УДК [341.24(470+571:485)+327(470+571:481)] (091) “ 17 (18 (045)

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THE RUSSIAN-SWEDISH UNION TREATY OF 1812 AND NORWAY'S ROLE

This article is devoted to the 200th anniversary of the Russian-Swedish Union Treaty of 1812, which was one of the international prerequisites for both the Swedish-Norwegian union and the Norwegian constitution of 1814. It raises the question whether the friendship established between Russia and Sweden in 1812 comprised Norway too – and to which extent it is possible to speak of Norwegian-Russian relations as something different from Swedish-Russian relations in the period of the Swedish-Norwegian union (1814–1905).

***Key words:** Russian-Swedish Treaty of 1812, "Russian menace", Russian-Norwegian relations, border delimitation, November Treaty of 1855.*

200 years ago, towards the end of the Napoleonic Wars, a shakeup took place on the political map of Northern Europe when two multinational states, Denmark and Sweden, split up into four nation-states. As a result, Finland and Norway stood forward as autonomous states, even though they were still united with larger states, Russia and Sweden respectively. 1809 has been named an *annus mirabilis* in Finnish history, and we are perfectly justified in using the same term for the year 1814 in Norwegian history. In both cases Russia and Emperor Alexander I played an important part, and the Norwegian historian Øystein Rian has proposed (somewhat playfully, as it seems) that a statue of Alexander I should be erected in Oslo[1]. A noble thought. Alexander I could have been placed beside the well-known equestrian statue of King Karl Johan in front of the Norwegian Royal castle, with Alexander on horseback too, the way he is often depicted. The two equestrian statues would then symbolize the friendship that was established between the hereditary enemies Russia and Sweden through the St. Petersburg Union Treaty of April 5, 1812, an event that we this year celebrate the 200th anniversary of[2].

When Jean Baptiste Bernadotte, Marshall of France and Prince of Ponte Corvo, in 1810 was chosen to be Sweden's Crown Prince (under the name Karl Johan) and heir to the throne, it was expected that he would help the Swedes to conquer Finland, which had recently been lost to Russia. Karl Johan did not like this idea, and instead he introduced what was later to be named "the policy of 1812", which was based on the realization that Finland was lost for ever. Sweden's future was to be found in the West, not in the East, and Karl Johan took up an old Swedish idea about extending Sweden's borders westwards and uniting Norway with Sweden. To obtain this he was ready to join the coalition against Napoleon and approach

Russia. He opened negotiations with Russian representatives in Stockholm, and his proposals found fertile ground in St. Petersburg. Alexander I declared his readiness to support Karl Johan's claim for Norway, in return for Swedish participation in the struggle against Napoleon, as this would also secure Finland's integration into the Russian Empire in the long term.

This was the essence of the St. Petersburg treaty of 1812, which was further confirmed through the meeting of the two potentates in Åbo in August 1812, which took place in an atmosphere of friendliness and concord. Butone can still ask, if the "ties of friendship and good harmony" that are mentioned in the St. Petersburg treaty as existing between Russia and Sweden, did they somehow encompass Norway, too? And from what time is it possible to speak of Russian-Norwegian relations as something separate from Russian-Swedish relations? These are the two questions that will be addressed in the present article[3]. At the outset, the cordial spirit of 1812, obviously, did not comprise Norway, since in paragraph 5 of the treaty Russia even undertook, if necessary, to force the Norwegians to comply by military means[4]. In the summer of 1814, when the Swedish-Norwegian War started, Karl Johan could have brought Russian troops in to break Norwegian resistance, but in the end he wisely decided against such a move. Instead, Russia's pressure was confined to diplomacy within the limits of the great power mission to Copenhagen and Christiania. It took Fredrik VI, the Danish king, and Christian Fredrik seriously to task to make sure that they abided by the regulations of the Kiel treaty[5].

Later, when the union was well established, Norway, too, came to benefit from "the policy of 1812", when in 1826 a state border was drawn between Russia and Norway. For more than 500 years there had been a vast Russian-Norwegian common area in the North. Commencing from the 17th century it started to shrink, and by the beginning of the 19th only three small Norwegian-Russian common districts remained in the Varanger area. The Norwegian government was still worried that these small common districts sooner or later might drag her into conflicts with the Russian great power. Russia had been reluctant to start negotiations about a border delimitation with Norway, but after 1814 the Swedish diplomats began to tackle this issue more energetically than their Danish predecessors had done. Thanks to the spirit of 1812, in the end they were able to achieve more. In 1823 MID, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, informed the Swedish counterpart that they agreed to draw a permanent state border between the Russian and Norwegian territories in the North.

MID started to gather information about Lapland and the border zone, but then, quite unexpectedly, the governor-general of Arkhangelsk province reported back that a demarcation vis-à-vis Norway was unnecessary, since, according to his good judgement, the whole common district belonged to Russia. In the end he succeeded in convincing Foreign Minister Nesselrode of the fairness of his position. Soon it became clear that the Emperor looked differently on this issue, however. He decided to disregard the opinion of the Arkhangelsk governor and stated that what was to be divided was, indeed, a common district which belonged to two countries. Therefore, it must be divided between those countries[6].

In the summer of 1825 a Norwegian and a Russian border commissary worked together in the Varanger area and agreed on a boundary line. The agreement was more or less in accordance with the proposal put forward by the Norwegian Storting, and Norway acquired a large area east of the Pasvik River, in which there was virtually no Norwegian population. The border project was well-received in Christiania, while dissatisfaction was widespread in Russia: the Eastern Sami, the indigenous population of the border zone, were discontented, because the border crisscrossed their land[7], and the Finnish authorities were displeased, since they had not been a part of the negotiations, even if the border undoubtedly affected Finland.

Alexander I, however, appeared to have had no objections to the new boundary line and gave his consent. But this was the autumn of 1825, and then came Alexander's untimely death, which was followed by the Decembrist rising. When the

negotiations relating to the border were resumed in April 1826, it became clear that the new tsar, Nicholas I, was not enthusiastic about the proposed state border in the North. The reason may have been that the Russian officer who had negotiated it, lieutenant-colonel Galyamin, had been involved in the Decembrist rising. The new tsar claimed that the whole area to the east of the River Pasvik ought to be ceded to Russia. After a while, however, he gave up his opposition to the border agreement, possibly because by then it had become clear that Galyamin's complicity in the rebellion could not be proven, after all. More importantly, however, he was anxious to assure the Swedish king of his intention to continue the tradition of 1812 and his brother's cordial policy towards the United Kingdoms of Sweden and Norway. The new tsar wanted to give Karl Johan "un noveau gage de son amitié" (a new pledge of his friendship)[8].

In many countries the establishment of or changes in the territorial demarcation of states has had an indisputable effect on the collective process of creating intangible or mental boundaries that define who *we* are and who the *others* are[9]. At first glance it seems unreasonable to assume that the new state border established between Norway and Russia in 1826 could affect the Norwegian elite's image of Russia in a negative way since two tsars, one after the other, had agreed to share the old common territory with Norway so liberally. Russia's restraint was not appreciated at its true value, however, and, paradoxically, it became a prelude to misconceptions about Russian expansionism in the North: the border treaty was, certainly, an advantageous treaty for Norway, but it was *almost too much of a good thing*, because there was considerable concern that Russia might claim back certain parts of the old common districts, – or even more: from the 1830s an idea became increasingly widespread that Russia needed ice-free harbours on the Norwegian coast to develop its own naval fleet[10].

All in all "the policy of 1812" was not seen in the decades following the signing of the treaty as being particularly beneficial to Norway, since there was also a feeling that Russia supported Karl Johan in his struggle with the Norwegian Storting. In 1821 the King openly admonished that Russia would intervene if the Storting really resolved to abolish nobility in Norway. Later, when Karl Johan dissolved the Storting in 1836, again it was said that he had to yield to Russian pressure. An old conservative interpretation among Norwegian historians was that Karl Johan had to go through with the dissolution to avoid intervention from "Europe's *gendarme*" (i. e. Russia) against what was regarded as revolutionary agitation in Norway.

Many years later, in 1929, the eminent Norwegian historian Halvdan Koht worked through the correspondence between the Russian mission in Stockholm and St. Petersburg concerning the dissolution of the Storting in 1836 in the Archive of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs. He did not find anything that supported the view that Russia had a finger in the pie. Even though in his communications with Russian authorities Karl Johan compared what was going on in Norway with the Polish insurrection of 1830-31, it did not have the desired effect. Russia looked slightly differently on the Swedish-Norwegian union than it had done 20 years earlier: in the instructions given to the new Russian envoy in Stockholm in 1836, it was stated that "The king of Sweden cannot today claim the right to put Norway back under the terms of the Kiel treaty, as he has shown the intentions of doing"[11]. This was, certainly, more in tune with Russia's traditional scepticism of Scandinavian integration. In this scepticism, there was a potential for Russian-Norwegian understanding that went unnoticed in Norway at the time because it was veiled by the "ties of friendship and good harmony" that had been established between Russia and Sweden in 1812.

"The policy of 1812" came to an end with the Crimean War and the November Treaty of 1855, which explicitly singled Russia out as a potential aggressor against Sweden-Norway. This treaty was based on the belief that Russia aspired to possess ice-free ports in North Norway and that it badly needed them to develop its own navy. John Rice Crowe, a British businessman and consul, residing in Norway, had since the 1830s been the

main protagonist of this theory, which was soon adopted by prominent representatives of the Norwegian political and cultural elite. Through the years he sent a series of dispatches about "the Russian menace" to London, the climax being the one he sent in May 1855, in the middle of the Crimean War, now acting as British Consul-General in Norway. This new and ominous report, which made a strong impression in Whitehall, ended with these words: "The spider continues to spin, and eventually will gain her ends – the possession of a port or ports on the shores of the Atlantic, unless vigilantly and incessantly watched"[12].

After having read Crowe's report, Prime Minister Palmerston issued the well-known instruction that it would be well "to enter into some agreement with the King of Sweden and Norway binding him to make no concession whatever to Russia whether of Fishery Rights, Pasture Rights or Territory without the consent of Great Britain". Such a Treaty, wrote Palmerston, "would be a security to us and a definitive support to him". Crowe's dispatches were later used to persuade Napoleon III and France to join the treaty. In the end Crowe took part in the negotiations that secured Swedish-Norwegian endorsement of the treaty. The Norwegian-American historian Paul Knaplund, who in the 1920s carefully studied this diplomatic process in the Public Record Office, proclaimed John Rice Crowe to have been "the real father of the November Treaty"[13].

The idea that Russia needed ice-free harbours in North Norway was one of the most remarkable Russophobian delusions of the 19th century, and a great deal has been written about this false idea. Swedish authorities did not devote much attention to this question before the Crimean War, and to begin with this was first and foremost a Norwegian and British threat perception. Roald Berg has claimed that the Norwegian Army had a need to establish a threat scenario, where Norwegian territory was singled out as a potential target for a Russian attack. Thus, the Russian menace became an argument in Norwegian self-assertion and in the Norwegians' struggle for equality within the Swedish-Norwegian union; ultimately, it determined the requirements for the Norwegian defence. These beliefs concerning Russian military aggression towards North Norway contrasted sharply with the Swedish doctrine about a defence based on the view that a Russian attack would be launched via the Baltic Sea, towards the Swedish capital and the central parts of Sweden; an attack along these lines would only threaten Norway if the Swedes, assisted by the Norwegian standing army, were to fail to contain the enemy on Swedish territory[14].

Many Eastern European countries today are pre-occupied with marking boundaries with Russia, as if they were emphasizing their belief that they belonged to Europe. The same phenomenon was also in evidence in Norway in the period we are concerned with. Norway was the northernmost periphery of Europe and at the same time an advanced outpost against Russia. I would claim that the Norwegian elite's susceptibility to the idea that Russia aspired to ice-free ports in North Norway may have something to do with Norway's desire to carve out a position for itself, not in the light, but in the shadow of Russia, thereby emphasizing that Norway, too, aspired to a place among the civilised nations of Europe.

Was there a rivalry here between Norway and Sweden, not relating to Russia's friendship, but rather concerning its perceived animosity? A few things point in this direction. In May 1856 Oscar I wrote about "the both honourable and tremendous vocation of being Europe's outposts against the danger threatening [us] from the East <…>"[15]. But it seems to me that the Norwegians were more successful than the Swedes in drawing attention to themselves in this respect. The aim of the November Treaty was primarily to block Russia from obtaining an ice-free port in North Norway, and, to begin with, it was to encompass only Norwegian territory. This was not well-received in Stockholm during the initial negotiations concerning the Treaty. King Oscar raised the question with the French envoy and said that the intended guarantee should also include Sweden. The Russian menace concerned not only Finnmark, he said, but

Gotland and other places and parts of Swedish territory. The King pointed out that the Swedes had been more clever to keep their defence in order, "and a feeling of jealousy might be created in this country by the defensive treaty not being extended to it"[16]. Foreign Minister Stierneld put forward similar objections vis-á-vis the British envoy and told him that Sweden, through the Russian fortress Bomarsund on the Åland Islands, was more threatened by Russia than Norway at the Varanger fjord. In the end the November Treaty came to include both countries. However, the Swedes had to accept the ban specified in the treaty against the exchange of land with Russia. For Britain and France, Finnmark was far more important than the Åland Islands, and they feared that Oscar I would be tempted to give away the Varanger fjord in exchange for Russian Bomarsund[17].

A paradox may well be hidden in this. Knaplund called John Rice Crowe "the father of the November Treaty", but among Swedish historians it is a widespread opinion that Oscar I himself was the stage producer here, that he organized the whole thing behind the scenes, a theory which was first put forward by Sven Eriksson in 1939. Even if there still is room for doubt, many things point in the direction that King Oscar used John Rice Crowe, who had close contact with the Swedish royal house, as an instrument for his own policies, and that he called on Crowe to send the new alarmist report to the Foreign Office in May 1855 and even furnished him with texts on which he could base his dispatch[18].

If this was the case, then Oscar I deliberately took advantage of the British anxiety for Russian naval ports in Norway to obtain a treaty that would give him backing for his desire to involve Norway-Sweden in a war with Russia and, thereby, win Finland back.The first step in this plan was successful, the treaty was secured, but it did not become the beginning of a European war against Russia. Quite contrary, together with an ultimatum from Austria, it convinced Russia that the time had come for putting down her weapons. According to Crown Prince Karl, his father aged ten years in a single day out of sheer disappointment[19]. That does not mean that the November Treaty was a failure. In Norway there was dissatisfaction with the fact that the treaty had been negotiated above the head of Norwegian authorities, and relief that it did not lead to war. In 1857, however, the Storting nonetheless, expressed its satisfaction with the fact that the treaty had been signed and that Norway now found itself under the protection of the Western great powers. The November Treaty actually institutionalized what was later acknowledged to be the main pillars of Norwegian security orientation for a hundred years to come: a fear of Russia and a security guarantee from the ruling Western powers, be it explicit or "implicit"[20].

According to Bruno Naarden, around the middle of the 19th century every person in Europe who considered himself liberal, socialist or revolutionary was anti-Russian. In conservative circles, in contrast, there could still be some sympathy for Russia, not least in Germany, where many aristocrats admired the Russian society for its stable values, its defence of Christianity, and its monarchy[21]. In Stockholm, reportedly, there was a group of higher officials and noblemen who defended Russia; in Christiania (Oslo) almost no one did so, with Vice-Regent Severin Løvenskiold being the one obvious exception[22].

Towards the end of the 19th century, however, Norwegian attitudes towards Russia clearly became more relaxed for several reasons. Internal developments in Russia made some impression in Norway, as well as in many other countries in the West. Russia's defeat in the Crimean War, the liberal reforms of Alexander II, and the social unrest and revolutionary ferment, all pointed in the direction of disintegration and weakness. The Russian military invasion, which many observers had warned about, became less and less probable and was replaced by "the Russian literary invasion", which reached the Scandinavian countries in the 1880s with the first translations of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky[23]. This created a wave of interest and sympathy with Russian culture in Norway, as it did in France, Germany and Great Britain. The discovery of "the Russian soul", so to say, became a factor in East-West relations. Thus it was, that towards the end of the century the "Russian

menace" came to coexist with new and alternative images of Russia.

And still there was something peculiar about Norwegian views of Russia, which we could call "the Swedish factor". Norwegian views of Russia came into being in a triangle, where Russia and Sweden constituted the other two corners. The drift in public opinion about Russia that took place in Norway was reminiscent of France, the only great power in Europe where, after 1870–71, an anti-Russian attitude was replaced by enthusiasm for Russia among the general public. Needless to say, in this latter case, the recently united Germany constituted the third force in the triangle. Fear in France for the new and stronger Germany was accompanied by affection for Russia[24]. And in this instance Sweden played approximately the same role vis-à-vis Norway as Germany did with respect to France: simply because the Swedes wanted the Norwegians to dislike the Russians, we began to like them, or, at least, to dislike them less than before[25].

So, if we move on to the 1890s and the decisive phase of the struggle for Norwegian independence, many Norwegian liberals and radicals had become more friendly towards Russia. No doubt this had to do with the fact that the Russian question was tangled up with the union struggle. Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, one of Norway's leading writers and at the time a leading figure in the liberal party, and many others had become convinced that the Swedes deliberately used the "Russian menace" with the intention of dissuading the Norwegians from leaving the union. In 1890 Bjørnson even advocated that Russia should, if she wished, be given access to one or more ice-free ports in North Norway and the opportunity of providing a rail link to them[26]. However, the Norwegians' greater openness towards Russia was in a way situational, and the assessment within the Russian MID in 1905 was that the greater moderation towards Russia, observable in many Norwegian newspapers at the time, was somehow artificial, and the atmosphere labile. Russian representatives in Scandinavia warned against anything that could be interpreted as if Russia had pretensions vis-á-vis Norway, lest the public opinion in Norway should suddenly turn around.

In 1905 Norway benefited from the fact that all the great European powers were occupied elsewhere (not least with the Moroccan crisis), and therefore all wanted a quick and peaceful solution to the Norwegian question[27]. Russia had to be particularly careful, because 1905 was its *annus horribilis* with war in the Far East and revolution at home. No doubt Russian authorities were sensitive to the fate of the monarchy in Norway because of the current menace to the Romanov dynasty, and the tsar would have reacted extremely negatively if the monarchy had been abolished in Norway. Two weeks after the Storting's resolution of the 7th of June, Foreign Minister Lamsdorff informed the Swedish-Norwegian envoy in St. Petersburg that the "revolutionary character" of the provisional Norwegian government was so evident that it should not count on sympathy from Russian quarters[28]. Meanwhile, however, reports from Russian representatives in Norway assured the MID that the Norwegians were monarchists, and that there would be a robust majority in support of the monarchy at a referendum[29].

In the end anxiety for the monarchy had to yield to other considerations. The Russian position was stated rather clearly in a new instruction for the envoy to Sweden and Norway, first in a draft from 1904 and then in the final text from March 1905. In some respects, it reminds one of the instructions from 1836 cited above. It was stated explicitly that the Norwegian-Swedish "dualism" was, indeed, desirable, as an assurance against intrigues and ambitions on the part of other great powers which were Russia's rivals in the Baltic and in northern waters. A pan-Scandinavian amalgamation could develop into a new political unity in Northern Europe and might attract Finland as well. Such a union would unavoidably be dominated by Sweden and most likely approach Germany (as was stated in the draft from 1904), or Germany or Britain (as stated in the final text from 1905)[30]. An obvious conclusion to draw from this was that an independent Norway would reduce the danger of a pan-Scandinavian union, and thereby also the danger

that the Danish straits could be closed. At the same time, however, there was a risk that a Norwegian secession from Sweden would increase Britain's influence in Norway. That could lead to the establishment of British bases in southern Norway and even along the coast of North Norway where their presence would threaten the Russian harbours in the north, which were completely open and defenseless.

There was not very much Russia could do about this, however, and from different quarters in the spring of 1905 it was suggested, therefore, that the most sensible thing Russia could do was to make an open statement to the effect that the country did not have any pretensions vis-á-vis Norway. A final decision about this was made in the beginning of October, when the Russian envoy in Stockholm reported rumours that Great Britain wanted to renew the November Treaty with Norway. According to Sune Jungar, these rumours were crucial for the decision to include a statement in the recognition of Norwegian independence that would remove the basis for the November Treaty[31]. The resolution consisted of two elements: 1) a formulation that Russia recognized Norway "dans toute son integrité territoriale" ('in all its territorial integrity'), and 2) that a diplomatic representative be sent to Kristiania as soon as possible to point out to Norwegian authorities that a renewal of the November Treaty was inconsistent with a good relationship with Russia[32]. On October 30, 1905 the Norwegian government at last received the longed-for telegram from Lamsdorff: Russia had been a leading force in forging the Swedish-Norwegian union in 1814, now it became the first state to affirm its dissolution.

Ironically, the rumours about a new November treaty directed against Russia were equally groundless as the rumours which, 50 years earlier, had preceded the signing of the November Treaty. Yes, in 1905 British Foreign Secretary Landsdowne considered a renewal of the November Treaty, but he was positive that a new great power guarantee for Norway should not be directed against Russia. On the contrary, Russia had to be among the powers that gave Norway this guarantee. Later, Russia was to participate in the negotiations which resulted in the so-called Integrity Treaty of 1907, where all the great European powers joined forces to guarantee the integrity of the independent Norwegian state[33].

Epilogue

Since the demise of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union towards the end of the 20th century, the fact that Russia became the first state to recognise Norwegian independence in 1905 has often been referred to as a cornerstone in the peculiar Norwegian-Russian historical friendship. This friendly act was reciprocated in 1992 when Norway became the first state to recognize the independence of the Russian Federation. Politicians often mention that, allegedly, the two countries have never been at war with each other (which is not entirely true, of course). What is true is that the state border established in 1826 between the two countries has been remarkably stable and is today regarded as the oldest of Russia's present state borders.

A revolution in Norwegian foreign policy towards Russia was the launching in 1993 of the trans-national Barents Euro-Arctic Region, comparable in some respects to "the policy of 1812" and based on the idea that not demarcation and isolation, but closeness and involvement create security[34]. Also new in this Norwegian-Russian cordiality, necessitated by the end of the Cold War, is the focus on the North. In the 19th century the issue of the North presented a cardinal point of distrust because of the beliefs associated with the ice-free port. Today, the North is one of the pillars of the Norwegian-Russian friendship as it is believed that in the North one is less concerned with the traditional discourse about power, history and identity, and therefore it is somehow easier to transcend the negative self-other divisions between the East and the West[35]. What will become of it in the future we do not know, but Norway has already reaped the fruits of this friendship with the agreement on the delimitation of the shelf in the Barents Sea between Norway and Russia, which was signed in 2011 and which inevitably reminds one of the 1826 border treaty. Here too, seemingly, the Russian leadership, instead of giving in to inner doubts or listening to sceptical voices within the country itself, decided to give Norway "a new pledge of its friendship".

Comments

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[3] The article is based on the author's presentation at the bicentenary conference *The Russian-Swedish Treaty of 1812 and its Aftermath in Northern Europe*, organized in St. Petersburg on 25–26 March 2012 by the Fritt Ord Foundation, Oslo, The University of Tromsø, The Institute for Defence Studies, Oslo, and The Institute for Universal History, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow.

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РОССИЙСКО-ШВЕДСКИЙ СОЮЗНЫЙ ДОГОВОР 1812 ГОДА И РОЛЬ НОРВЕГИИ

Статья посвящена 200-летию заключения российско-шведского договора 1812 года, который стал одной из международных предпосылок создания Шведско-норвежской унии и утверждения конституции Норвегии 1814 года. В статье рассматриваются следующие вопросы: охватывала ли дружба, установленная между Россией и Швецией в 1812 году, кроме того и Норвегию, а также, в какой степени можно говорить о российско-норвежских отношениях как отдельных от российско-шведских в период Шведско-норвежской унии (1814–1905).

***Ключевые слова**: Российско-шведский договор 1812 г., «русская угроза», российско-норвежские отношения, установление границ, Ноябрьский договор 1855 г.*

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