

Chapter 9 : Sweden-Norway-Finland

The North is a collection of countries that all have a complicated relationship with Sweden.

Associate Professor Johan Strang, Turku, 2016.

The Union

Denmark, in alliance with Russia, made several attempts to regain the provinces they had lost through the Peace of Brömsebro (1645) & Roskilde (1657). The strategy was a pincer movement where Denmark attacked Skåne, Norway attacked Jämtland & Russia, while the Swedes were so occupied, attacked Finland. The strategy was a matter of great concern to the Swedes who wanted to protect their western front by taking over Norway. The Swedish-Finnish-Danish-Norwegian-Russian tug-of-war began during the Great Northern War 1700-1721 and ended during the Napoleonic Wars 1803-1815. Charles John fought on both sides, with France in alliance with Russia in 1808 to help out with the pincer movement. Charles John commanded a Franco-German-Spanish-Dutch-Danish force that would attack Skåne while the future Swedish heir Prince Charles August attacked Jämtland. None of them put much energy into it, but it tied down Swedish troops & contributed to the loss of Finland.

However, when the conquest of Norway came about - in 1814 formalized into a union - it was already made obsolete by the loss of Finland & the Turku treaty of 1812. One interpretation is that Charles John thought the treaty would be as short lived as all other treaties, and that as soon as the opportunity rose Russia would try to also include the Swedish heartlands in its empire. When this did not happen, the Union was instead motivated as a replacement for Finland. Another interpretation is that there were ongoing discussions about a possible counter-attack, similar to Oscar I's later attempts during the Crimean War. Barton¹ summarizes the diplomacy as Denmark wanting to strengthen the North through a new Kalmar Union, but neither Napoleon nor Alexander wanted that. Nor at a later stage England.

If you put the Turku treaty, the peace of Kiel, the Moss convention and other negotiations side by side, Karl Johan's lack of government and negotiating experience was evident. Short-term gains led to long-term problems. "A strong blow to the table by the King was not followed up by further, consistent action to the entrenchment of the King and the Union, while the Norwegian Parliament retreated concerning the timetable and ceremonies but neither in substance nor in principle."² All of Karl John's close associates have since uttered similar criticism. His compliance has led to suspicions of a hidden agenda. Perhaps Desirée's opinion on Norway was also Charles John's: "In that way we had a throne in reserve, if the Congress of Vienna would have driven us away from Sweden."³ A more reasonable interpretation in that spirit, however, is that it was important for Charles John's future that he delivered rapid results.

What is still commented on is that Charles John recognized Norway as a state rather than a province. The objection has been that Sweden could otherwise have taken over Denmark's role. Such a Swedish role, however, seems unrealistic. Although Sweden could possibly, with the help of Russia, have managed to occupy Norway - Alexander actually in the Turku Treaty offered him a force of 44 thousand men to do just that (uncertain information though; maybe

¹ Barton 2009: ss. 117-136.

² Höjer 1960: s. 433.

³ Brander 1923: s. 29.

it had something to do with Denmark), Sweden lacked the resources to administer the country. It was also doubtful whether the English & Swedish Parliament would accept Russian troops on Swedish-Norwegian soil. There was a reason why those particular paragraphs were secret.

A comparison with Finland is illuminating. Finland had been self-administering such that higher posts were filled with a "Sweden-based" bureaucracy that had completed their higher education in Uppsala & the administrative language was Swedish. The Danes similarly administered Norway with a "Danish-based" bureaucracy that had completed their higher education in Copenhagen and the administrative language was Danish - later replaced by "Bokmål". Norway had long worked to break the Danish education monopoly, which they in 1809 succeeded in doing, although it took time until it had any effect. Finland had the same ambition & from the 1880s "Fennomanized" its higher education. The Russians' attempts to "Russify" the Finnish bureaucracy were never successful.

The Danish system of rule through a military governor, civilian governor or vice-king (a love child has many names) was taken over by the Swedes. In 1873 it was replaced by a system of two Norwegian prime ministers. One in Kristiania (Oslo) who was Head of Government & one in Stockholm for Union matters (a diplomatic function). The Swedish rule was at first relatively conflict-free. The period 1814-1884 is usually referred to by Norwegian historians as Norway having a "bureaucracy" rather than a government proper. The Bernadotte chose their governments from those being loyal to the Union. When the Norwegians in 1884 managed to unite around parliamentarianism, i.e. the government was elected from the majority, a series of crises ensued which ended with the dissolution of the Union. The literature about the Union is very extensive. Only about the dissolution there are over 600 works - debate books, chronicles, memoirs & memories.⁴

The Norwegian version of events is not unexpectedly more "patriotic". Sather (2015: ss. 24-43) refers to a Danish-Norwegian cultural debate that he interprets as a form of proto-nationalism similar to its Swedish counterpart. It does not seem to have been very wide-spread, but according to Sather it was the basis for Norway's break with the *Helstat* in 1814 & with the *Union* in 1905.

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The Union's disappointing end in 1905 has been a Swedish trauma throughout the 20th century. There was a large minority who wanted to keep it going by force. Its dissolution, however, seems to have been a consequence of how it was created. The discussions with Charles August 1809 already required two equal parties. In his memoirs, Oscar II blames it on the Union Constitution and the spirit of the time, but not on any particular person:

"It is very difficult to keep one's oaths to two separate people, whose association treaty is as frivolously authored as the Swedish-Norwegian treaty of 1814, and both of whom are quick to take offence, defiant and freedom-loving right to the limit of self-indulgence and have laws written almost exclusively to protect them against their rulers."⁵

The sons had a more dispassionate view of the matter:

⁴ Haukaas 1956.

⁵ Kung Oscar II 1960: del 1, s. 85.

- He [Crown Prince Gustaf] was of course upset about what had passed in Kristiania, but judged the situation calmly and cold and apparently had the impression that if the Norwegians did not understand the benefits that they had from the Union, and if they misunderstood the intentions of the Union King and the wishes of the Swedish people, there was no reason to ask them to reconsider, but they could chose their own path.⁶
- Prince Carl: "Now that Norway absolutely wanted to exit the Union, it must be admitted that they have pursued their gaol with great skill and perseverance. The men who led the separatist movement in Norway were not considerate, but tenacious and consistent."⁷
- Prince Eugen's position was that Norway under Sweden's protection had been given the opportunity to develop into an independent state & wise policy was to accept the consequences.⁸ Which Sweden did.

The end of the Russo-Finnish personnel union became a much bloodier affair, which may have affected the judgment of the peaceful Swedish-Norwegian dissolution. The centenary was celebrated without bitterness. During World War II, the Swedes even had some benefit from their Finnish and Norwegian national dissolutions because their brethren went to war while Sweden, under protection of its position, could remain neutral.

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Continued monarchy

Because the Norwegians wanted to avoid foreign policy complications from their bourgeois "revolution", there never was a Norwegian republic but a constitutional monarchy, according to the ideas of diplomat Sigurd Ibsen (1859-1930) formulated as early as 1898. The so-called Bernadotte option.⁹

A referendum was held on November 12-13, 1905. The alternatives were a republic (21 percent) or a monarchy (79 percent). Voter turnout was 75 percent (men only). The Republican side was censored, but there is a compilation of the post-debate.¹⁰ A Social Democratic posting from 1913:

"The monarchy is an old-fashioned, antiquated institution, which does not fit our time, and which had already ceased to have any function when the autocratic monarchy was destroyed. Why this hypocritical sympathy and high regard for a degenerate, physically inferior representative of this antiquated institution. That the royal families are generally more or less degenerate is a matter that has long been known and recognized by science. Our great and proud goal can only be achieved through the conquest of political power, but not as long as we have on the throne an old man in the clutches of the capitalists, with power and military at his disposal.

⁶ Hildebrand 1928: ss. 3-4.

⁷ Prins Carl 1931: s. 411.

⁸ Prins Eugen 1942: s. 324, brev till C.A. Ossbahr 1905-03-28.

⁹ Leiren 1978; Hoelseth 1997.

¹⁰ Brand 1943.

*Down with the oppressors!
Long live the Social Republic!”¹¹*

A number of candidates for the throne were discussed, among them Prince Carl, who actually received an offer. Norén Isaksen has described the twists and turns.¹² To defend himself against accusations of intriguing against his father for his own purpose, Carl wrote a memo about the course of events, which he, however, had classified until 1965.¹³ The Bernadotte option ended up in Prince Carl's daughter Märtha 1929 marrying Norwegian Crown Prince Olav. Finland also had plans for a constitutional monarchy, but the election of the German Prince Frederick Charles of Hesse was unfortunate, the victors refused to accept him, and Finland became a republic.

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Legacy

After World War II, research began on the dissolution of the union based on declassified letters, diaries and archives. Swedish research was fixated on the guilt issue. The Norwegians concentrated on their political development. Torbjörn Kjölstad (1973) has published a research review:

”Within the framework of the Swedish-Norwegian Union, Norway was an independent kingdom with its own constitution, national assembly and own government. In purely Norwegian matters the government and *storting* [parliament] decided independently of the corresponding Swedish bodies. But Sweden handled the foreign policy, the union king was Swedish - and Sweden was the far stronger kingdom of the two. A red thread through the history of the Union, is for Norway to keep Sweden at bay, later to assert its position and in the end to achieve full equality.

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In this connection, nationalist tendencies also came to a head. In addition, economic interests in Norway felt restricted by the Union laws governing the trade of the two kingdoms. Norway was a free-trade country; In Sweden, protectionist ideas prevailed in the second half of the 1880s. This raised the issue of the consular organization [that handled much of the trade negotiations] and the Foreign Office. As long as these bodies were common, Norway's interests could not be served in the best way - and in the longer term, the demand for separate consulars was a Norwegian foreign minister of their own. If these goals were achieved, the Norwegian considered complete equality had been achieved between the kingdoms. From a Swedish point of view, this meant that the political Union was transformed into merely a symbolic union, which could poorly assert the common interests outwards. The Union's main objective, that of mutual protection, would have thus come to nothing. It was clear that this must meet with resistance in broad Swedish circles.”¹⁴

That the ”Union King was Swedish” is a misunderstanding though. There was no common Union king, but two separate kings who happened to be the same person. A political science oddity & a not very effective design, attributed to Charles John. It is supposed to have been a consequence of Prince Charles August's refusal to break his oath of allegiance to Frederick

¹¹ Kongedømmet. I: Klassekampen, 1913:1. [Citerat i: Brand 1943: ss. 74-75.]

¹² Norén Isaksen 2006a & 2006b.

¹³ prins Carl 1905/1906: ss. 59-60; Norén Isaksen 2006a: s. 133.

¹⁴ Kjölstad 1973: ss. 81-82.

VI and proclaim himself king of Norway. Otherwise, the Norwegian throne would have been inherited by his brother, who would then have reigned over the double monarchy Sweden-Norway. Now it was a personal union between two sovereign kingdoms, one of which lacked a king of its own.

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In connection with the 50th anniversary of the dissolution of the union, a peace monument was unveiled "The Girl with the Broken Sword" and the Swedish and Norwegian King each gave a conciliatory speech.¹⁵ Prior to the 100th anniversary, several research projects started within the framework of the Swedish-Norwegian network Project 1905. These concentrated on structural differences between countries and were presented in three anthologies and a number of independent publications. Sweden's official position is contained in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' brochure "The Swedish-Norwegian Union 1814- 1905: Conquest, Harmony and Divorce" (Nilsson 2004). Contents: The creation of the Union was the work of one man. The Union's death was teamwork. The resolution appears to have been a not very exciting affair, with minimal repercussions. The Norwegians had either managed to sabotage all attempts to integrate the countries or they were too structurally different for that to be possible. When the Great Powers in 1905 were occupied by other things, the Norwegians took the opportunity to break away, much as when the Icelanders broke away from Denmark in 1944.

At the height of the Danish Empire (c. 1500), it encompassed the "core area" [Jutland peninsula + northern Schleswig; Fynn & Sjælland Islands]; Some areas adjacent to Germany [southern Schleswig, Holstein]; some Swedish landscapes [Skåne, Halland, Blekinge, Gotland & Bornholm]; Norway including additional Swedish landscapes [Jämtland, Härjedalen, Bohuslän]; Some Baltic provinces [Russian Gulf, Baltic countries & Northern Germany]; some Norwegian exclaves [Orkney-, Shetlands- & Faeroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland]; Some islands in the Caribbean. Then its fortunes turned, so that in 1864 the country had been reduced to a rump state & was heading to oblivion.

The Danish view of losing Norway was published as a series of lectures "Denmark-Norway before and after 1814" on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the Treaty of Kiel, which in Danish historiography competes with 1864 for the status of the country's worst disaster ever (Glenthøj & Nordhagen Ottosen 2014). There is also a dissertation (Glenthøj 2010).

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In connection with the 2009 anniversary of the Swedish-Finnish partition, there was a debate in which the Finns expressed surprise that the Swedes dated the end of their Empire to 1721, when they still experienced it so vividly in terms of mentality. Despite 200 years, the Swedes spoke about 1809 as their lost destiny, the national trauma-partition- division-amputation, "a separation like cutting into living flesh". The Finnish interpretation was that the Union of Sweden-Norway had contributed to prolonging the Swedish people's fantasy's of their long gone glory days.

¹⁵ Rodell 2005.

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