Comments on the papers of Joenniemi and Nagayo

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We have been treated to two fascinating presentations, on territorial issues and cooperation between Finland-Russia and between Slovakia-Hungary. Richly detailed, the presentations do not reach toward larger issues or conclusions. In this short comment, I shall briefly review the presentations individually, compare them, and try to set them in a broader framework to facilitate discussion.

Finland-Russia

As Professor Pertti Joenniemi shows, for some Finns, the USSR's 1955 return of the Porkkala naval base outside Helsinki, followed by the 1960 agreement on the Finnish leasing of the Saima canal in the Vyborg area, raised expectations (some might say illusions) about the possibility of a "return" of the border area known loosely as Karelia, which had been taken by the USSR in 1940 and again in 1944 (I think eastern Karelia was first acquired by Peter the Great in 1721 from Sweden in exchange for relinquishing the rest of Finland). By the 1970s, however, responsible Finnish political leaders declared that the Finnish government unequivocally accepted the status quo on the border with Russia. Although some public voices in Finland persisted in calling for the redemption of Karelia, strong warnings were also heard about the possible harm to Finnish-Russian relations, the economic costs of reintegrating Karelia into Finland, and most remarkable of all, about Finland's need to take into account the Russian point of view, particularly regarding the strategic value to Russia of the Karelian isthmus.

Most of this took place before the end of communism and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. When those momentous events reoriented Finland's position regarding the European

Union, Finland readily accepted the uncompromising European Union position on the inviolability of borders. More than that, instead of reenergizing the Finnish irredentist movement, the new circumstances following 1989-1991 seem to have induced Finland into reinterpreting the very nature of its Russian border. Rather than as a demarcation of territory, the border is coming to be seen as an opportunity for enhancing transnational cooperation. This development is extremely exciting, yet a bit vague, as Professor Joenniemi acknowledges.

Professor Joenniemi does not seek to explain why relinquishing claims to territory forcibly taken by Russia can be seen by Finns as a method for expanding the benefits they derive from their relations with Russia. Evidently, to him the fact that the Finnish-Russian border should permit new levels of cooperation seems natural (and desirable). By way of explanation, two factors seem to stand out. Firstly, the long-standing role of what might be called "geopolitical realism" in the relationship between Russia and Finland, which, of course, was once part of the Russian empire. Secondly, the enticement of joining the European Union and the need, therefore, to abide by all rules and conventions of the EU. In Professor Joenniemi's paper, the relative importance of these factors remains unclear, and is perhaps impossible to settle without recourse to comparative analysis.

Slovakia-Hungary

Professor Susumu Nagayo examines the history of the Gabčiko-Nagymaros water management system, originally proposed in Hungary in the 1940s and begun mutually by Czecho-Slovakia and Hungary in the 1970s. Eventually, the Hungarian side suspended its participation, but the independent Slovaks continued towards completion, driven by feelings of national pride as well as expediency (they were far along). In Hungary, meanwhile, the project became a lightning rod for opposition to the regime. Given that the Slovak side of the

border contains a sizable Hungarian minority population, the stage appeared set for a dramatic, potentially devastating bilateral confrontation once the constraints imposed by Soviet domination were removed.

But in Slovakia-Hungary, as in the case of Karelia, each side agreed to find a mutually acceptable solution, submitting its views to a binding decision of the International Court of Justice. As Professor Nagayo argues, each country's behavior appears to have been driven primarily by the fact that escalation of the water management conflict would harm its chances of joining the European Union. To be sure, Slovakia evidently had much less to lose by agreeing to a third-party imposed solution. Still, Slovakia also seems to have felt compelled to behave responsibly in the eyes of the European Union. Rather than the revival of historical trauma and recrimination, Slovakia and Hungary discovered cooperation -an extraordinary development, justifiably highlighted by Professor Nagayo. Can the same be said for Slovak policy towards minorities (Hungarians, Ruthenians, Roma), where the Slovaks may feel they are being called on to sacrifice too much to comply fully with EU strictures?

The meaning of Europe

If we juxtapose the two cases of Finland-Russia and Slovakia-Hungary, we see that the attraction of joining the European Union seems to be an overriding consideration in diffusing and regulating otherwise dangerous border disputes. Since the kind of realism that has characterized Finnish-Russian relations cannot be said to characterize Slovak-Hungarian relations, the key factor common to both cases would appear to be the desire to "join Europe."

The contrast with Asia, although beyond the scope of this conference, is striking. (It can be eye-opening to compare Finland's approach in border issues with Russia to Japan's approach in border issues with Russia.) From the Kurile Islands

to the Spratly Islands, there is no commitment in Asia to placing the goal of overall regional stability above irredentist and nationalist considerations. In short, through comparison with Asia, the importance of the idea of Europe and of the attraction of joining Europe stand out even more. It's as if a magic wand has been discovered: you want to join Europe, behave! Here is a seemingly compelling argument, beyond all the well-known ones, for sustaining the vision of the European Union.

Still, many questions arise. What precisely does joining Europe mean? What does Europe mean? How long will the attraction of joining Europe serve to redefine such border disputes? Forever? Until a new conjuncture? In other words, is the European Union a viable long-term set of institutions, or merely a dream, an organizing principle with considerable short-term practical value but ultimately without the possibility of long-term institutionalization?

Here a parallel set of questions arises regarding the limits to the Europe Union. Are there natural borders to Europe? Should there be natural borders to Europe? In some ways, of course, all the talk about Europe, the European Union, and so on, can be seen to be about Europe's eastern boundaries. Particularly the revival of the notion of Central Europe can be seen as largely a device for defining Europe's eastern boundaries. Germany is no longer the eastern fringe of Europe but once again Europe's center, and the problem of defining Germany's - and to a lesser extent Austria's - relations with the small countries immediately to the east is simultaneously a problem of determining how far the eastern boundary of Europe will extend.

Everyone knows that Europe has no geographical eastern boundary. Indeed Europe is technically not even a continent by the Europeans' own definition - a body of land surrounded on four sides by water. Over the centuries the eastern boundary of Europe, politically and culturally, has been variously interpreted and contested. Such is the case today.

Since 1989/91 what we are seeing, obviously, is the recentering of Germany, and along with the recentering of Germany, something like the reabsorption of the core Habsburg lands and a part of the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Muscovy and the Ottoman southeast of Europe - Byzantium, so to speak - appear to be outside the charmed circle, even if few people want to say so openly. But what happens to Europe and European stability if not all countries that may themselves claim to be part of Europe are "invited in"? We might also ask, what happens to those countries allowed in, when they discover that in the *best case scenario* they have become suppliers of raw materials and intermediate products for a German economy that dominates their own economies? At present a revival of German political domination seems a highly remote possibility, and there does seem to be some basis for hoping that the USA and Japan, as well as perhaps France, can reduce the reliance on German capital. Yet one wonders whether short-term solutions to the question, What is Europe?, however compelling they seem now, will become long-term solutions.

The meaning of borders

Here we might consider the sometimes confused relationship between the European Union and NATO that has been alluded to throughout this conference. With the frequent conflation of the Europe and NATO, the United States is viewed as forming an integral part of Europe, while Russia is not. In Asia, meanwhile there is the United States-Japan relationship. Thus, we have an Atlantic bloc on one side of Russia, paralleled by a Pacific Rim on the other side of Russia. Russia is integrated neither into Atlantic/Europe nor into the Asia/Pacific. Constant appeals for both Europe/Germany and Japan to take greater initiative in their respective spheres have not so far reduced the relative weight of the United States in these two powerful blocs, or the seeming "exclusion" from these blocs of

Russia.

At the same time, the boundaries of the Atlantic/Europe bloc have shifted radically to Russia's disfavor even as the relative balance of power in the Asia/Pacific side is rising to a level competitive, if not superior, to Europe. As a result, Russia appears sandwiched between two economically superior blocs, left to mire in its ambiguous relations with the unstable Turkish/Persian belt on its southern flank. Is this wise? Is it simply unavoidable? Can we just say tough luck, here's the payback for centuries of imperialism?

In this context it is instructive to return to the case of Finland/Karelia and the apparent reinterpretation there of the very nature of borders. In the Finnish approach to Karelia, do we have merely the reluctant recognition of Russia as an unavoidable presence that must be appeased? Or do we truly have a border as a site and even as a means of enhanced cooperation? And if so, are the Finnish efforts to engage rather than exclude Russia sustainable and generalizable?

Interestingly, something similar to what might be called the Finnish approach to Russia has quietly become the modus operandi of NATO during the enlargement being implemented by the eager collaboration of Germany, Poland, and former Habsburg territories. Russia is invited to participate in as many NATO discussions and activities as possible, even as NATO is set to expand eastward into the territories of the former Warsaw Pact. Is this in fact a new form of cooperation similar to what the Finns propose for Karelia, or merely mediocre public relations camouflage for the naked power play being undertaken by the coalition of NATO expansionists? NATO expansionists insist that their actions are in no way directed at harming Russia, yet in foreign affairs are not perceptions often more important than supposed intentions? (Anyway, Japanese consumers who use disposable wooden chopsticks could well say that they do not intend to denude the world's rain forests.) Does the expansion of NATO - a military alliance, after all –

make any strategic sense? Will the clamor over expansion simply become little more than the unintended impetus for the kind of complete military overhaul long overdue inside Russia?

"Finlandization" in reverse?

As potentially threatening disputes such as those between Slovakia and Hungary become manageable through the allure of joining Europe, it would also seem from the current practice of NATO that the thorny issue of Europe's eastern boundary can be finessed, *for the time being,* through a strategy of suffusion, rather than the heavy-handed imposition of impermeable borders. Whether there is more to the treatment of Russia than temporary expediency remains to seen, however. In this regard, if Professor Joenniemi is correct, Finland, which has the first of what may become several European Union borders with Russia, might lead the way. The case of the three Baltic states will be of immense importance.

The expression "Finlandization" arose during the Cold War to denote the possibility of Soviet bloc countries achieving near total independence in domestic affairs, while remaining deferential in foreign policy and security issues toward the USSR, as Finland had done. Perhaps in the aftermath of the downfall of Communism and the dissolution of the Soviet Union we are on the verge of a degree of "Finlandization" in reverse, although this potential new Finlandization would be more a matter of voluntary cooperation than enforced deference. Only time will tell, yet already one point seems clear. In the handling of Europe's eastern boundaries, anything less than an approach parallel to the emerging Finnish treatment of the Karelian question - permeability rather than fixed borders - would contradict the spirit of the European Union, not to say the European Union's prospects for continued existence. As these two papers show, the meaning of Europe, and the meaning of borders, are closely intertwined.

In closing, let me express a historian's sense of caution.

The former Yugoslavia aside, much has changed in Europe in the most recent past, especially in regards to the abandonment of empire-building and territorial aggrandizement, for which we can all be grateful. But it would be unwise to assume that the present situation will continue forever. Remember that those present at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 thought they were settling the major questions once and for all. The same can be said of most of those present at the Versailles Peace Treaty negotiations in 1918-19, or the Yalta conference in 1945. I am not suggesting that the present situation is comparable to any of these cases, or that we will see a return of the past. Rather, I want merely to emphasize that we will see change. History teaches us that even though no one knows what the future will bring, we can all be assured that the present situation will not last forever. History also teaches us that most policies are formulated on the basis of satisfying immediate perceived interests, only to be subjected later to the kind of harsh judgments that those who study the past are always eager, retrospectively, to render.