

# English Abstract

## ”Finland is no Albania”

The Finnish attitudes towards Eastern Central Europe and the Balkans – the ”Europe in between” – can be categorized in four narratives already mentioned at the outset of the research: a sympathetic narrative of comrades-of-destiny and of a reference group; a narrative of fascinating exoticism; a narrative of peculiar political culture and society; and a narrative of an undeveloped, wild, unnatural way of life. All these narratives existed during the entire interwar period, and it was not unusual to find several of them in the same source simultaneously. However, their contents and importance changed, and the final outcome was that there never was a single narrative that could have been a real, positive alternative to the Finns or that would have been able to challenge the Scandinavian and Western self-image of the Finns – the image which assured to them that they represented a higher level of culture and civilization than the ”Europe in between” and which defined how Finland faced the crisis of the late 1930s.

The Europe in between could never produce a narrative that would have been able to appeal to the Finns via the arguments of common destiny and brotherhood and which would have strengthened the identity and self-image which the Finns wanted to entertain about themselves. They could not create a narrative that would have met Finnish interests. At the end of the day, there was a considerably more suitable and familiar narrative much closer: a narrative of the common values,

heritage and brotherhood of the small Scandinavian nations and their common neutrality, defending themselves against the outside world. It was a narrative which could bring about historical heritage because of previous shared statehood (1155–1809), shared religion, shared laws, shared enemies, shared values. It was a narrative which could be justified and set as a moral example because it had been able to maintain a democratic and law-abiding state that advanced the values of common education and only wanted to build its own society, not to meddle with the politics of distant nations. This was an idolizing picture in which there was no room for the Eastern Central Europe, let alone "Balkan", narrative – these offered the wrong kind of narrative, wrong values, a wrong reality.

However, it could feasibly have gone the other way. The official foreign policy of Finland was seriously interested in the "Europe in between", or at least in its northernmost nations, and the civic society entertained a wide, romantic and quite stable sympathy for Hungary. The leading forces of Finland were at first centrist – a Liberal President and governments led by the Agrarian Union and the Progressive party (the Liberals) – and it seemed that there was little competition for an alliance with the Baltic and Eastern European nations in security issues since Germany had collapsed, Britain remained uninterested, the interests of France were considered alien for Finland, and the relations with Sweden were cool for some years because of the Åland Island question. It seemed that the "Europe in between" might, after all, become the reference group for Finland. After all, it found itself in a very similar position to that of Finland in the early 1920s: the enemy was the same, the general interests in security policy were the same, the position as a newcomer in the European concert was largely the same. Since the earlier pro-German sympathies of the Agrarians and the Progressives had faded, they were not worried even by the fact that the patron of the new Eastern Central European states was France, which did not enjoy much popular support in Finland between the world wars.

The Agrarian Union in particular could also find familiar features in the societies of the "Europe in between". They were, by and large, agrarian nations, and it seemed that they cherished the same ideals of newly-

born nationalism and peasantry and freedom of previous oppression – the same kind of youthful energy as Finland. Compared to this, Western Europe seemed to be fatigued and destroyed by the war, Germany had lost its strength, and even the Scandinavian nations seemed arrogant towards independent Finland. The main object of this interest was the Baltic area, especially Estonia, but Poland was equally important, Hungary was considered a brother of the Fenno-Ugrian tribe, Romania and Bulgaria seemed to have potential, and Czechoslovakia represented a credible democracy.

A Finland ruled by the Agrarian Union might have been able to construct a narrative which would have connected the Finnish destiny to the one of the "Europe in between". However, this was not to be. The problem was that the Agrarian Union was so extremely Finnish in its nature, that very few of its representatives had any interest in foreign affairs or in finding international companions. When it came to foreign policy or international affairs in general, the Agrarian Union was by far the most passive and inexperienced political party in Finland. The Progressive Party was stronger in these sectors, but even to the Progressives Eastern Central Europe and the Balkans were, at the end of the day, a backyard of the Baltic States and a subordinate clause in a narrative which concentrated much more on the glamorous and modern Western Europe and League of Nations. Besides, both parties had to deal with the fact that the reality in Eastern Europe did not for long support the idealized notion of nations ruled by a democratic peasantry. One after the other became a dictatorship, so the area could not be represented as a positive alternative any more. It seemed to be on the path to reactionary politics, Fascism, the days of the old lords. None of these would advance the freedom and interests of democratic peasantry.

There simply was not enough to create a "natural" Finnish interest toward the area. Finland's concrete interests did not meet the Eastern Central European and Balkan reality, and even individual countries of the area were of no lucrative interest in Finnish domestic policy. Finally, it was not vital or even important for any political party actively to "lobby" cooperation. Mutual trade was very negligible, the area was physically distant and it had no influence on Finnish interests worth

mentioning. It did not become an issue for conflict in Finnish domestic policy either. The collapse of the Warsaw agreement of 1922 was of course an important political decision, and there was a clear political reason why the Social Democrats and the Swedish People's Party did not participate in the Finnish parliamentary visit to Hungary in 1928. But these were the only exceptions when the "Europe in between" also caused domestic quarrels.

By the end of the 1920's the Progressive Party, too, had orientated itself towards the League of Nations, and the Agrarian Union concentrated on domestic policy. The political Left never really bothered much about the "Europe in between". The Social Democrats had some interest in Austromarxism, and at the end of the 1920's they were also somewhat influenced by it. However, even the Austrian democracy fell, and after that Czechoslovakia was the only state in the area which the Social Democrats could consider a democracy. They could not visualize any cooperation in security policy either. Seen from the Western and Nordic Marxist view, the area represented mainly reactionary, agrarian backwardness, and all this was often seen only through the lenses of one's own ideology and called "Fascism". Only the coup of Piłsudski in 1926 had any sympathies from the Finnish Left, because he was seen as a counter-force against Fascism. In all other respects, there was not much to be interested in or hopeful for in the area.

The Finnish Right-wing never had any real appreciation for the "Europe in between" either. The moderate Conservatives considered Scandinavia to be the real reference group for Finland, and, if possible, one would gladly have seen Germany or Britain as the patron and big brother of Scandinavia. The "Europe in between" was considered far too weak and undeveloped. The Conservatives were not shocked to see the area drifting into dictatorships – it concerned only the nations in question, and the right-wing mentality was often tempted by the notion that a "strongman" government would be more efficient than a Parliament which was full of diverse, conspiring parties. Nevertheless, even they could not appreciate a regime which could resort only to police measures or military means, because such a conduct would make any true national awakening and national cohesion impossible, and the Finnish

right-wing longed for these. Eastern Central Europe and the Balkans seemed to be simply too unstable and uncivilized to qualify as a reference group that would be suitable – good enough – for Finland.

The attitude of the Finnish right-wing, and that of the nationalist intellectuals in general, was, as the strongman of Finnish Conservatism, Lauri Ingman, put it, "Finland is no Albania". J. K. Paasikivi, another distinguished Conservative and later (1946–1956) President of the Republic, wrote in his diary in 1922, that the Balkan nations still belonged to the 19th century.<sup>579</sup> Being "Eastern" still had the pejorative stigma of being wild und uncivilized, and one wanted to stay apart from such company, due to the sense that Finland's own level of civilization was so much higher, the Finnish society and morality so much healthier and the Finnish way of conducting things so much more honest and matter-of-fact than its counterpart in the "Europe in between". The latter represented the "Other" – not the dangerous kind, but a kind which was suitable for bolstering one's own ego, to make oneself feel better and to highlight for others one's own positive features. Some descriptions of Romanian corruption and Hungarian Jews are even outright hostile – a true enemy image.

The aspect of exoticism remained, and its content changed little during the entire period. It is true that the narratives of sympathy and common destiny faded, and the narratives of disorder and dictatorship rooted themselves deeper and deeper in the minds of the Finns. The Hungarian Pusta, the Polish Huzars, the turbans of Bosnia, the peasants of the Balkans etc. still remained exotic and fascinating, and this narrative remained robust while the critical narratives became ever more critical. However, exoticism represented entertainment – there was no political content in it.

Nonetheless, the Finns, so assured of themselves being civilized Westerners and Scandinavians, might have been in for a shock, had they had a chance to read British, German or Swedish diplomatic reports about them – since the Finnish "national character" received very much the same attributes in these as the "Europe in between". These reports talked about a nation in which politics was pursued with a peculiar, somewhat sinister fashion, whose national character was sullen, stub-

born and simple, and to which one referred using stereotypic, somewhat scornful terms. The reporters also often made a distinction: these features were typical especially to the Finns, the Swedish-speaking part of the population was much more civilized. Even assessments about leading Finnish politicians might be very harsh. The words which the Swedish Envoy used about the Finnish Prime Minister J. H. Vennola in 1921 are as uncharitable as those which the Finnish envoys used about the Romanians and Bulgarians: "... naive, childish, self-content, garrulous, busybody, shallow in his judgements. ... Besides, it seems that he thinks that the dungeon from the top of which he greets the rising sun every morning is the biggest and finest in the world."<sup>580</sup>

In evaluating the "Europe in between", the Finns used the same method as this Swedish envoy. You had to find a group beneath you, so that you and your own group, "Us", would seem more matter-of-fact, competent, brave, civilized and law-abiding in comparison. The law was a standard set by a sense of duty and self-control, and to defend the law and the civilized way of life by force, even to sacrifice yourself for these, was the true measure of valor.

This attitude did not change in any decisive way even after 1944. When a new kind of totalitarianism conquered Prague in spring 1948, J. K. Paasikivi, now the President of the Republic, saw fit to make a marked contrast between Czechoslovakia and Finland in his diary: the Czechs were Slavs, who had surrendered without firing a single shot in 1938, the Finns had not done so. The nations in South-East and Central Europe had not prospered – they had now become vassal states of Soviet Russia, whereas Finland belonged to the civilization of Nordic and Western states. Things that had happened in Czechoslovakia may never happen in Finland, "and they will not happen, before I have been shot. In Finland, you have to obey the lawful order of things." A very compact line tells everything: "We are not Czechs."<sup>581</sup>

Thus, you can infer that attitudes towards Eastern Central Europe and the Balkans also represented image-building in the Finnish case. One created and strengthened one's identity by identifying a geographically distant and decidedly worse, peculiar and strange way of conducting things. Simultaneously one drew a line between oneself and this

peculiar area in order to show to Western Europe and Scandinavia that Finland qualifies as Western and Scandinavian. The Finnish intellectuals were not blind to the danger that, from the perspective of the West and from Scandinavia, Finland would be seen only as one part of the chaos of unfit nations which would reach to the Arctic Ocean in the north and to the Mediterranean and the Black Sea in the south. This was not an appealing entourage for the patriotic intellectuals of a newly-born state which was convinced of its own role as an outpost of Western culture and jealous of its Scandinavian past.

Even though it is Finnish identity in focus here, it must also be borne in mind that the Finnish prejudices adhered largely to the same formula which had taken root in Western Europe before. By and large, the same features, the same arguments, the same descriptions can be found for example in Larry Wulff's *Inventing Eastern Europe*. "Europe in between" was, to borrow Wulff's expression, "a cultural construction, an intellectual invention", which was not based on fiction, but, quite the contrary, on the fact that the area had now been visited more often than before and you now had more knowledge about it than previously. However, the new facts had been assimilated and generalized to fit one's own mental needs, and they were used to emphasize the difference between Eastern Europe and one's own reality, the reality which one considered European.<sup>582</sup> The Finnish narrative of the Balkans greatly resembles the astonished, romanticizing and patronizing attitude that Todorova and Goldsworthy describe as they write about the 19th century Western, partly also Russian, descriptions of the same area, both in travel books and fiction.<sup>583</sup>

The Finns repeated a Western narrative which had already been established about 150 years before, and this was done in order to be "Western" oneself. This was scarcely done according to any conscious master plan or calculation, but the Finns had a special mental need for it: it was brought about by an instinctive need to qualify for the Western and Scandinavian "club" which had not yet approved the Finns as full members.

However, even though the Finns almost unfailingly considered them culturally and in every other aspect superior compared to the "Europe in between", sometimes the tables were turned and the Finns had to

explain Finnish political events to those whom they considered more "Eastern". For example, in 1932 you had to make excuses for two things: the non-aggression pact which had been concluded with the Soviet Union, and the abortive coup in Mäntsälä (which surrendered after a few days without bloodshed).

The non-aggression pact seems to have surprised the Romanians in particular. The Finnish envoy emphasized to them that he understood that it would have been in the Romanian interest if no country had entered into such negotiations with the Soviets. Even Finland had not taken any initiative in the matter. However, since so many others had already concluded such a treaty with the Soviets, the Finns had not found it politically advisable to be left entirely isolated against the Soviets, and even a treaty which was not quite satisfactory was better than no treaty at all.<sup>584</sup>

The Finnish diplomat in Prague had had to explain the "incidents" in Mäntsälä. According to him, they had not raised that much interest in Czechoslovakia, and it had usually been assumed that it had been a somewhat similar demonstration to the Peasant March in 1930. Since the latter had a better reputation in Prague than an attempted coup would have had, he had not corrected these interpretations. Besides, the Czechoslovakians were used to hearing news of coups in their neighboring countries.<sup>585</sup>

In Finnish eyes, however, this was the very point: Finland should be too good and civilized to be the source of anything like the same kind of news that you could hear from the "Europe in between".

In this sense, a citation that Goldsworthy makes in her book about Rebecca West, a British journalist and author renowned for her descriptions of Yugoslavia, might have been a good thing for Finland, although a bit "dull". She wrote:

I wanted to write a book on Finland, which is a wonderful case of a small nation with empires here and there, so I learnt Finnish and I read a Finnish novel. It was all about people riding bicycles. But then, when I went to Yugoslavia, I saw it was much more exciting, with Austria and Russia and Turkey, so I wrote that. I really did enjoy it terribly, loved it.<sup>586</sup>

We may end this story for Finland with a remark of a more gratifying kind. Agatha Christie, the creator of Herzslovakia, did not forget Finland entirely either. One of her characters, her own alter ego Ariadne Oliver repented once, in the book *Cards on the Table*, the fact she had made her detective a Finn. Ariadne Oliver complained that she kept getting letters from Finland pointing out all the time what sort of impossible things (for a Finn) this detective had said or done. Oliver commented that the Finns seemed to read a lot of books, and she assumed this was so because of the long winter nights without daylight. She added that, on the other hand, the Romanians and Bulgarians did not seem to read any books, so she should have made her detective a Bulgar.<sup>587</sup>

Christie's knowledge of Finland was not very wide. She even had named Ariadne Oliver's Finnish detective Sven Hjerson. However, most of her Finnish contemporaries, who really were already reading the translated versions of Christie's books back in the 1930's, were no doubt pleased about the cultural difference which had been stated about Finland and Bulgaria.