

Opening words at “The Prospects of the Åland Example as a Tool of Nordic Peace Mediation” seminar Johannes Koskinen
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Our challenging theme today is the Åland Example as a tool of Nordic peace mediation: Tackling identity conflicts, autonomy and minority rights. We have to admit that when the Åland Example was created, it was not a tool of Nordic peace mediation. It was more a result of European peace diplomacy and the involvement of the League of Nations.

After decades of innovative legal and political development, however, the Åland Example may now serve as a constructive tool in solving many severe regional disputes and minority conflicts. Åland type of autonomy has awakened interest from different parts of the world, both as a comparable example and as a well functioning process. One could mention Northern Ireland, Kosovo, Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Israel-Palestine, Sri Lanka, Aceh in Indonesia, Kashmir, Zanzibar and East Timor.

In this seminar we will have the opportunity to share the ideas of distinguished experts how to use one remote example as a hopefully efficient tool of peace mediation. I want to underline some special features of the success story Ålands autonomy has shown, which are unfortunately not often present in regional conflicts:

- the League of Nations decision of 1921 and international guarantees
- strongly legalistic traditions both in Finland and Sweden, constitutionalism
- traditional connections between Åland, Finland and Sweden
- Nordic Council and other Nordic mechanisms of cooperation, also cultural and social community of peoples
- geography of the archipelago demands self-rule in many aspects
- dynamics of Ålands economy (now among the wealthiest regions in Europe)

I think it is important to point out two elements of the Åland Example that are easier to export successfully.

Firstly, the autonomy or self-government of Åland has been carefully tailored for the special circumstances and historical developments of the region. Especially the division of legislative powers between the central government and the autonomous entity has to be designed with wisdom and pragmatism.

Secondly, autonomy can last and construct a stable democratic form of government. Maybe too often people think that granting autonomous powers will lead to the next step and to the next... and sooner or later to full independence. That is not the case: autonomy is not a one-way road towards formal independence.