interview with Seppo Kääriäinen, *Ilkka*, 13 April 1996.

that the government was neglecting traditional links to the Nordic countries and Russia at the expense of Germany. In fact, Germany and Finland were the only countries to join EMU in which the public opinion did not support it.

Lipponen explained his policy towards Germany and Europe in a speech at a think tank seminar in November 1996. Lipponen started with saying that from the point of view of the opposition, there are only two alternatives in conducting relations with Germany: “either one bares one’s behind to Germany or one creeps before it”. Lipponen further argued that for many politicians who used to live as if West Germany did not exist, it was now difficult to build up a self-assured complex-free relationship with Germany. He defended his orientation towards Germany saying that it is not the only direction of his policy and pointed to some differences in the Finnish and German positions. Yet he said he had consciously tried to follow the “mainstream” in European affairs that his critics depicted as “driftwood” policy referring to Finland’s orientation towards Germany during the Second World War. In Lipponen’s view, the dissidents to the government’s policy lack the analysis of how Finland would benefit, if it did otherwise in its policy towards Germany and the European Union.<sup>38</sup> Lipponen also argued that the membership in the EMU gives Finland and the other small states better chances to influence German policy in a way that would not otherwise be possible.<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, although Lipponen was seen as a friend of Germany, he had often emphasised the equal status of the small member states in the Union.<sup>40</sup> In particular he vigorously resisted the prospective of a *directoire* of big EU member states deciding on matters of security and defense. In the words of Lipponen, “such regulations will simply not do”.<sup>41</sup> Although Finland’s basic attitude was pragmatic in the sense that it acknowledged that big powers may have wider interests and that they may have more at stake in international crises than small powers, Finns were strongly against institutionalising such privileges. Actually, Finns would probably prefer a Europe dominated by Germany to a Europe that is dominated by a coalition of big powers.

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<sup>38</sup> Speech by Paavo Lipponen “Suomi, Saksa ja Eurooppa”, at the Seminar of the Finnish Centre for Business and Policy Studies, 4 November 1996. Still later Lipponen criticised his opponents by contending that “one doesn’t seem to be able to speak analytically about Germany without being labeled to be crawling in front of Germany”.  
<sup>39</sup> Lipponen: Keskustelu kaatuu usein ‘lärväilyyn’”, *Helsingin Sanomat*, 13 January 1997.

<sup>39</sup> Paavo Lipponen, “Ruotsin EMU-päätös ei vaikuta Suomen linjaan”, *Helsingin Sanomat*, 4 July 1997

<sup>40</sup> For example, that was one of the main themes when Prime Minister Lipponen met Chancellor Kohl in Bonn in April 1997. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 9 April 1997.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen, *Helsingin Sanomat*, 1 July 1999.

After the end of the Cold War and unification of Germany, Finland hence quickly established close relations with Germany. Membership in the EU as well as in the EMU underlined and symbolised this closeness. Germany's new role in Finnish foreign policy was perceived so significant that a review of Ahtisaari's presidency regarded his term as a period during which Finland and Germany became dearest friends and Germany Finland's most important reference point.<sup>42</sup> From the Finnish perspective, "Europe looked more as Germany than France or Italy, not to speak about Portugal", concluded one media researcher his analysis on the public discussion preceding the referendum.<sup>43</sup> These comments point to the tendency that in the lay Finnish perception Germany and the EU are essentially more or less the same entities. Indeed, Finland's drive towards the core of the EU can be seen as a consequence of its rapprochement with Germany and not the other way round.

### **Berliner Republik: Storms in a Glass of Water?**

The change of government coalition as a result of the federal elections of 1998 and the transfer of the capital from Bonn to Berlin were in Finland perceived as a sign of normalisation in Germany.<sup>44</sup> Although some reports painted the view that Berlin was not only the new capital of Germany but also that of Europe, Finns regarded the implications of the transfer of the capital more from a geographical than historical perspective. It was seen as positive that Berlin is located closer to Finland than Bonn.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, Gerhard Schröder's victory and Kohl's withdrawal was seen not only as a change of ruling coalition but as a change of political generation, too, but only minor changes were expected in foreign policy. Germany was not seen as quitting the multilateral and European basis of its foreign policy. President Ahtisaari contended that the results of German elections will not have an effect on Finnish-German relations. Yet, to some extent it was believed that Germany will become more self-assertive. In particular, it was concluded that the pace of European integration and its enlargement in

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<sup>42</sup> *Helsingin Sanomat*, kuukausiliite, 4 December 1999; see also "Ahtisaari piti virkakautensa viimeisen puheen Berliinissä" *Helsingin Sanomat*, 8 January 2000.

<sup>43</sup> Pertti Suhonen, "Läheisiä ja etäisiä naapureita", in Pertti Suhonen (ed.), *Yleinen mielipide 1997* (Helsinki: Tammi 1997).

<sup>44</sup> See e.g. my own analysis of German normalisation written in 1997-98. Tuomas Forsberg, "The Debate over Germany's Normality: a Normal German Debate?", in Howard Williams – Colin Wight – Norbert Kapferer (eds), *Political Thought and German Reunification. The New German Ideology?* (London: MacMillan 2000).

<sup>45</sup> Tapio Nurminen "Euroopan mahti muuttaa Berliiniin", *Optio*, 18 June 1998; Heikki Aittokoski, "Berliinin tasavalta, eteenpäin keskustaan", *Helsingin Sanomat*, 20 April 1999.

particular might suffer because Germany was struggling with its domestic problems and less prepared to contribute to the EU's budget.<sup>46</sup>

Finns had particular interests in hoping that only few changes in Germany's foreign policy orientation would take place. The success of German presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 1999 was important from the Finnish point of view, as Finland was to succeed Germany as the president. The achievement of the agreement on Agenda 2000 at the Berlin summit was greeted positively and it was seen a tour de force of German presidency. During the Kosovo crisis, the countries were working particularly closely together. This closeness was symbolised by Ahtisaari and Schröder hugging each other at the Cologne EU summit after Slobodan Milosevic had accepted the peace deal over Kosovo. Also in other fields shared interests were many. Germany's and Finland's approaches regarding in particular employment policy and eastern enlargement coincided. Although Finland was still more reluctant than Germany in issues of deepening the integration such as developing institutions for building up European defense dimension or drafting a European charter for basic rights, the Finnish government often showed its readiness to compromise according to the German model.<sup>47</sup>

Yet, when Finland started its presidency in July 1999, it met with troubles from an unexpected direction – from the side of Germany. The reason was the so-called language dispute. Germany decided to boycott the unofficial EU meetings during the Finnish presidency, because the German language was not given status of a working language. The Finnish Government was not happy with the German attitude and its strict behavior in the matter, as the government believed it only followed the established practice in the EU. It did not subscribe to the German view that German language had already been used for a longer period of time in unofficial meetings, but feared that providing an interpretation into German would raise the question of the status of Spanish and Italian languages. Foreign Minister Tarja Halonen assumed that a stronger state simply wanted to bully a smaller one. Lipponen argued that the big states should bear their

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<sup>46</sup> E.g. "Schröder voitti vaalit, nyt kysytään kansleria", *Helsingin Sanomat*, 29 September 1998; Tuomas Forsberg, "Schröderin johdolla kohti Berliinin tasavaltaa", *Savon Sanomat*, 29 September 1998; Pekka Visuri, "Saksan ulkopoliittikan peruslinja pysyy", *Aamulehti*, 1 October 1998; Reijo Rutanen, "Hailakan punaista ja vihertävää", *Suomen Kuvalehti*, 2 October 1998; Janne Virkkunen, "Saksa, Suomi ja EU:n laajentuminen", *Helsingin Sanomat*, 22 November 1998.

<sup>47</sup> The Finnish government was satisfied with Germany's preparation of the Cologne Declaration of the European Council on "Strengthening the Common European Policy on Security and Defence", although the German approach was frequently seen as "too institutional"; Lipponen also approved the nomination of Roman Herzog to the chairman of the working group for drafting the Charter on Basic Rights, although Finland had earlier resisted the German approach that aimed at enhancing the status of the Charter.



responsibility in the development of the Union instead of thinking about their own prestige. The Finnish press supported the line of the government and saw Lipponen as defending the rights of the small states.<sup>48</sup>

After two boycott meetings, the language dispute was solved in August. Although the government felt that the underlying question of the nature of the proper language regime remained unresolved, it was agreed that the German language will be used in all but one of the unofficial meetings. According to the Prime Minister's office the agreement did not imply any "special treatment" to German language.<sup>49</sup> The perception in Finland was, nevertheless, that Germany had won the dispute and Finland had to yield.<sup>50</sup> Columnist Erkki Pennanen wrote in *Helsingin Sanomat* that Finland had misjudged Germany's interests and thus had to meet the setback.<sup>51</sup>

After the settlement of the language dispute only few critical public statements on Germany's behavior in the issue were expressed from the side of the Finnish government. Lipponen seemed to be relieved that the dispute was over and did not want further complaints to disturb his good personal relationship with Schröder. Yet the Minister for European Affairs, Kimmo Sasi of the Conservative Party, made an exception when he argued in an interview with a local German newspaper that Germany's policy had become more selfish since the change of the government.<sup>52</sup> As some bigger newspapers had taken up the comment, Chancellor Schröder felt offended. Lipponen apologised to him at the Tampere summit in October.<sup>53</sup> The apology, in turn, gave a reason for further commentaries on Finland's dependence on Germany. The incident was, for example, a subject of a TV discussion in which the basic assumption was that Finland is again following the dictates of a stronger state. Indeed, MP Jaakko Laakso of the Left Alliance argued that the government does not make any decisions before it knows what the German stance is. The feedback from the audience also supported Sasi rather than Prime Minister Lipponen. Social democrat MP Liisa Jaakonsaari tried to defend her party comrade's action and regarded Minister Sasi's behavior as loudish.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Paavo Lipponen, "Suomi pitää linjansa", *Turun Sanomat*, 14 July 1999; Seppo Hentilä "EU:n kielikiistan taustalla on historia", *Helsingin Sanomat*, 29 July 1999.

<sup>49</sup> "Saksan kielelle 'ei erityiskohtelua' mutta tulkkaus EU-kokouksissa", *Helsingin Sanomat*, 15 August 1999.

<sup>50</sup> Heikki Aittokoski, "Saksa – Suomi 6-0", *Helsingin Sanomat*, 14 August 1999.

<sup>51</sup> Erkki Pennanen, "Suomi sai karvaan opetuksen", *Helsingin Sanomat*, 18 August 1999.

<sup>52</sup> *Märkische Zeitung*, 15 October 1999.

<sup>53</sup> "Berlin und Helsinki schrammen an diplomatischem Skandal vorbei", *Vereinigte Wirtschaftsdienste*, 16 October 1999.

Also this second storm in the glass of water was soon over. At the opening of the Nordic embassies in Berlin in October both Ahtisaari and Lipponen assured that the dispute had been settled. Ahtisaari argued that the flaws in German-Finnish relations were only cosmetic.<sup>55</sup> Also Halonen contended that the basic relationship with Germany was good.<sup>56</sup> Certainly, the government did not want to cause any further tensions during the presidency.<sup>57</sup> This does not mean, however, that the relationship had remained as before. Although the incidents were quickly overcome at the highest level, Finnish politicians, officials and the general public may include these episodes into their wider picture of German foreign policy. The picture is still positive but it may not be as rosy as it used to be.

### **Future Expectations: More Contacts, More Friction?**

Those Finns who have had more to do with Germany often see that Germany is an important, close but still a strange country to Finland. Certainly many aspects of German culture and political life are not correctly perceived in Finland. However, that statement would apply to all other nations, too. It is still the case that Finns probably know Germany better than say Britain, France, Russia or the United States.

The above view can also be found in recent books on Germany written by foreign correspondents. According to Heikki Aittokoski, who writes for *Helsingin Sanomat*, “Lipponen is right, Germany’s importance is not properly understood in Finland”.<sup>58</sup> Aittokoski also assumes that the people who still use marks as their currency, whose national anthem is composed by a German, whose capital’s centre is designed by a German architect and whose religion is Lutheran should understand the importance of German influence. For Aittokoski, Germany is not a threat as such. The importance of the “thick eagle” (*Reichsadlerus Bundesrepublicus*) is in its heavy weight. “If the eagle does not move, then nothing moves. If it totters then others can fall.” In Aittokoski’s view the *Berliner Republik* has all the chances to succeed in a way that benefits all of Europe.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *A Talk*, YLE 1, 28 October 1999.

<sup>55</sup> “Ahtisaari: Säröt Saksan kanssa vain kauneusvirheitä”, *Helsingin Sanomat*, 20 October 1999.

<sup>56</sup> ”Schröder: Erimielisyydet Suomen kanssa pantu järjestykseen”, *Helsingin Sanomat*, 21 October 1999.

<sup>57</sup> Yet, during the Finnish presidency two other incidents were seen as awkward from the point of view Finnish foreign ministry. The first was the statement by German, French and Italian foreign ministers late September on the situation in Chechnya that was done before Finland had announced the joint European stand on the issue. The second was Fischer’s decision not to participate at the inofficial conference of the Foreign Ministers on the Northern Dimension of the European Union that was held in Helsinki in November.

<sup>58</sup> Heikki Aittokoski, *Lihavan kotkan maa* (WSOY, Helsinki 1999), p. 161

<sup>59</sup> *Idem*, p. 25.

In the view of two other journalists, Erkki Karjalainen and Raija Valta, too, the Finnish attitude towards Germany is too much based on emotion and not on cognition. They also point to the co-existence of admiration and dislike of Germans in Finland. Their own view of Germany is nevertheless much more positive than negative. With the new generation in power, Germany is not developing into a “Fourth Reich”, but is still willing to bear the responsibility for the past. It has got rid of its historical burden that they name Wilhelmianism, that is “a mystical worship of spirit of self-sacrifice, pain and heroic death”. The new generation has better chances to be self-assured without being arrogant. Germany faces many domestic problems as a result of the unification and it is quintessential for Europe that Germany is able to solve them. They regret that Germany has lost some of its interest in the Baltic Sea area but argue that the basis exists for a re-emergence of a strong German presence in the region. In Karjalainen’s and Valta’s view, it is not impossible that in the future, Germany could once again become fashionable in Finland.<sup>60</sup>

Finland’s view of Germany’s role and leadership in Europe can thus be summarised as follows. Europe needs leadership but such a position should not be given to any single state or group of big states. If the formal status is preserved as equal, small states such as Finland will understand that it is in their interests to let the big states decide the main issues. From the point of view of a small state, one single leader state is better than a coalition of great powers. Germany is no worse than other European big powers, on the contrary, Finland shares most interests with Germany. The basic perception of Germany is thus positive. Germany occupies a central role as a reference point in Finnish foreign policy. Critical views and negative attitudes towards Germany of some politicians and columnists in Finland have more to do with Finland’s experience with the Soviet Union than with Germany directly. The “psychological complexes” derive from the assumption that Germany or a German-led EU now subordinates Finland in the same way that the Soviet Union did during the Cold War or that orientation towards Germany or the core of the EU will eventually result in a major conflict with Russia. In contrast to many other European states, a reserved attitude towards Germany is hence less directly based on the experiences and memories of the past relationship with Germany.

When the question of Germany’s status as a great power is related to the rights of small powers, Finns are more alerted than when it refers to Germany’s position in the group of other big

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<sup>60</sup> Karjalainen – Valta, *Saksalaisten valtakunta*.

powers. Finns welcomed Germany's increased power in the 1990's, but fears of great power dominance in Europe nevertheless remained. Finns do not believe in any "Fourth Reich" scenarios, but they feel that they need to watch out the rights of a small nation. Moreover, recent incidents in bilateral relations, such as the stir caused by the language dispute, arose some indignation against Germany. Indeed, Schröder's Germany is typically seen as a more assertive but less resourceful than Kohl's Germany. Although Germany may thus no longer be seen just as a "benevolent giant" to the same extent as before, it is nevertheless and without doubt counted as an important – if not the most important – partner in Europe.<sup>61</sup> Therefore one can conclude that the new government's style in Berlin has been greeted with some reservation but it has not significantly changed the basically positive Finnish view of Germany.

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<sup>61</sup> For example, in Hannes Saarinen's analysis, Director of the Finnish Institute in Berlin, Berliner Republik will carry on the political traditions from Bonn. "Although Germany has displayed greater self-assurance in her foreign political approach, particularly under the new Chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, nobody can seriously argue that the decades of "forgotten power" have now been replaced by a totally single-minded "power obsession". Berlin will not be like Paris in France or Vienna in Austria. Yet, the Finns should grasp the opportunities in Berlin and other parts of Germany. Saarinen actually points out, that if one thinks of Germany as a truly federal state, then Finland is not necessarily a small partner. Hannes Saarinen, "Germany and Finland in the Twentieth Century", Presentation at Danielson-Kalmari Seminar, Asikkala, 10 February 2000. See also the book reviews of the Finnish translation of Wolfgang Michal's *Deutschland und der nächste Krieg*. Pertti Lassila, "Saksan kutsumus maailmanvaltaan", *Helsingin Sanomat*, 18 April 1999; Kimmo Elo, "Norsu palaa posliinikauppaan", *Ulkopolitiikka* vol. 36, no. 1, 1999, pp. 88-90.