

The EU referendums on Åland:  
An overview of the EU debates in the  
Åland Parliament during autumn 1994

Hasan Akintug



"25 år i EU – åländska erfarenheter"



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## Preface

It is remarkable that so little has been written until today concerning the two referendums of 1994 on the Åland Islands prior to the entry into the European Union. It is remarkable, first of all, because this was a “revolutionary” decision as argued by the author of this report, Hasan Akintug. It is also remarkable because the Åland Islands held two referendums, first as part of the statewide, Finnish referendum and then a little later after the negotiations for the conditions and exceptions for the Åland Islands had been completed. This is a valuable practice involving an autonomous region and could be used as an example in other cases concerning fundamental decisions and international relations involving both an entire state but also an autonomous region within it. For this reason it is also valuable to have this report in English.

Hasan Akintug shows how complex it was for political parties on Åland to formulate and assess positions concerning a matter as multilayered and comprehensive as the European Union. He explores the expectations and arguments of various voices and uses the archive of the Åland Parliament as his main source of primary data. Internationalisation and regional integration(s) are not an easy match for anyone, least so for an autonomy as small as the Åland Islands.

The present report is published as the first of the outcomes of a yearlong study entitled “25 years of EU membership – Ålandic experiences” a project commissioned by the Åland Government and conducted in cooperation with Statistics and Research Åland (Åsub). Several other reports shall be published, in Swedish to start with, until summer 2021.

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# 1. Introduction

The relationship between the European Union (EU) and the territorial autonomies within its member states can be perceived as complex and multilayered.<sup>1</sup> On one hand, the oft-cited “democratic deficit”<sup>2</sup> provides challenges regarding political oversight for the member states. On the other hand, “autonomy leakage”<sup>3</sup> towards Brussels is a source of concern unique to territorial autonomies.

The decision of the Åland Parliament to join the EU constitutes a first in the context of Ålandic society and politics, and also provides an exceptional case within the Nordic region. The decision taken on 2 December 1994 is the first time that the Åland Parliament gave its consent to the transferring of some of its own legislative power to a supranational organisation. In other words, it was the first time that the legislative competencies of Åland decreased as opposed to the two revisions of the Autonomy Act in 1951 and 1991. From a Nordic perspective, the Åland Islands remain the only territorial autonomy that is a member of the EU, as Greenland chose to leave in 1985 and the Faroe Islands rejected EU membership in 1973.

This report analyses the parliamentary debates during the period between the Corfu summit on 24 June 1994, in which Finland and Åland’s EU membership application was confirmed by the EU member states, and the final decision by the Åland Parliament on 2 Decem-

ber 1994. This period is chosen to highlight the referendum processes on Åland and to emphasise the agency of the Åland Parliament during Finland’s accession to the EU. This analysis aims to put into context the historic decision of the Åland Parliament to transfer a share of its legislative powers to the EU and to explore how the parliamentarians on Åland at the time discussed the issue of EU membership.

This report begins with a description of the socio-political context on Åland during the early 1990s (Chapter 2) and then summarises the negotiation process with the EU between 1992–1994 (Chapter 3). The next chapter chronologically presents the debates and newspaper articles in order to determine the themes and shifts of the EU discussion on Åland (Chapter 4). The concluding chapter provides a summary of the debates and their relevance for contemporary political affairs.

## *1.1 Data Used for the Analysis*

This report utilises seven parliamentary debates manually collected and printed out of the archive of the Åland Parliament.

The timeline is chosen to emphasise the internal political process on Åland, which has often been forgotten in Nordic-based research on the EU as well as the public debates on the EU in the Nordic region.<sup>4</sup> Prior to the Corfu Summit, the EU or a member state could withdraw from the accession process of Austria, Finland and Sweden, stopping the EU’s expansion in 1995. The approval of the Finnish EU membership treaty in Corfu can be described as “putting the ball in Finland and Åland’s court”. On 2 December 1994, the Åland Parliament gave its

1 This report is based on the author’s unpublished Master’s thesis titled “The Åland Islands Meet European Integration: Politics of History and the EU Referendums on Åland”. While the thesis focuses on Åland’s EU referendums from an International Relations theory perspective, this report provides a thematic analysis.

2 See [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/glossary/democratic\\_deficit.html](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/glossary/democratic_deficit.html).

3 See Suksi 2011 pp. 158–161.

4 See, for example, Miles 1996 and Strang 2015.

consent to EU membership, which guaranteed EU membership from 1 January 1995. This is not to claim that the EU process for Åland started from the Corfu summit, but to contextualise the referendum process that led to the political decision in favour of EU membership for Åland.

The debates held on EU membership and its consequences during the ratification process took place on the following dates:

- 14 September 1994
- 21 September 1994
- 26 September 1994
- 11 November 1994
- 17 November 1994
- 28 November 1994
- 2 December 1994

Overall, there is a lack of academic research on the topic while there is great potential in the use of parliamentary records from the Åland Parliament (*lagting*) which form the bulk of the primary materials for this report. However, as the Åland Parliament does not convene during the month of October, which is considered a break month between two legislative sessions, this report also utilises as an additional empirical source local Ålandic newspaper articles from both *Ålandstidningen* and *Nya Åland* from 16 June 1994<sup>5</sup> until 2 December 1994. The newspaper articles will allow for an analysis of the political developments in between the two sets of EU debates between September and November 1994. This is crucial, as the statewide referendum took place on 16 October 1994. The news articles were collected from the digital archive of the National Library of Finland in Helsinki.

This report argues that by utilizing the parliamentary debates and the public statements of Ålandic politicians, it is possible to sufficiently describe and analyse the context in which the Åland Islands joined the EU. The analysis of these debates aims to contribute to the under-

standing of the EU from the perspective of an autonomous region, in which Åland is the designated case study.

The basis of this report lies in the understanding that the EU referendum process and the parliamentary debates on Åland are essential to comprehending the continuity and change regarding the EU on Åland during its 25 years of EU membership. It is particularly important to analyse the internal dynamics of Åland to stress not only the agency of Åland in relation to the EU, but also the internal convergence and divergence in the Ålandic party system. The parliamentary debates are especially relevant, as the decision to join the EU could only be taken with the consent of the Åland Parliament. As the democratic representatives of different political groups of the Ålandic people, analysing the debates in the Åland Parliament will allow for a thorough analysis of the EU question from several Ålandic perspectives that would otherwise be difficult to access. It is important not to construct one single perspective as the definitive 'Ålandic' perspective with regard to the EU. In short, the analysis of the EU debates at the time will allow for a reconstruction of the public discussion on Åland during the autumn of 1994.

Certain themes that arise from the analysis already have their roots in the historical process towards EU membership. Examples of this are the fear of transferring legislative power to a supranational entity and the fear that Åland would lack direct influence in EU decision-making. Although Sweden and Finland's EU membership are self-evident from the vantage point of 2020, the Ålandic EU debates were held in a significantly more insecure environment. At the time, Åland and Finland choosing different paths was a real possibility and Swedish EU membership could not be taken for granted, either. The social, political, and economic anxieties of this possible divergence from EU membership was a crucial element in the referendum process on Åland.

<sup>5</sup> It was on this date on which the Åland Parliament decided to hold a separate referendum.

Anxieties expressed regarding the centralisation of political power at the EU level and increased urbanisation are also relevant concerns in today's Åland and the rest of the Nordic region. However, the hopes of EU membership as a potential tool to expand Ålandic autonomy and its room for manoeuvre in relation to the Finnish state does not seem to have been realised and have been a source of concern during Åland's 25 years of EU membership.

## 2. The Socio-political Context on Åland in the Early 1990s

This section provides an overview of the socio-political context on Åland at the time of the EU referendums. It will present the political parties in the Åland Parliament, the economic structure of Åland, and the demographical structure on the islands at the time.

### *2.1 The Parliamentary Situation After the Election of 1991*

By the early 1990s, the political field consisted of five parties representing different sections of the Ålandic electorate. The largest party was the Centre Party. It has its primary voter base in the countryside and the archipelago, while lacking similar influence in Mariehamn. The party emphasised the antagonism between the city and countryside and between Finland and Åland.

The second largest party on the islands were the Liberals, which have support among public sector workers and had a split voter base between Mariehamn, the countryside, and the archipelago. The Liberals have also close links to the Swedish People's Party in Finland.

The Frisinnad Samverkan (FS) was a liberal conservative party with a strong support base

in Mariehamn. It had a free market orientation and stressed the economic importance of industry and trade. It was the precursor of the contemporary Moderat Samling för Åland which exists today.

The Social Democrats have affinity with the other Nordic Social Democratic parties commonly associated with the 'Nordic model'. It emphasises the importance of welfare policies and social equality. However, due to the prevalence of autonomy politics and a lack of an organised working class in the urban region, it has been significantly weaker than its Nordic counterparts.

The Unaligned group was founded in 1987 by the more nationalistic elements of the Centre Party. They have insisted on not adopting a party program but have been labelled right wing.

EU membership was not an active issue during the 1991 elections, which produced a parliamentary situation described in the table.

After the result of the elections, a cabinet led by the Centre Party leader, Ragnar Erlandsson, was formed with the FS and the Social Democrats, giving the Åland Government a two-thirds majority in the Åland Parliament (20 MPs).

Party	Ideology	Group in Nordic Council	Number of Members of Parliament (MPs)
Centre	Liberal/Agrarian	Centre Group	10
Liberals	Liberalism/Social Liberalism	Centre Group	7
FS	Liberal Conservatism	Conservative Group	6
Social Democrats	Social Democracy	Social Democratic Group	4
Unaligned	Conservatism/Nationalism	Conservative Group	3

Figure 1: The Parliamentary Situation after the 1991 Election

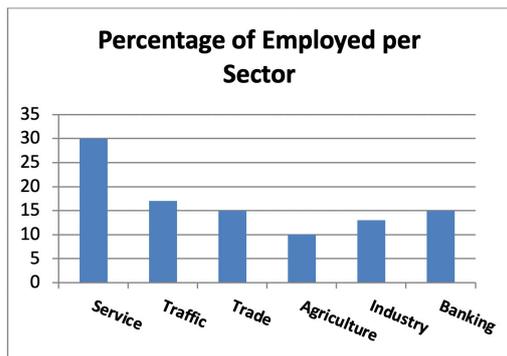


Figure 2: The Economic Structure According to Fields of Employment<sup>9</sup>

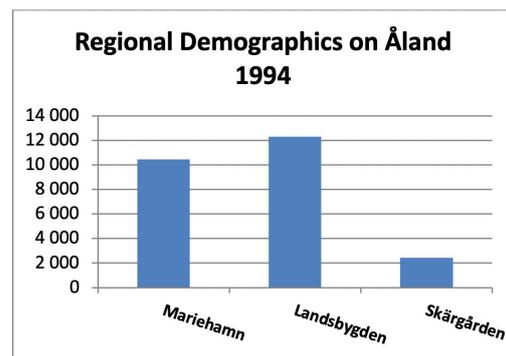


Figure 3: Population Structure on Åland According to Regions<sup>14</sup>

### 2.2 The Economic Situation in 1991

According to a report on the possible effects of EU membership on the Ålandic economy published by SIFO Future AB in 1992, the Ålandic economy was largely service and communications-based. According to this report, of all those employed on Åland, 30 percent were in the service industry, 17 percent in traffic and communications<sup>6</sup>, 15 percent in trade, roughly 10 in agriculture (farming and fishing)<sup>7</sup>, 13 percent in industry, and 15 percent in banking.<sup>8</sup>

### 2.3 The Demographic Situation in 1994

When analysing the population structure, there is often reference to a tripartite division between the capital Mariehamn city with its 10,429 people, the rural regions<sup>10</sup> on mainland Åland with 12,290 people, and the Archipelago<sup>11</sup> with 2,439 people.<sup>12</sup> The majority of Ålanders at the time

lived outside the city, which could explain the dominance of the Centre Party in the rural regions and the archipelago. The anxiety deriving from the depopulation of the rural regions and increased urbanisation on Åland is also evident among the members of the Centre Party, the Unaligned, and FS MP from the archipelago, Harry Eriksson. To compare the drastic change in regional demographics, in 1920, Mariehamn had only 1,403 residents, the rural regions on mainland Åland had 14,229 residents, and the archipelago had 5,949 residents.<sup>13</sup>

6 This includes the employment on the ferries between Sweden and Finland and employment on ships carrying goods.

7 The corresponding percentage was 4 percent for Sweden and 6 percent for Finland at the time. See SIFO Future 1992.

8 SIFO Future 1992, pp. 49-57.

9 This graph was constructed by the author according to the number provided by SIFO 1992.

10 *Landsbygden* in Swedish.

11 *Skärgården* in Swedish.

12 Source: Befolkning 1975-2019 efter år, ålder, kommun och kön (population data by Statistics and Research Åland, Åsub)

[https://pxweb.asub.ax/PXWeb/pxweb/sv/Statistik/Statistik\\_BE\\_Befolkningens%20storlek%20och%20struktur/BE001.px/?rxid=ac5560d8-21c0-4b7d-8ae3-3c0c020ed-f2d](https://pxweb.asub.ax/PXWeb/pxweb/sv/Statistik/Statistik_BE_Befolkningens%20storlek%20och%20struktur/BE001.px/?rxid=ac5560d8-21c0-4b7d-8ae3-3c0c020ed-f2d).

13 Lindh 1984, p. 271.

14 This graph was constructed by the author according to the database provided by Ålands statistik- och utredningsbyrå. See footnote 12.

### 3. Åland's Path to the European Union

In 1989, Finland applied for membership of the Council of Europe (CoE) and began negotiating membership of the European Economic Area (EEA) between 1989 and 1991. This caused a dilemma for the Ålandic autonomy, which was designed to preserve the national identity of a minority group through exceptional arrangements regarding political participation, linguistic safeguards, restrictions on land ownership, and the right to certain professions.<sup>15</sup> This was clearly not in line with the four freedoms of the EU.<sup>16</sup>

For the context of the EEA agreement, derogations were accepted and the Åland Parliament unilaterally accepted EEA membership in December 1992, which came into force on 1 January 1994.

The EU process turned out to be significantly more complicated. Realising this, the Åland Government was also cautious to include the Ålandic parliamentarians in the process through establishing a parliamentary committee, which included all the political parties represented in the Åland Parliament and regularly sent reports to the Åland Parliament regarding the ongoing process.<sup>17</sup>

Sweden applied for EU membership in September 1991 and Finland followed suit in March 1992, also beginning a two-and-a-half-year journey for Åland. The Åland Government sent its first report to the Åland Parliament upon Finland's application, in which it admitted that membership of the EU was a much more comprehensive matter than what the EEA

agreement had foreseen and that the decision on membership of the EU was one of the largest decisions since the birth of the Ålandic autonomy arrangement.<sup>18</sup>

The second report was sent to the Åland Parliament in August 1992, which stated a number of fields of concern that the Åland Government considered to be in need of special regulation. These were:

- The recognition of the demilitarisation and neutralisation of the islands
- The legislative authority of Åland in regard to community legislation
- The unilingual Swedish-speaking status of Åland
- Restrictions on political participation of non-regional citizens in local and regional elections
- Restrictions regarding property ownership
- Restrictions regarding the right to trade on the islands
- The right to have special commercial and tax laws on Åland
- Satisfactory participation of Ålandic representatives in the EU decision making process.<sup>19</sup>

It was especially emphasised that due to the heavy dependency of the local economy on shipping and tourism, Åland would need exemptions with regards to the tax harmonisation within the EU, which would allow the continuation of tax-free sales on ferries from and to Åland.<sup>20</sup> Fagerlund observes that one of the most interesting aspects of this report from the Åland Government is that it refuses to take a position regard-

15 Silverström 2002, P.10.

16 These are the freedom of movement for goods, services, capital and persons. See [https://institut-delors.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/171024jd\\_igrundfrihetenwebeinzelseiten4.pdf](https://institut-delors.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/171024jd_igrundfrihetenwebeinzelseiten4.pdf).

17 Fagerlund 1997, p.257.

18 Fagerlund 1997, p.191.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

ing Ålandic membership of the EU. Fagerlund rather notes that there were several options considering other island regions that belong to EU member states but were kept out of the EU through special regulations.<sup>21</sup> He notes that this position is quite distinct from the official line of the Government of Finland, which considered EU membership to be the official political goal and actively pursued it.<sup>22</sup> It is also noteworthy that Eric Hayes, the EU ambassador to Finland at the time, later described the position of the Åland Government to constitute a “very ambitious agenda”.<sup>23</sup>

From the EU side, it was also accepted that Åland required special attention when it came to the field of Åland’s status according to international law and the importance of the service industry for the future viability of the local economy.<sup>24</sup> The Åland Government took this as a step towards the positive recognition of Åland’s international status, which is composed of minority protection measures, demilitarisation, and the neutralisation of the islands.

On the Finnish side, however, this was met with scepticism, especially when certain military personnel put forward the idea that in the post-Cold War era, Åland’s demilitarised and neutralised status was no longer relevant and should be reconsidered.<sup>25</sup>

A compromise was reached between the Finnish Foreign Ministry and the Åland Government on 17 September 1993, which was to submit a unilateral declaration to the EU that would be a part of the Final Act of the Accession Conference. This declaration would include the phrase “Åland’s established status under international law”, which the Finnish Foreign Minister, Heikki Haavisto, ensured was a reference to demilitarisation and neutralisation.<sup>26</sup>

The Finnish Government presented its position paper regarding the special provisions for Åland to the EU in October 1993. This was taken up on a ministerial-level EU meeting at Brussels on 22 February 1994, in which the representatives of the Ålandic Government were also present. The outcome of the meeting was Article 2 of the Finnish accession treaty to the EU, more commonly known as the “Åland Protocol”.<sup>27</sup> This amounted to a legal recognition of the permanent derogations demanded by the Ålandic side regarding the restrictions deriving from regional citizenship (*hembygdsrätten*) and the exclusion of the territory of Åland from the tax union.<sup>28</sup> The main surprise for the Finnish and Ålandic sides in the Åland Protocol was the last minute addition of the phrase “the special status that Åland enjoys under international law” as the justification for the given derogations from the main principles of community law.<sup>29</sup>

The substantial accession negotiations between Finland and the EU had concluded by 1 March 1994. However, there were two specific fields which still caused some stress between the Finnish and Ålandic sides.<sup>30</sup> These were communicated by the Åland Government to the Åland Parliament in their third report regarding the consequences of EU membership on 20 May 1994.<sup>31</sup> In this report, the Åland Government noted that in order for the region to give its consent to join the EU, it would need a guarantee from the Finnish government that it would be granted the power to levy taxes on the islands if the Ålandic Government would express its desire to do so. The Åland Government also noted that it required satisfactory participation within the decision-making structures of the EU and

21 Fagerlund gives the Isle of Man, Guernsey, and the Faroe Islands as some examples.

22 Fagerlund 1997, p.192.

23 Hayes 2011, p.60.

24 Fagerlund 1997, p.192.

25 Tiilikainen 2002, pp. 38-39.

26 Fagerlund 1997, p.195.

27 Silverström 2013, p.34.

28 Which would allow the continuation of tax-free sales on ferries and consider Åland as a “third country” in terms of tax harmonisation. See Silverström 2013.

29 Hayes 2011, p.64

30 Fagerlund 1997, p.191.

31 Ibid.

influence on EU policy making at the national level.<sup>32</sup> A separate Member of the European Parliament (MEP) was specifically singled out as vital for the region. These two political goals would be constitutive of the debates which were to follow.

### 3.1 *Why a Separate Referendum on Åland?*

In its historical context, the separate referendum was nothing particularly out of the ordinary as at the time, all four applicants<sup>33</sup> to the EU each held their own public vote on the topic of EU membership. Furthermore, in the context of Nordic territorial autonomies, Greenland had rejected EU membership in their 1982 referendum and the Faroe Islands chose not to join the EU, but instead to cooperate with the EU through special arrangements. However, it is surprising that more attention has not been given to the process on Åland.

Regarding the reasons as to why governments chose to commit to the idea of a public vote on European integration, Opperman proposes a typology which is constructed on a two-dimensional basis. The *first* dimension is regarding the *political level* at which the use of referendums is directed at. This could be for domestic reasons or reasons pertaining to European integration. The *second* dimension is defined as the *strategic mode* of the government in question. This is qualified in two subdivisions: when governments propose a referendum in order to avoid political losses (the defensive mode) or to consolidate political gains (the offensive mode).<sup>34</sup>

Greenland and Åland have been included in Opperman's analysis, in which Greenland is said to have held a referendum on the basis of concerns regarding the nature of European integration and Åland on domestic grounds. According to his results based on expert surveys, the Åland

Government put forward the idea of a referendum primarily because it saw no other realistic possibility to obtain approval for EU membership.<sup>35</sup>

Indeed, when one looks at the summary of the debate regarding the decision on a separate referendum on Åland, which took place on 16 June 1994, one can observe a split political field on this topic. Although the Åland Government consisted of the Centre Party, the conservative FS and the Social Democrats, all the Social Democrats voted against the separate referendum and received support from two Centre Party MPs and one Conservative MP. The vote passed 22-7.<sup>36</sup>

Already at this stage, it was evident that the EU question was putting stress on the internal cohesion of the Ålandic parties, government, and opposition alike. It was emphasised that the referendum would take place after the statewide referendum on 16 October 1994, and the Swedish vote on 13 November 1994, which would allow both the politicians to take into account the choices of its immediate environment. It appears that the cross-cutting nature of the EU question alongside the dependency of Åland on Sweden and Finland (and their decisions on EU membership) were the two driving forces behind the decision to hold a separate referendum.

The Supreme Court of Finland analysed this law proposal in regard to the legal authority of the Åland Parliament to arrange a second referendum. On 9 September 1994, the Supreme Court of Finland came to the conclusion that as it was an advisory referendum, Åland had not exceeded its legal authority with regards to the regional law pertaining to an advisory referendum on Åland.<sup>37</sup>

According to the revised Autonomy Act of 1991, if an international treaty that Finland signs

32 Ibid.

33 Austria, Finland, Sweden, and Norway.

34 Opperman 2013, pp. 688-691.

35 Id., p. 698, note 6c.

36 Ibid.

37 Ålandstidningen 9 September 1994.

is contrary to the Autonomy Act (e.g. transferring competencies to the EU), the provision will only enter into force on Åland if the Åland Parliament gives its consent with a two-thirds majority.<sup>38</sup> This means that at least twenty Ålandic MPs would be needed for Åland to join the EU.

### 3.2 *Opinions Among Ålandic Parliamentarians Before the Referendum Process*

On 19 August 1994, the newspaper *Nya Åland* had published an overview of the positions held by Ålandic MPs on the topic of membership of the EU.<sup>39</sup> According to the answers given by the individual MPs<sup>40</sup>, the main points of contention were the MEP question, taxation, agricultural policy, and the lack of an alternative to EU membership.<sup>41</sup>

In terms of individual parties, the largest party in the chamber and the governing party, the **Centre Party**, was the most split among its MPs. Six of their ten MPs refused to take a clear position on EU membership, two said they would vote against EU membership under certain conditions<sup>42</sup>, one said he would vote No for Finland's part and Yes for Åland due to the need for EU agricultural support, and one stated that he had already decided in favour of EU membership during the EEA process.

The Liberals were more positive albeit with certain reservations. Three of their seven MPs stated that they would vote in favour of EU membership, and four maintained positivity to-

wards EU membership with certain reservations.<sup>43</sup>

The conservative **Frisinnad Samverkan (FS)**<sup>44</sup> were split but with a clear positive-leaning majority. Four of their six MPs stated that they were positive towards the EU, one was not sure about his position and one maintained a no.<sup>45</sup>

The **Social Democrats'** four MPs all had positive answers towards EU membership.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, the **Unaligned** group's three MPs were all negative towards EU membership.<sup>47</sup>

Before the reconvening of the Åland Parliament, the bilateral committee between Finland and Åland<sup>48</sup> that had previously been established for the exploration of the potential transfer of taxation authority for Åland came out with its final report on 25 August 1994. The report considered that the taking over of taxation powers by Åland would expose the local economy to cyclical economic distress, and that it could lead to Åland becoming a tax paradise. The two Ålandic representatives in the committee expressed their reservation towards the decision and their indignation toward the usage of the term "tax paradise".<sup>49</sup>

38 Autonomy Act 1991, Chapters 59 and 69.

39 Ålandstidningen 19 August 1994.

40 Only Jan Liljehage from the Unaligned group could not be reached for comments, but he can be safely considered in the No camp alongside the other MPs of the party. He voted 'No' to EU membership in the final vote on 2 December 1994.

41 *Nya Åland* 19 August 1994.

42 One MP stated the refusal of Finland to grant Åland taxation authority would be a reason to vote no and another stated that a rejection of EU membership in the Finnish and Swedish referendums would cause him to vote 'No'. See *Nya Åland* 19 August 1994.

43 Such as the decisions of Finland and Sweden, improvements to the EU membership agreement, yes for Finland but unsure about the specific conditions for Åland. See *Nya Åland* 19 August 1994.

44 The name of the party roughly corresponds to "Free-minded Cooperation" but for the sake of convenience and common usage in the source material FS will be preferred.

45 *Nya Åland* 19 August 1994.

46 *Ibid.*

47 *Ibid.*

48 Unofficially called the Olsson Committee, which consisted of representatives of the Finnish and Ålandic Governments.

49 Ålandstidningen 25 August 1994.

## 4. The Referendum Process

This section provides a chronology of the debates from the EU-themed sessions of the Åland Parliament in September 1994 until the final decision on EU membership on 2 December 1994. It begins with a presentation of the first three debates that took place on 14 September (section 4.1), 21 September (section 4.2), and 26 September (section 4.3). Then, a separate section examines the Ålandic reaction to the results on Åland and Finland on 16 October (section 4.4). This is to provide a chronology of the political process and to contextualise the shift in the debates that took place afterwards. The debates that took place after the opening of the new session of the Åland Parliament on 1 November are each presented in a subchapter. These took place on 11 November (section 4.5), 17 November (section 4.6), 28 November (section 4.7) and 2 December (section 4.8).

The purpose of this section is to analyse the themes that arose in the debates during the accession process and to analyse the reaction of the MPs to their political environment.

The Åland Government sent its fourth report to the Åland Parliament on 7 September 1994, which also refused to take a position on EU membership. This was preconditioned by the consent of the Åland Parliament for Åland's EU membership to include a guarantee regarding the expansion of Åland's taxation authority and a seat in the European Parliament. Furthermore, the ongoing negotiations between Finland and the EU regarding regional policy and agricultural support were noted as an unresolved issue. The Åland Government stated that it would send its fifth and final report in November 1994.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Ålandstidningen 7 September 1994.

### *4.1 The First Debate Before the Statewide Referendum*

The first debate on Åland's EU membership took place on 14 September 1994. It consisted of a discussion of the government report regarding the consequences of the EU membership for Åland and the potential alternatives to EU membership. It was stressed by Premier Erlandsson that the alternatives were hypothetical scenarios that would require further negotiation processes, which could not be foreseen at the time. The parties appeared to have similar positions as their answers published in the local newspaper *Nya Åland* a month earlier.

*Ragnar E lutar på EU:*

**Brussel mer generöst mot oss än Helsingfors**

Figure 4: "Brussels more generous towards us than Helsinki"<sup>51</sup>

The **Centre Party** group, which also led the government coalition, remained somewhat ambiguous towards the prospect of EU membership. The party leader and Premier Erlandsson claimed that during the EU process, Brussels had been "more generous" than Helsinki in terms of accepting Ålandic demands and that a non-membership scenario could create increased dependency towards Helsinki, which was not a desirable situation. He stated that a separate MEP for Åland alongside a guarantee from Helsinki to expand taxation powers for the region were "threshold questions" in order to "maintain a positive outlook towards EU membership". He stressed that the transfer of legislative

<sup>51</sup> Ålandstidningen 14 September 1994. Statement made by the Ålandic Premier Ragnar Erlandsson.

authority towards the EU organs legitimised Åland's demand for a separate MEP.<sup>52</sup> Agriculture Minister, Anders Eriksson, emphasised that the EU's Regional and Agricultural Fund was the only way to "get money back" from the EU membership fee.<sup>53</sup> Göran Bengtz, group Leader in the Åland Parliament, repeated the threshold questions and also expressed confidence that the EU would be able to accommodate a situation in which Åland remained outside.<sup>54</sup> MP Christer Jansson expressed his displeasure of transferring legislative competencies to the EU without getting compensation in return (i.e. a MEP). He also conveyed his fear of "Finnisation" in a scenario in which Sweden did not join the EU, as the status of Swedish as an official language of the EU would be in doubt in that scenario.<sup>55</sup>

The **Liberals** were represented by party leader Olof Erland and MP Folke Sjölund. They considered the decision on EU membership for Åland to be dependent on the actions of Finland and Sweden and maintained a positive outlook on EU membership in this case. They stressed the significance of the four freedoms of the EU for the Ålandic economy and that access to the EU markets would allow Åland to maintain a competitive trade policy. They maintained that a separate MEP for Åland was a justified demand. However, the Liberals were not convinced of increased taxation powers for Åland and stated that this was a matter between Åland and Finland. They also stressed the principles of the European peace process and the benefits of international cooperation as the backbone of European integration. Erland also advocated a decentralised Nordic union based on the EEA agreement as an alternative to EU membership.<sup>56</sup>

The conservative **FS** was represented by the MPs K-G Eriksson, Max Sirén, May Flodin,

and Harry Eriksson. The majority of the group spoke of the EU in economic terms and stressed the benefits of EU membership through the four freedoms. K-G Eriksson and Sirén insisted that increased taxation powers for the region and a separate MEP were justified on the subsidiarity principle in the EU and Finland's guarantee to expand Ålandic autonomy from the first Autonomy Act that was adopted in 1920.<sup>57</sup> Harry Eriksson broke the party line by arguing that the transfer of legislative authority to a supranational authority was unacceptable in any situation and that the common market posed a threat to the local economy due to increased competition.<sup>58</sup> May Flodin also addressed the EU from a gender perspective, agreeing with the Social Democrat MP Barbro Sundback that the EU's equality directives were better than the legal arrangements in the Nordic countries, although the de facto situation was better in the Nordic region. Flodin did also state that the EU itself was not an obstacle for women's rights, although there were cultural differences between the Catholic model of housework for women as opposed to the Lutheran model, which stressed the need for women to be more active in the job market.<sup>59</sup>

The only **Social Democrat** to speak in this session was MP Barbro Sundback, who stressed the peace element of the European integration process and the benefits of a borderless Europe. Sundback also mentioned the economic benefits of the common market and the recognition of the defence mechanisms regarding regional citizenship set out in the Åland Protocol. Sundback emphasised that a non-membership scenario would cause economic difficulties for investment attraction to Åland and the maintenance of welfare levels on Åland, as the EEA agreement would no longer be valid. She criticised the

52 Ålands Lagting 14 September 1994, pp. 43-45.

53 Id., pp. 45-48.

54 Id., pp. 48-50.

55 Id., pp. 78-82.

56 Id., pp. 50-54 and pp. 85-88.

57 Id., pp. 63-68 and pp. 91-94.

58 Id., pp. 94-96.

59 Id., pp. 104-107.

members of Ålandic parliament who “laid their souls” into obtaining taxation, saying that there was no inherent connection with the EU process and increasing taxation authority. Sundback also viewed the EU’s gender equality directives and the opportunity to increase contacts outside of Åland as beneficial to Åland. She responded to Erland’s Nordic union idea as unrealistic due to foreign policy differences between the Nordic countries.<sup>60</sup>

The final group was the **Unaligned** represented by MP Bengt Häger, who opposed EU membership on the grounds of his and his party’s opposition towards transferring authority to a supranational organisation. Häger insisted that a special free trade agreement or some form of customs union would be a more suitable solution for Åland’s relationship with the EU.<sup>61</sup>

It can be observed from the first EU debate that the derogations granted by Brussels alongside the statement regarding Åland’s international status allowed Premier Erlandsson to portray Brussels as a more benevolent actor than the Finnish state. The line between the domestic and European level seems to have been deliberately blurred, especially for MPs from his party. The coupling of the EU process to demands for a separate MEP and increased taxation competencies seems to have been a political strategy to expand the Ålandic autonomy through threatening to remain outside of the EU.

It is noteworthy that the two other political parties in the Åland Government (FS and the Social Democrats) had differing views about this tactic. The majority of FS MPs also viewed EU membership as a potential means to achieve these goals but nevertheless emphasised the economic benefits of the EU for Åland. The Social Democrats insisted that these issues had nothing to do with the EU process and were not convinced of the benefits of increased taxation

competencies in the first place. They stressed the economic benefits of EU membership and praised the EU for its legislation regarding gender equality.

The Liberals were also critical of the “threshold questions” strategy and did not believe in the inherent benefit of increased taxation competencies either. The Unaligned maintained an anti-EU position based on the ideological opposition towards political integration at the European level and the potential harms of the common market for the local economy.

#### *4.2 The Second Debate Before the Statewide referendum*

This debate took place on 21 September 1994. It was a continuation of the first debate which discussed the consequences of EU membership or non-membership for Åland. The stance of the parties were the same as the previous session: the Centre Party emphasised the threshold questions, the Liberals maintained an ideologically positive attitude towards EU membership, and the Social Democrats stressed that EU membership would not endanger the rights of workers.

The **Liberals** were represented by MPs Gunnevi Nordman, Edgar Abrahamsson, and Gunnar Jansson. Nordman’s speech was a response to the previous debate’s theme on gender equality and the EU. She agreed with Sundback and Flodin on the fact that the EU’s equality directives were superior to the legislation in the Nordic region.<sup>62</sup> Abrahamsson criticised the Centre Party and the Åland Government on not being able to negotiate a satisfactory deal on agriculture support and regional policy. He also accused them of using “political jargon” whilst discussing the threshold questions. He demanded that the Åland Government clarify whether the MEP and taxation issues were actually preconditions for an Ålandic ‘Yes’ to the EU.<sup>63</sup> Gunnar Jansson

60 Id., pp. 69-73 and 96-99.

61 Id., pp. 76-77.

62 Ålands Lagting 21 September 1994, pp. 134-137.

63 Id., pp. 145-147.

likened the choice between EU membership and non-membership as a “choice between a Volkswagen and a Wartburg” the implication being that choosing the West (i.e. EU membership) is better than the East (i.e. non-membership).<sup>64</sup>

The **Centre Party** was represented by MPs Olof Salmén, Tage Boman, Sture Gustafsson, and Christer Jansson. Salmén insisted that the MEP and taxation issues needed to be resolved before the decision on EU membership and blamed Helsinki for “wanting to control the Ålandic economy”. Salmén also insisted that the Åland Protocol was evidence that Brussels would be supportive of Åland expanding its taxation authority and that Finland should be ready to negotiate a non-membership scenario for Åland should it be required.<sup>65</sup> Boman stated that he was overwhelmingly negative towards EU membership and repeated the party line on the threshold questions.<sup>66</sup> Gustafsson expressed his anxiety regarding agricultural policy and increased competition within the EU.<sup>67</sup> Christer Jansson stated that he was positively inclined towards the EU, but nevertheless expressed his worry of lowering life standards as a result of EU membership. He suggested that obtaining the authority for indirect taxation could help combat the difficulties in trading that may arise as a result of the tax border that was included in the Åland Protocol.<sup>68</sup>

The **Social Democrats** were represented by MP Britt Marie Lund, who stated that the fears of privatisation and the reduction of the public sector were exaggerated. She claimed that there was no need to fear the loss of social benefits or the collective agreements as a result of EU membership. She concluded by stating that the purpose of the EU was to establish peace and democracy and to increase solidarity between the member states.<sup>69</sup>

64 Id., pp. 155-160.

65 Id., pp. 140-142.

66 Id., pp. 144-145.

67 Id., pp. 154-155.

68 Id., pp. 151-153.

69 Id., p. 161.

The second debate saw a continuation of themes of the first debate, in which the Centre Party was concerned about the future of Ålandic farming within the EU. The Centre Party also maintained its sceptical view of the Finnish government and attempted to use the EU process as a way of realising its demands. The Liberals insisted that this strategy was misguided and maintained an ideological positivity towards European integration despite the dependency on the Swedish and Finnish decisions. The Social Democrats, while positive toward the prospects of the EU, maintained a defensive rhetoric in order to ensure its voters that the welfare model found on Åland would not be threatened by the market-based thinking of the EU.

#### *4.3 The Third Debate Before the Statewide Referendum*

This debate was the final one before the vote on 16 October. It was also a continuation of the first two debates, and the discussion revolved around the potential consequences of the referendum.

The **Centre Party** participated with Premier Erlandsson and MPs Christer Jansson, Göran Bengtz, and Anders Englund. Premier Erlandsson's speech focused on the international status of Åland. He stated that there was a significant difference between themselves and the Finnish authorities regarding their interpretations of the phrase “in consideration to the special status Åland enjoys under international law”. Erlandsson claimed that without this status, the EU would hardly grant the derogations found in the Åland Protocol. For Åland, he clarified that this international status consisted of three pillars that could not be separated from one another, namely Åland's constitutional status, the autonomy arrangement, and the demilitarised and neutralised status of the islands. He emphasised that the Finnish side refrained from any mention of demilitarisation and insisted that the preamble only referred to the autonomy ar-

rangement. Premier Erlandsson stated that he could not understand this attitude from Finland and suggested that the Åland example should be promoted as a peaceful solution towards minority conflicts.<sup>70</sup>

In his speech, Christer Jansson agreed with Premier Erlandsson on Åland's international status and focused on the realisation of the tax exemption. Christer Jansson claimed that if Finland insisted on integrating Åland into its tax region despite the derogation, Åland could turn to certain EU institutions, such as the European Court of Justice and the European Commission to realise this. He took a different approach from the majority of his party on the MEP issue by arguing that it was not an essential matter and representation could be achieved through other means, such as the European Committee of Regions. He also stressed the importance of the Finnish and Swedish referendum results for the Ålandic decision on EU membership.<sup>71</sup> Bengtz expressed his deep concern for the future of the agricultural section within EU membership and stated he would vote 'No' in the first referendum on 16 October.<sup>72</sup> Englund criticised the EU's agricultural policy, which he specified was the reason why he would also vote 'No' in the referendum on 16 October.<sup>73</sup>

The **Liberals** were represented by MPs Olof Erland and Gunnar Jansson. Erland repeated the Liberal position of "if Sweden and Finland were to join the EU, so should Åland" and mentioned the benefits of the EU from the perspectives of peace, economy, democracy, and welfare. He insisted that a separate MEP for Åland would mark Åland's international status and would provide a useful political platform in the EU. He also stated that an exclusion scenario (i.e. remaining outside the EU) would cause un-

certainty for Åland.<sup>74</sup> Gunnar Jansson's speech revolved around an emphasis on the economic benefits of EU membership that would allow Åland to maintain its welfare levels. Nevertheless, he expressed some concern towards the Common Fisheries Policy and the Common Agricultural Policy in the EU.<sup>75</sup>

The **Unaligned** participated with MPs Bengt Häger and Bert Häggblom. Häger criticised Finland for not demanding opt-outs like Denmark did. He expressed his disappointment with the EU regulations on agriculture and tax harmonisation. He claimed that in practice, the subsidiarity principle would end up being synonymous with subordination. Häger concluded by referring to the Faroese precedent, in which there was a three-year transition period comprising association with the EU before deciding on EU membership.<sup>76</sup> Häggblom gave a similarly EU-critical speech, constructing an EU that was incompatible with the autonomy arrangement and governed by unaccountable bureaucrats. He stated that once a member, it would be practically impossible to leave the EU, unlike in the EEA arrangement. He also invoked the Faroese precedent and claimed that the demilitarisation of Åland had not been recognised as Finland had not asked for a derogation like Denmark had. He stated that the EU only wanted the Nordics in to become net payers towards the EU budget and complained about the lack of the "principle of public access to official records"<sup>77</sup> in the EU.<sup>78</sup>

In this debate, the Centre Party representatives gave a significant amount of attention to the international status of Åland and its relation to the EU. They stressed that the EU's derogations were connected to the international legal arrangements regarding Åland, and that the EU

70 Ålands Lagting 26 September 1994, pp. 248-250.

71 Id., pp. 251-255.

72 Id., pp. 277-280.

73 Id., pp. 284-286.

74 Id., pp. 286-288.

75 Id., pp. 264-268.

76 Id., pp. 261-263.

77 *Offentlighetsprincipen* in Swedish.

78 Id., pp. 270-272.

institutions could be utilised in achieving political goals in the event of Finland being uncooperative. They also expressed anxiety regarding the agricultural sector. The Liberals continued to be ideologically positive on the basis of European integration but expressed concern regarding the agricultural policy. They insisted that Åland should only join the EU if Finland and Sweden were to do the same. The Unaligned remained totally against EU membership and were not convinced that Åland's international status was recognised by the EU.

#### 4.4 The Statewide Referendum on 16 October 1994

By the end of the month of September in 1994, some of the Ålandic parliamentary parties began discussing their final official positions toward the referendum. Meanwhile, the Åland Government visited the Finnish parliamentary party groups with the intention of convincing them to allocate a separate MEP to Åland.<sup>79</sup>

The Social Democrats held a meeting on the referendum on 26 September 1994, which resulted in a “clear majority in favour of membership”, according to party leader Pekka Tuominen, despite some opposing voices and no actual vote on the issue.<sup>80</sup>

The conservative FS held its own meeting in the same week and recommended its members to vote ‘Yes’ in the referendum on 16 October.<sup>81</sup>

A week later, the Liberals also recommended a ‘Yes’ in the vote.<sup>82</sup>

The Centre Party and the Unaligned did not take a formal position towards the referendum on 16 October.<sup>83</sup>

The Åland Government’s “convincing round” of negotiations with the Finnish political parties in Helsinki regarding a separate MEP for Åland

ended in failure “despite Åland’s constitutional right to a MEP”, according to Premier Erlandsson on 6 October 1994.<sup>84</sup> This failed round of negotiations demonstrated that the assertion that a separate MEP for Åland and the overtaking of taxation competency as “basic preconditions” for maintaining a positive attitude towards EU membership remained primarily in rhetoric.

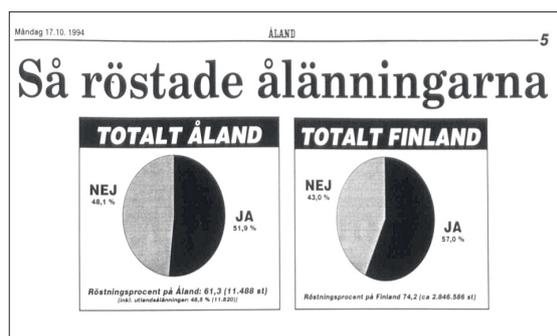


Figure 5: The results on Åland in relation to the state as a whole<sup>85</sup>

The results on the evening of 16 October 1994 painted a somewhat different picture in Åland than on the Finnish mainland. Of the 18,752 registered voters on Åland, 11,483 voted, which indicates a participation rate of 61.2 percent. The ‘Yes’ votes totalled at 6,041 (51.9 percent) while the ‘No’ votes gathered 5,608 (48.1 percent). The difference was remarkably lower than in Finland as whole, where the ‘Yes’ side enjoyed a much more comfortable majority (57 to 43 percent).<sup>86</sup>

Another interesting element of the results was a clear urban-rural divide on the Åland Islands. Of the 16 municipalities, only two of them had a ‘Yes’ majority; Mariehamn<sup>87</sup> (with 63.7 percent in favour) and Lemland<sup>88</sup> (50.9 percent

79 Ålandstidningen 28 September 1994.  
80 Nya Åland 27 September 1994.  
81 Ålandstidningen 30 September 1994.  
82 Nya Åland 4 October 1994.  
83 Nya Åland 14 October 1994

84 Nya Åland 8 October 1994.  
85 Ålandstidningen 17 October 1994.  
86 Ålands statistik- och utredningsbyrå / Statistics and Research Åland (Åsub) 1994.  
87 The capital of the Åland Islands and its only town.  
88 The district immediately to the south of Mariehamn.

in favour).<sup>89</sup> Considering the slim majority in Lemland, it would not be far-fetched to claim that Mariehamn was the only district in Åland with any notable enthusiasm towards the prospects of EU membership.

Ålandstidningen reported that Premier Erlandsson expressed his surprise at the results, as he was expecting a triumph from the 'No' side. He stated that he was expecting a larger 'Yes' in the second referendum considering that the Producers Union<sup>90</sup> were then recommending a 'Yes'. He maintained that the insecurities regarding the future would still be higher if Åland chose to remain outside the EU. Erlandsson also asserted that the influence of EU policy and taxation questions must be resolved before a 'Yes' in the second referendum could be obtained. He stated that "A massive Ålandic 'No' due to a stepmotherly government would be harmful for Finland's reputation. Finland wins internationally by following the spirit and intention of autonomy". Erlandsson also expressed his disappointment at how the Nordic region "hopped on the EU train". He suggested that it would have been better to have waited some years to see how the Maastricht Treaty functioned in practice and have more time to reach a higher level of national unity.<sup>91</sup>

The Speaker of the Åland Parliament, Roger Jansson<sup>92</sup>, expressed his satisfaction with the results of the referendum, and he said that the results were good for the country from an economic and defence policy perspective. He noted that the Ålandic debate had been notably more negative than the Finnish debate on the grounds of unresolved issues and influences from the

Swedish debate.<sup>93</sup> Roger Jansson also said that so far, there had not been a clear "Yes movement" on Åland and that "it was up to Helsinki to decide" when it was going to begin. Roger Jansson asserted that he was for EU membership on the condition that "Åland gets what belongs to Åland and that the autonomy does not get devalued by the state".<sup>94</sup>

The MP for Åland in the Finnish Parliament, Gunnar Jansson, expressed his concern over the urban-rural divide on the EU issue both in the region and the state as a whole.<sup>95</sup> Two other Liberal MPs were also available for comment on the evening of the results: Sune Eriksson and Olof Erland, the leader of the party.

Eriksson claimed that the turnout in the referendum was a sign of voter interest towards the EU. His hypothesis was that Lemland's 'Yes' depended on its proportion of commuters<sup>96</sup>, which was higher than the farmers in the district. He stated that he did not believe that the second referendum would be much different than the first one and noted that Finland had taken a decision as a sovereign state without looking towards Sweden.<sup>97</sup>

Erland also said that the bare majority in favour of EU membership pointed towards a deep division among the voters, especially between the urban and rural regions. He also observed that all parties had 'Yes' and 'No' subdivisions. He argued that the bare majority increased the importance of the second referendum, from which it was important to get a clear 'Yes' result. Erland stated that the Finnish membership of the EEA agreement was now invalid, and that a Nordic union outside the EU was also no longer real-

89 Åsub 1994.

90 Ålands producentförbund in Swedish, an influential organisation in the agricultural sector on Åland. The organisation has a close relationship with the Centre Party. It recommended a 'No' in the first vote.

91 Ålandstidningen 17 October 1994.

92 Member of the Conservative FS.

93 This is a reference to the influence of Swedish media on Åland. The Swedish political climate was more sceptical of the EU than the Finnish, which was evident in the referendum results. See Trädgårdh 2002 pp. 130-181.

94 Ålandstidningen 17 October 1994.

95 Ibid.

96 To Mariehamn.

97 Ålandstidningen 17 October 1994.

istic. He concluded by emphasising the importance of maintaining scattered settlements and a living countryside and archipelago in the EU.<sup>98</sup>

Parallel to the referendum process, the so-called Jääskinen Committee was set up under the leadership of legal expert Niilo Jääskinen. The Jääskinen Committee delivered to the Finnish Ministry of Justice its report on the inclusion of Ålandic representatives on EU policy at the state level.<sup>99</sup> The result was a unanimous agreement to amend the Autonomy Act in order to ensure Åland's participation in certain areas of EU policy making. These were:

- One of Finland's seats in the European Committee of Regions
- The input of Åland Government when the national position on EU policy is being formulated by the Finnish Government should the subject be considered within Åland's authority or be considered of importance by the Åland Government
- A permanent representative at the Finnish delegation in Brussels
- Granting the MP for Åland in the Finnish Parliament permanent access to the meetings of the Grand Committee.<sup>100</sup>

The changes were met with great enthusiasm on the side of the Åland Government but the remaining threshold questions, namely representation in the European Parliament and increased taxation authority to the region, would still remain on the agenda going forward.

The most dramatic example of this was a speech given by Roger Jansson, in which he stated that by withholding an MEP seat from Åland,

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

100 Ibid. See Jääskinen 2005 for his own analysis of the matter. The Grand Committee is a committee in the Finnish Parliament which takes decisions regarding EU affairs. All parliamentary groups (including Ålands MP) are represented. See [https://www.eduskunta.fi/EN/valiokunnat/suuri\\_valiokunta/Pages/default.aspx](https://www.eduskunta.fi/EN/valiokunnat/suuri_valiokunta/Pages/default.aspx).

Finland was on its way towards a “constitutional crisis” if the state attempted to “downgrade the autonomy”. He stressed that the Åland Parliament had also transferred a share of its legislative authority to the EU and hence required compensation. Roger Jansson also included the possibility of Åland to seek external help from the states that were involved in the 1921 League of Nations decisions that secured Åland's international legal status<sup>101</sup> as well as from the United Nations, which “according to certain interpretations, could be considered the successor of the League of Nations”.<sup>102</sup>

Developments regarding the application of the tax exemption provisions were also quite discouraging, at least from the perspective of Ålandic politicians. The economic-political committee of the Finnish Government stated that a tax border between Åland and Finland was not possible to achieve at the entrance to the EU, and that border practicalities should be avoided.<sup>103</sup> Both the Åland Government and MP Gunnar Jansson expressed their frustration with the decision and the later also stated that taking the matter to the European Court of Justice was an option.<sup>104</sup>

Ålandstidningen interviewed 29 of the 30 legislators<sup>105</sup> in the Åland Parliament on which way they would vote in the current situation if they had to.<sup>106</sup> The results were as follows:

Out of the ten **Centre Party** MPs, four were unclear, three were against, and three were in favour.

101 Although he does not specify, this likely refers to the October 1921 agreement, in which the Demilitarisation and Neutralisation Treaty was signed by a number of states.

102 Ålandstidningen 21 October 1994.

103 Ålandstidningen 25 October 1994.

104 Ålandstidningen 26 October 1994.

105 28 of them were interviewed on 26 October and 1 was interviewed the day after. Bengt Häger was unavailable but as the head of the Utanfö EU (Outside EU) movement, it is assumed that he is a 'No' vote. Utanfö EU was a cross-party activist group which advocated that Åland should not become a member of the EU.

106 Ålandstidningen 27 October 1994 and 28 October 1994.

Out of the seven **Liberal** MPs, one was unclear<sup>107</sup> and six were in favour.

Out of the six **FS** MPs, two were unclear, one was against, and three were in favour

Out of the four **Social Democratic** MPs, one was unclear<sup>108</sup>, and three were in favour

Out of the three **Unaligned** MPs, all three were against.

From these results, it can be concluded that 17 MPs were ready to vote 'Yes', six would vote 'No', and six were unclear. While this fell short of the two-thirds requirement (i.e. 20 MPs) to take the decision to join the EU, it seemed that the referendum results had pushed a certain number of MPs towards accepting EU membership. Most notable was that the Centre Party remained quite divided in its orientation towards the EU.

The new Ålandic parliamentary term began on 1 November 1994, and Roger Jansson from FS was re-elected Speaker of the Åland Parliament. He gave a speech on the topic of EU membership, in which he noted that the EU issue was simply "too large to achieve unity on". He asserted that despite certain uncertainties regarding taxation, "sufficient representation" (i.e. a separate MEP), and "clarity" regarding demilitarisation, there seemed to be "positive interpretations" regarding these issues in the Finnish Parliament, even if the Finnish Government was not expressing it. Roger Jansson also stated that "After 77 years, Finland should have the confidence to accept that its sovereignty over Åland will remain strongly limited". He urged for a 'Yes' vote in the referendum and claimed that a 'No' option could lead to greater dependency on decisions taken in Finland, which he considered to be undesirable for the autonomy of Åland.<sup>109</sup>

107 It was Gunnar Jansson who said he would wait for the referendum results. Based on his previous argumentation in favour of EU membership, it is assumed that he is a 'Yes' vote.

108 Pekka Tuominen stated that the "question was hypothetical" and that he didn't need to respond. However, he is assumed to be a 'Yes' vote on grounds of his previous positive statements on the EU. Ålandstidningen 27 October 1994.

109 Ålandstidningen 1 November 1994.

The Åland Government sent its final report to the Åland Parliament on 8 November 1994, in which it officially recommended that Ålandic voters vote 'Yes'. The Åland Government had clearly admitted that it could not achieve a separate MEP for Åland, although it was satisfied with the level of participation at other levels. It also mentioned that it was of "definite opinion" that the easing of tax formalities as a result of Åland's exclusion from the tax harmonisation should be applied not only to trade between Åland and Finland but also for trade between Åland and the other EU member states. The Åland Government urged the Finnish Government to establish a committee to change the Autonomy Act in order for Åland to be granted authority in the field of company tax and indirect taxation. The Åland Government suggested that the committee should also propose a timetable for the whole transfer of taxation authority to the region. The Åland Government also stated that a special agreement with the EU would be needed if the "outside track" was selected, and that they had contacted the Finnish delegation at the EU to inquire if Finland was prepared to negotiate one. Finally, on the topic of Åland leaving the EU, the Finnish Ministry of Justice claimed that it was technically possible provided that all the member states would consent to it. The Åland Government promised to "take measures" towards the unresolved issues before the referendum, which was only 12 days away.<sup>110</sup>

#### *4.5 Debate Before the Swedish Referendum*

This debate took place after the Åland Government's fifth report on the EU process was sent on 8 November 1994.

The **Centre Party** was represented by Pre-

110 Ålandstidningen 8 November 1994 and Nya Åland 10 November 1994.

mier Erlandsson and MP Christer Jansson. Premier Erlandsson began his speech by noting the change in paradigm in relation to the previous debates, namely that now the question was not about whether to join but rather on which conditions will Åland and Finland join the EU. He largely repeated the contents of the report sent on 8 November and concluded his speech by stating that a 'Yes' would result in an orderly future while a 'No' would cause uncertainty.<sup>111</sup>

Christer Jansson held a speech on the application of tax exemption granted in the Åland Protocol. He stated that the signals from Brussels were quite positive regarding the formalities of the tax border, although the Finnish side appeared to have more negative understanding of this.<sup>112</sup>

The **Liberals** participated with MP Folke Sjölund.

Sjölund stated that while the EU was no paradise, the alternative was much worse. He reiterated that the EEA agreement would no longer apply at the turn of the year, and that Åland did not have an alternative in place. He claimed that the Åland Government's insistence on the taxation issue<sup>113</sup> was a stillborn attempt, and that they should have focused on the realisation of the tax exemption status instead.<sup>114</sup>

The conservative **FS** joined with MPs K-G Eriksson, Max Sirén, May Flodin, and Harry Eriksson.

K-G Eriksson recommended a 'Yes', which he justified with their agreement with the Åland Government's report. He also stated his belief that the MEP issue and increasing the taxation authority would be resolved "positively".<sup>115</sup> However, Harry Eriksson maintained his sceptical stance on the EU, claiming that there was a

significant lack of information among the voters and he expressed worry for the depopulation of the archipelago and the countryside on Åland.<sup>116</sup> May Flodin was ambiguous on the final vote and Max Sirén spoken in favour of a 'Yes' vote. Sirén also stated that he vote 'Yes' even if Sweden voted against EU membership. Flodin stressed that the results of the second referendum on Åland would be morally binding despite it being an advisory referendum. She also expressed her scepticism towards lobbying in Brussels.<sup>117</sup> Max Sirén struck a slightly more positive tone when he stated that he believed that the EU was an organisation that was built for keeping peace, restoring the environment, and securing prosperity.<sup>118</sup>

The **Social Democrats** had MPs Barbro Sundback and Pekka Tuominen as participants.

Barbro Sundback referred to her previous statement that the MEP and taxation authority questions would not have been solved by EU membership, and that this had proven to be the case. She expressed her belief that Ålandic membership of the EU would increase the room for negotiation in several fields and that Åland's influence at the state level would also increase compared to the current situation.<sup>119</sup>

Pekka Tuominen stated that throughout this process, demilitarisation and restrictions regarding land acquisition were the two main points of concern for the party, and that both had been dealt with in a satisfactory manner. He claimed that the current state of affairs justified the Social Democratic scepticism towards a separate referendum and sent his thanks to the MPs that had supported their proposal against arranging the referendum in June. He concluded by stating that the party would not issue a recommendation on how to vote in the referendum but that "It is important to go out and vote".<sup>120</sup>

111 Ålands Lagting 11 November 1994, pp. 22-26.

112 *Id.*, pp. 28-31.

113 Meaning the attempt to increase Åland's tax authority by labelling it a threshold question.

114 *Id.*, pp. 33-34.

115 *Id.*, pp. 39-40.

116 *Id.*, p. 57.

117 *Id.*, pp. 62-63.

118 *Id.*, pp. 39-40.

119 *Id.*, pp. 41-44.

120 *Id.*, pp. 58-60.

Bengt Häger from the **Unaligned** stated his displeasure with the Åland Government's inability to provide a real alternative to EU membership. He also claimed that "I heard in the countryside that they say they feel misplaced to sing the line 'we carry the inheritance of freedom'<sup>121</sup> in the Song of the Ålander". Häger stated that with EU membership, Åland would practically surrender all of its decision-making power.<sup>122</sup>

After the results of the statewide referendum, it seems that a general shift occurred in the debates. The threshold questions put forward by the Centre Party were no longer linked to the EU process and the Åland Government openly advocated in favour of EU membership. The Centre Party representatives expressed hope that EU membership would increase Åland's room for manoeuvre against the Finnish state, a position also held by the Social Democrats. The Liberals and Social Democrats felt justified in their criticisms of linking the threshold questions to the EU process. The FS appeared to have a majority in favour of EU membership, whereas the Unaligned expressed disappointment at the results of the statewide referendum on 16 October.



Figure 6: "Åland Took a Step Towards the EU"<sup>123</sup>

The Swedish referendum took place on 13 November 1994 and resulted in a slim majority (52.2 percent) in favour of EU membership.<sup>124</sup> This meant now that Åland's referendum and

121 "Frihetens arvsrätt vi bära" in Swedish, a line from the national anthem of Åland adopted in 1922.

122 Id., pp. 45-48.

123 Ålandstidningen 14 November 1994.

124 Ibid.

the subsequent decision on EU membership would be taken in the knowledge that both of its immediate neighbours (i.e. Sweden and Finland) would join the EU.

#### 4.6 Debate Before the Ålandic Referendum

The last debate before the separate referendum on Åland took place on 17 November 1994.

The **Centre Party** participated in this debate with MPs Göran Bengtz and Christer Jansson.

The debate began with a group speech from Göran Bengtz. He stated that although Sweden's 'Yes' vote made it easier for Åland to join the EU, there were still problems regarding the Common Agricultural Policy and the Common Fisheries Policy in the EU. He declared that "farmers are serfs in the EU". He also said that he would personally vote 'No' despite his belief that the 'Yes' side would win the final vote. Bengtz stated the Centre Party would not have an official position in the Ålandic referendum. On the two former threshold questions (i.e. the MEP and increased taxation authority), he stated that a separate MEP for Åland should be pursued "with thought about the autonomy our forefathers gave us to administer"<sup>125</sup>. He claimed that the demand was based on the fact that every legislative organ (of the member states) in the EU had been compensated for their transfer of authority to EU organs. He also expressed his confidence that the EU would be helpful for Åland to achieve greater taxation powers in consideration of their acceptance of the tax exemption, something which the Finnish authorities had not been as accepting of. Despite not being in favour of EU membership, he still recognised that Brussels was more willing than Finland to acknowledge Åland's demilitarised status.<sup>126</sup>

125 This is an interesting reinterpretation of history considering that the original attitude towards the autonomy arrangement by the Sundblom leadership was considered to be a "deathblow" in 1921.

126 Ålands Lagting 17 November 1994, pp. 65-70.

Christer Jansson gave a speech which deviated from his party line (or rather lack thereof), in which he stated that despite the ongoing issues with the tax exemption, he was personally in favour of EU membership. He justified this statement by claiming that EU membership was “the most important development in terms of nationality protection since Åland was separated from the Swedish realm in 1809”. He said that it was “important to maintain the same trade relations with Sweden as with Finland” and that this aspect was crucial in maintaining Åland as a monolingual Swedish-speaking province going forward.<sup>127</sup>

The **Liberals** participated with MPs Olof Erland and Gunnar Jansson.

Olof Erland began his speech by claiming that Åland was now in the “third important epoch” in the history of its autonomy. He stated that the first stage was the birth of the autonomy, the second stage was participation in the Nordic cooperation process, and the third stage was the European integration process since 1989. He reminded the voices that were critical of Helsinki that Åland had gotten its say during this process and perhaps the persistence of “ill will and ignorance” towards Åland from Finland was of Åland’s own doing. He summarised the Liberal position as “Voting ‘Yes’ even if the price is high”. On the MEP issue, he claimed that the argument base on the transfer of legislative powers was insufficient and that the real legitimisation of a separate MEP came from the fact that the Ålanders were a separate people with a separate party system. He stated that they were not interested in one of Finland’s MEPs, but rather a separate MEP for Åland. Erland concluded by expressing his hope for a ‘Yes’ and a large turnout in the referendum on Sunday.<sup>128</sup>

Gunnar Jansson gave a long and colourful speech on the benefits of EU membership. He

127 Id., pp. 91-93.

128 Id., pp. 75-83.

especially stressed that the difference between internal and foreign affairs within the EU would be blurred, which would give Åland an opportunity to express its own viewpoints and present its demilitarisation. Gunnar Jansson stated that this blurring of the internal and external in the EU would “dramatically increase” the foreign policy capabilities of Åland because foreign policy will not be subordinate to the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs or that it would not function at all<sup>129</sup>, as in the Nordic Council.<sup>130</sup>

The **Unaligned** were represented in this session with MP Bert Häggblom. Bert Häggblom held a speech in which he insisted that the insecurities of EU membership are still higher than remaining outside. He expressed his concern for the whole population of Åland, especially the farmers, the fishermen, and the rural communities. He stated his belief that due to increased urbanisation, “Åland will have a large head but no body”, with Mariehamn being the dominant region while the countryside and archipelago continue to depopulate. Häggblom also insisted that the alternative to EU membership could be found in continued association with the EEA provided that the EU and Finland could agree on it.<sup>131</sup>

After the results of the Swedish referendum, the debate in the Åland Parliament revolved about the potential effects of EU membership for Åland. All the parties that held speeches (Centre, the Liberals, and the Unaligned) expressed differing amounts of concern regarding the EU’s Common Agricultural and Fisheries Policies and urbanisation as a result of EU membership. However, Centre and the Liberals insisted that EU membership would provide Åland with a new forum to express its own views

129 This refers to the lack of the traditional divide between domestic and foreign policy in the Nordic Council, in which MPs from one country can inquire about another country’s internal affairs during plenary sessions.

130 Id., pp. 95-100.

131 Id., pp. 107-109.

and political goals. The Unaligned did not share this viewpoint.

The separate referendum on Åland took place that Sunday on 20 November 1994, a week after the Swedish referendum and a week before the Norwegian referendum. The idea was to have a “domino effect” within the Nordic region to ensure that the most pro-EU country (Finland) would vote first and the most EU-sceptic country (Norway) would vote last.<sup>132</sup> It seems that the political leadership on Åland were aware of this strategy, which accurately predicted the decreasing enthusiasm towards the EU among the east-west axis in the Nordic region<sup>133</sup>, but still failed to convince the Norwegian voters, who ultimately voted to remain outside of the EU.



Figure 7: “Huka dig EU, nu kommer vi!” (“Beware EU, Here We Come!”)<sup>134</sup>

18,090 people on Åland were registered to vote in the second referendum. Of that number, 8,878 people decided to vote, meaning the turnout was 49.1 percent. The total amount of ‘Yes’ votes totalled 6,456 (73.6 percent) and the ‘No’ votes totalled 2,311 (26.4 percent).<sup>135</sup> Despite the over-

132 See Jahn and Storsved 1995 for more on this strategy.

133 The ‘Yes’ votes were 57 percent in Finland, 52.2 percent in Sweden, and 47.8 percent in Norway.

134 Ålandstidningen 21 November 1994.

135 Åsub 1994.

whelming proportion of ‘Yes’ votes, which were a majority in every district on Åland, the significantly lower turnout can be interpreted as lack of motivation to vote again among the ‘No’ side and the undecided. Interestingly, the number of ‘Yes’ votes increased by 415 from 6,041 in the state-wide referendum on 16 October 1994.<sup>136</sup>

The first immediate consequence of the referendum results was the decision of the Centre Party to vote in favour of EU membership in the final vote, which was to take place on 2 December, joining the Liberals, Social Democrats, and FS.<sup>137</sup> Harry Eriksson from FS still insisted against his party line that he would vote against EU membership, and all 3 MPs from the Unaligned group also maintained their positions against EU membership.<sup>138</sup> This meant that the Åland Parliament now had a qualified majority (26 votes) in favour of EU membership, which was required for a positive decision.

#### 4.7 Debate After the Ålandic Referendum

The legal committee of the Åland Parliament published its report regarding their final statement on EU membership on 24 November 1994.<sup>139</sup> The report was then sent to the Åland Parliament for debate on 28 November 1994. The debate began with a speech from the chairperson of the legal committee of the Åland Parliament MP Sune Eriksson. He expressed his gratitude to the ‘No’ side in the referendum process for “deepening the debate”. He stated that the “critical yes” result from the referendum results should not be forgotten during Åland’s participation in the EU. His speech consisted of the committee proposals for the final statement the Åland Parliament would attach to its declaration on the decision to join the EU.<sup>140</sup>

136 Ibid.

137 Nya Åland 22 November 1994.

138 Ibid.

139 Ålandstidningen 24 November 1994.

140 Ålands Lagting 28 November 1994, pp. 290-293.

The **Centre Party** participated with MPs Göran Bengtz and Christer Jansson.

Göran Bengtz stated his support for the committee statement on the MEP issue, as Åland had transferred some of its legislative power to the EU and should be compensated for it. Bengtz expressed his satisfaction with both the 'Yes' and the 'No' sides having based their arguments on defending and developing the base of autonomy. He ended on a positive note by stating that EU membership had the benefits of increased recognition for the autonomy arrangement, demilitarisation, and expansion of international law.<sup>141</sup>

Christer Jansson from the **Centre Party** expressed his concern regarding the application for the tax exemption and stated that the tax exemption could not be dealt with by unilateral legislation on Finland's side, as the Åland Protocol was a part of EU primary law. He also proposed collaboration with Swedish and EU officials to ensure the enforcement of the regulation.<sup>142</sup>

The **Liberals** participated with MP Olof Erland.

Erland stated that their parliamentary group would vote 'Yes' in the vote on Friday<sup>143</sup>, but that it would be a "critical Yes". He noted the difference in interpretation of demilitarisation between Åland and Finland, but claimed that the EU also wanted to avoid potential hinders for defence cooperation in the future<sup>144</sup>. Erland asserted that the Åland Parliament should insist on its demand for an MEP based on the idea of an "Ålandic people" as separate entity, since Åland was joining the EU on its own terms and not "just as Finnish citizens". He expressed his hope that the cooperation of the Nordic Parliaments within the framework of the EU could help apply the "principle of public access to of-

ficial records"<sup>145</sup> as a similar principle was lacking within the EU. Erland also proposed making Åland a permanent meeting place for Nordic meetings on EU issues and that a congress house could be built for the occasion.<sup>146</sup>

From the conservative **FS** group, MPs K-G Eriksson, Max Sirén, and Harry Eriksson gave speeches.

K-G Eriksson stated that the large majority of their group were in favour of EU membership, but they could not convince Harry Eriksson due to his "strong personal convictions". He said that he felt good that Åland was on its way to the EU with Finland, and they would need to work towards solving the issues that remain.<sup>147</sup>

From the same party, Max Sirén continued by emphasising that it was important to join the EU despite the unresolved issues. He clarified them as the MEP question and the application of the tax exemption.<sup>148</sup> He stated that the Finnish side's reluctance to apply the tax exemption could result in Finland's EU journey "beginning in court".<sup>149</sup>

A dissenting voice from the **FS** group, Harry Eriksson, insisted that "No true islander would accept being ruled by directive from far away" and that his 'No' vote should be considered a protest against a lack of alternative to EU membership. He expressed his belief that the lack of alternatives was the reason for low turnout in the second referendum and that "the disappointment among the people of the entire Nordic region will be large when the inevitable austerity packages start coming despite EU membership". Additionally, he claimed that the treatment of animals within the EU region was "uncivilised".<sup>150</sup>

145 *Offentlighetsprincipen* in Swedish.

146 *Id.*, pp. 295-298.

147 *Id.*, pp. 298-300.

148 The proposed law would incorporate Åland into the same tax region as mainland Finland, hence disallowing tax-free sales between Åland and Finland. See Fagerlund 1997, p.200.

149 This was a clear threat to apply to the European Court of Justice on the grounds of Finland violating the Åland Protocol. *Id.*, pp. 300-302.

150 *Id.*, pp. 304-305.

141 *Id.*, pp. 293-295.

142 *Id.*, pp. 301-303.

143 That is 2 December 1994.

144 Hence the phrasing regarding "the status the Åland islands enjoy under international law". See section 3 above.

Finally, another notable opponent to EU membership, Bert Häggblom from the **Unaligned** group, gave a speech in which he expressed his regret over Åland “losing” a significant part of its authority to “another forum”. Häggblom went on to claim that the Åland Protocol could be expanded to incorporate the language of the “Sami Protocol”<sup>151</sup>, which clearly refers to their “exclusive rights to reindeer husbandry within the Sami territory”. He suggested that the Protocol could be expanded in relation to developments regarding their “traditional means of livelihood”. He also complained about the presence of lobbyists by stating that Denmark had fewer representatives in Brussels than the Italian automobile producer Fiat. Contrary to the overall tone of his speech, he also stated that “the EU had never treated small island societies poorly, even if they chose to stay outside”.<sup>152</sup> He concluded that Ålandic politicians were “all too eager to make EU adjustments” and that they “forgot to develop the autonomy”, which he considered to be of the highest importance.<sup>153</sup>

By the time of this debate, the prospect of Åland remaining outside the EU was no longer considered to be a realistic option by the by grand majority of MPs. The Centre Party was now stressing the benefits of EU membership by noting the recognition of Åland’s international status and the fact that the Åland Protocol was now a part of EU primary law. The Liberals stated that their ‘Yes’ vote was critical, and they insisted the Ålanders were a separate people within the EU and therefore worthy of a separate MEP. The majority of FS stated that EU membership was important despite the unresolved issues (a separate MEP and taxation

competencies) and they expressed faith that they could be dealt with within the EU. Harry Eriksson (FS) and the Unaligned maintained that EU membership would deplete the rural regions on Åland and that transferring competencies to the EU organs was unacceptable.

On the same evening as this debate, the Norwegian voters also went to the polls to decide on EU membership. The results were 52.5 percent against EU membership and 47.5 percent in favour.



Figure 8: “The Voice of the Nordic Region Becomes Weaker in the EU”<sup>154</sup>

Among the first to react to the Norwegian results on Åland was Roger Jansson. He stated that Norway’s ‘No’ would weaken the Nordic voice in the EU and that this in turn would make the introduction of the principles that the Nordic region wanted to introduce to the EU “more weakly advanced”. Roger Jansson also stated that Nordic cooperation was “essential” for Åland and there was a risk that Finland and Sweden joining the EU (without Norway) could weaken it.<sup>155</sup>

May Flodin, also from the same party, emphasised that the Norwegians stressed “their right to decide for themselves” and speculated that perhaps they had a better capacity than Finland or Sweden to afford it due to a better economy. She stated her belief that the Nordic Passport Union and the Nordic common labour market could be maintained in the EU but predicted that Nordic cooperation would be more focused on cultural and regional policy.<sup>156</sup>

151 Protocol No. 3 in the Finnish EU Membership Treaty. See <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/SL/TXT/?uri=CELEX:11994N/PRO/03>

152 This is a clear reference to the special arrangements made with Greenland, the Faroe Islands, and the Isle of Man, among others.

153 Ålands Lagting 28 November 1994, pp. 306-307.

154 Ålandstidningen 29 November 1994, after the results of the Norwegian vote.

155 Ibid.

156 Ibid.

The leader of the Utanför EU (Outside EU) movement and the **Unaligned** group, Bengt Häger, expressed his opinion on the results by stating that although it was a shame that the Nordic region was split, the Norwegians showed that “they want to stand on their own feet”.<sup>157</sup>

#### *4.8 The Final Debate Before the Decision on EU Membership*

The Åland Parliament convened on 2 December 1994 to give its final decision on EU membership. The vote was held after the referendums in the Nordic region, in which Åland voted twice in favour of EU membership. All Ålandic parliamentary groups except one declared that they would be voting ‘Yes’. This made the final debate the shortest during the EU referendum process. The final vote was less dramatic than what could have been expected based on the debates prior to the first referendum and its subsequent split results.

The **Unaligned** group had MPs Bengt Häger, Bert Häggblom, and Jan Liljehage as speakers.

The debate began with a speech from Bengt Häger from the **Unaligned**. He stated that “the decision we stand before today is certainly one of the largest that has been taken in this house and with the largest and most uncertain results for the province of Åland”. He took a comparative approach towards the reactions to the recent votes on EU membership in the Nordic region by claiming that after a ‘Yes’ result in Finland, Nokia had decided to “move 2,000 to 3,000 jobs to Texas” and that in Sweden, interest rates had increased while the value of the national currency had decreased. He contrasted this with the Norwegian ‘No’ vote, resulting in decreased interest rates and the increased value of the national currency. He lamented the split in the Nordic region on the EU membership issue. Häger also questioned the future of Nordic cooperation considering that former Prime Minister of Sweden Carl Bildt “goes out and wants to scrap it”. He stat-

157 Ibid.

ed that it was “practically impossible” to leave the EU, as it would require a unanimous decision by all the EU member states. He also stated that he could not understand the serving of champagne in the Åland Parliament after the vote on EU membership since “it felt like salt in a wound”.<sup>158</sup>

Jan Liljehage gave a very short speech acknowledging his relative silence during the EU process and his worry over the potential dangers of the increased bureaucracy for trade between Åland and Finland as a result of the application of the tax exemption. He said that he was now convinced that the tax exemption without the transferring of full taxation authority to Åland was only a disadvantage. Using colourful rhetoric, he proposed that “...for God’s sake, take away the tax exemption until we have got our own taxation authority”.<sup>159</sup>

Bert Häggblom gave a final anti-EU speech before the vote. He was strongly against the tax exemption granted within the Åland Protocol, which he argued would create a border with Sweden and that was something he could never accept. He went so far as to claim that an EU membership without the Protocol would be more beneficial than an EU membership that was negotiated. Häggblom also insisted that “the Nordic region is something that is needed for the rest of Europe”, and that the EU wanted the Nordics to strengthen the EU and “pay the bill” for keeping the weaker countries in the EU. He also stated that the ‘No’ side was now waiting on Spain<sup>160</sup> to reject the EU membership applications of Austria, Finland, and Sweden.<sup>161</sup>

Also coming from an EU critical perspective, **FS** MP Harry Eriksson held a short speech in which he claimed that the main reason many were in favour of EU membership was to maintain the special status of Åland by a “less ugly

158 Ålands Lagting 2 December 1994, pp. 327-328.

159 Id., p. 331.

160 According to EU rules, every member state must approve the acceptance of new members in the EU. Spain was set to vote on 28 December 1994.

161 Id., pp. 341-342.

authority”.<sup>162</sup> He claimed that the ‘Yes’ side had bluffed about there only being “one train to Brussels” in the EU process but that the Norwegian vote had called that bluff<sup>163</sup>. He said that while Åland was not an independent state, he considered that “we have the same right to stand our ground”. He concluded by pleading the MPs to vote “according to their conscience”.<sup>164</sup>

The **Liberal** speakers in this session were once again MPs Olof Erland and Gunnar Jansson. Erland stated that EU membership would give Ålandic politics a new dimension. He mentioned that despite its small size, Åland was “principally and constitutionally” a people in itself among the peoples of Europe; “the Ålandic people”. Erland asserted that the EU was aiming for peace and cooperation and was striving for a free market to secure welfare and give individuals opportunities.<sup>165</sup>

Gunnar Jansson repeated his previous claims that the difference between domestic and foreign policy would be blurred and this would be beneficial to “strengthen the autonomy”. He also raised the MEP question by praising the Legal Affairs Committee’s (of the Åland Parliament) statement on ensuring the influence of Åland in the European Parliament, which he considered to be an avenue for increasing the foreign policy competencies for the people of Åland. He said that this decision was “the largest decision we have made” and that he had already said ‘Yes’ once (in the statewide vote on 16 October), but he would do it again “with joy and not without pride” today as well.<sup>166</sup>

At the end of the session, the Åland Parliament decided to give its consent to EU membership in a 26 to 4 vote, putting an end to the Ålandic EU membership process and ensuring EU membership from 1 January 1995.<sup>167</sup>

162 I.e. the EU in relation to the Finnish state.

163 That EU membership was inevitable.

164 Id., p. 330.

165 Id., pp. 330–331.

166 Id., pp. 332–339.

167 Ibid. Three MPs from the Unaligned group in-



Figure 9: Speaker Roger Jansson signs the declaration by the Åland Parliament to be sent to the President of the Republic of Finland<sup>168</sup>

sisted on registering their reservations to the accepted declaration. Harry Eriksson, the other ‘No’ voter, did not do the same.

168 Ålandstidningen 2 December 1994.

## 5. Conclusion

“The most revolutionary decision in the history of autonomy”<sup>169</sup> relied on roughly 450 votes. With those 450 votes, Åland became a member of the EU alongside Finland and Sweden on 1 January 1995.

One striking feature of this process has been the difference in enthusiasm between the political elite and the Ålandic voter. This was manifested in the bare majority in the statewide referendum (in which 14 of the 16 municipalities had a ‘No’ majority) and the low turnout (49.1 percent) in the Ålandic referendum. This is not to claim that the political establishment represented in the Åland Parliament was uniformly enthusiastic about the EU, but rather to highlight that viewing the process backwards from the decision on 2 December (26-4 in favour of EU membership) and the referendum results on 20 November (73.6 percent in favour) would give a skewed impression regarding political attitudes towards the EU at the time. If the first referendum had resulted in a ‘No’ result, it is almost certain that neither of these events would have taken place as they have.

The existence of intraparty splits and ambiguity towards the EU within the main governmental party (Centre) validates Oppermann’s analysis that on the *strategic level*, the Åland Government took a *defensive* stance to the referendum and that on the *political level*, the Åland Government’s concerns were primarily *domestic*.<sup>170</sup> This claim is strengthened by the “points of interests”<sup>171</sup> stated by the Åland Government during the earlier stages of the EU negotiations.

These were already addressed<sup>172</sup> both by Brussels and Helsinki by the time of the Ålandic referendum. It should be noted that neither the MEP question nor the taxation issue were among these concerns during the EU negotiations.

Another interesting observation regarding this process is the shifts in discussions as the political developments played out. Its noteworthy that during the first stage of the debates<sup>173</sup>, which took place before the vote on 16 October 1994, the discussions heavily revolved around the taxation and MEP questions. The second stage of the debates, which took place after 16 October<sup>174</sup>, were focused on the conditions in which Åland would join the EU, such as the application of the tax exemption in the “Åland Protocol”.

### 5.1 Why Åland’s EU decision was

#### “revolutionary” and why it is relevant today

Described as the “most revolutionary decision in the history of autonomy” by the then editor-in-chief of *Tidningen Åland*, Harry Jansson<sup>175</sup>, the decision to join the EU remains relevant for contemporary Ålandic politics and for territorial autonomies in the Nordic region and in Europe in general. The “revolutionary” element of this decision comes from the fact that only the Åland Parliament was authorised to make this decision according to the 1991 Autonomy Act. It was the first time that the authority of the Åland Parliament was partly handed over in exchange for membership of the European integration process albeit with derogations.

169 Quote by Harry Jansson in *Ålandstidningen* 15 November 1994.

170 Oppermann 2013, p. 693.

171 See section 3, footnote 17.

172 With the only exception of the demands regarding taxation competencies.

173 On 14, 21, and 26 September.

174 On 11, 17, and 28 November and on 2 December.

175 Quote by Harry Jansson in *Ålandstidningen* 15 November 1994.

With Finland and Åland joining the EU, it can be claimed that the Ålandic autonomy has now also been “Europeanised”. It can no longer be considered only on the Stockholm-Mariehamn-Helsinki axis, and a multifaceted approach is necessary to understand political phenomena on Åland. In other words, “the time that Ålandic politics could exclusively be limited to what’s happening on Åland is gone”.<sup>176</sup> Evidence for this claim has clearly been provided during the discussions regarding spring hunting<sup>177</sup>, the selling of snus (oral tobacco) on Åland<sup>178</sup>, and most importantly, the fears that the Åland Parliament could have potentially blocked the Lisbon treaty in 2009<sup>179</sup>. The autonomy of Åland now has to take into consideration the developments at the European level as much as the developments in Finland and Sweden. Similarly, European-level politicians cannot ignore the political dynamics of Åland, either. This interdependence between a small island community and wider Europe makes the Åland case interesting not only from the vantage point of Åland but also for those who study exceptional cases within the European framework.

### *5.2 Stances of the Parties During the EU Referendum Process*

This section summarises the stances of the parties in the Åland Parliament during the EU referendum process. It also provides a summary of the parties and how they reacted to the political developments during this process.

#### *The Centre Party*

The party was quite ambiguous about its stance

<sup>176</sup> Sundback 2006, p. 102.

<sup>177</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_18\\_1446](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_18_1446).

<sup>178</sup> <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/utrikes/aland-slipper-eu-boter-for-snus>.

<sup>179</sup> This would have meant that Finland would not have been able guarantee the implementation of the Treaty in the entirety of its territory. See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7582077.stm>.

on EU membership up until after the second referendum on Åland. Its MPs were the most internally spilt, with many citing concerns regarding centralisation and the EU’s common agricultural policy. It’s noteworthy that during the first debate on 14 September, the leader of the party and head of the Åland Government, Ragnar Erlandsson, went as far as to claim that “Brussels could afford to be more generous than Helsinki towards Åland”. The Centre Party insisted that a separate MEP for Åland and increased taxation authority were threshold questions that were decisive for the Åland Government’s stance on the EU question. However, these demands were not met by Helsinki and after the results of the Ålandic referendum on 20 November, the party took a stance in favour of EU membership. All ten of its MPs voted in favour of EU membership in the final vote on 2 December 1994.

#### *The Liberals*

The Liberals on Åland had a generally positive outlook towards the EU. In several Ålandic parliamentary speeches, Olof Erland stated that the EU would be beneficial for four reasons. These were peace, welfare, democracy, and the economy. Generally, the Liberals maintained noteworthy positivity towards international engagement on Åland. The Liberals also expressed some concern regarding the agricultural and the fisheries policies of the EU, but stated that they were nevertheless in favour of EU membership “even if the price is high”. This can be considered an indication of the party’s regionally dived voter base, which included people in the fishing and agriculture sectors. The Liberals were hesitant about the issue of expanding Åland’s taxation authority and frequently criticised the Centre Party’s attempt to link the issue to the EU process. On the topic of a separate MEP for Åland, the Liberals were in favour of it and stressed that it was justified on the grounds that the Ålanders

constituted a “separate people” within the EU framework. They recommended a ‘Yes’ vote in both referendums on Åland and that all of the seven MPs vote in favour of EU membership in the final vote.

#### *FS (Frisinnad Samverkan)*

The party viewed the EU and the European integration process primarily through economic terms and stressed that the four freedoms found in the EU were beneficial for Åland. Additionally, the FS stressed that the subsidiarity principle in the EU treaties could be invoked to expand Åland’s authority regarding taxation. FS rhetorically supported the Centre Party when it came to the threshold questions of a separate MEP and increased taxation. However, they still maintained a positive majority in favour of EU membership despite the lack of realisation of these issues. The party leadership already recommended a ‘Yes’ before the vote on 16 October and maintained this position throughout the process. However, the FS group was the only Ålandic parliamentary group which could not uphold group discipline. Harry Eriksson maintained his opposition to the EU during the whole process and voted against EU membership during the final vote on 2 December. Eriksson stated that the EU’s common agricultural policy and political centralisation both on Åland and at the EU level were not acceptable.

#### *Social Democrats*

The Social Democrats on Åland had a generally positive view on the prospects of EU membership during the EU referendum process. They recommended a ‘Yes’ vote in the first vote on 16 October and remained ambiguous towards the second referendum, which they initially opposed. The party stressed the importance of internationalisation on Åland and the importance of the EU common market to sustain welfare levels on Åland. The party maintained that the

market-based thinking commonly associated with the EU Common Market did not constitute a threat to the working conditions and labour rights on Åland. They were against the idea of increasing the taxation authority on Åland and criticised the Centre Party’s association of the taxation issue with the EU process. The Social Democrats were in favour of a separate MEP for Åland but did not label this issue as a threshold question. All of the Social Democrats’ four MPs voted in favour of EU membership in the final vote.

#### *The Unaligned (Obunden på Åland)*

The Unaligned on Åland were the only party to be clearly against the prospect of Åland joining the EU. During the debates, they insisted that the urbanisation process on Åland had been devastating for the countryside and archipelago, and that EU membership would hasten this process. Their MPs also insisted that the transferring of legislative authority from Åland to Brussels was inherently incompatible with the logic of the autonomy arrangement, which according to them, should be expanded at much as possible. They also stated their objections to the governance structures of the EU as inherently “anti-democratic” and likened the EU to a place where bureaucrats ruled supreme. They insisted that the EEA agreement was sufficient for Åland’s part. All three of Unaligned’s MPs voted against EU membership and also registered their reservations towards the decision in the Ålandic parliamentary records.

#### *Summary*

As a cross-cutting cleavage, the EU question clearly put stress on the Ålandic parties during this process. It is noteworthy that all the parties who voted in favour of EU membership had also expressed reservations at times. The largest party, the Centre Party, was ambiguous on the prospect of EU membership and their stance took

into consideration the developments in Sweden and Finland. Although they managed to sustain party discipline in the final vote, this was not self-evident during the period analysed in this article. The Liberals were ideologically positive but expressed concern regarding the agricultural and fisheries policies of the EU. The FS were largely positive but could not convince Harry Eriksson at any stage of the EU referendum process. The Social Democrats also framed their arguments in a defensive manner, such as that the EU “would not threaten” social equality or labour rights, which can be understood as a way of addressing the concerns of the grassroots of the party. The Unaligned were uniformly and consistently against EU membership.

### *5.3 Themes of the Debates*

This subsection provides an overview of the important themes that arose during these debates.

Beginning with the threshold questions (taxation and a separate MEP), we see an interesting divide among the political parties of Åland.

#### *The MEP issue*

Regarding the granting of a separate MEP for Åland, no party objected to the legitimacy of the Ålandic demand for direct representation in the European Parliament and several claims were made to justify this. The most commonly used argument was that Åland, like Finland, would transfer some of its legislative competencies to the EU and therefore advocated for compensation in the form of representation in the European Parliament. Some of the Liberal MPs also insisted that the Ålanders constituted a separate “people” within the larger framework of the EU.

#### *The taxation issue*

On the taxation front, a clear divide between the parties for and the parties against can be observed. The Centre Party, the conservative FS, and the Unaligned were all in favour of expand-

ing Åland’s authority regarding taxation, while the Liberals and Social Democrats expressed reservations regarding the benefit of it. The Liberals and Social Democrats also did not believe in the value of associating the EU process with the taxation issue. The Unaligned were critical of the Centre Party representatives who used term ‘threshold question’. However, the Unaligned eventually took a stance in favour of EU membership despite having not achieved the demands raised by the threshold questions.

#### *The urban-rural divide*

Concern regarding centralisation and urbanisation was clearly visible in the rhetoric of the Centre Party, the Unaligned, and Harry Eriksson (FS). To varying degrees they stressed the importance of combating the depopulation of the rural regions on Åland and the potential of European integration to further urbanisation. They were also sceptical towards transferring authority to Brussels. The EU’s Common Agricultural and Fisheries Policies were particularly singled out to be problematic for Ålandic farming and rural communities. The Liberals also stressed that this was problematic although their overall stance was pro-EU membership.

#### *International involvement on Åland*

The Liberals, the Social Democrats and the majority of FS stressed that the autonomy of Åland rested on international involvement and considered the EU process to politically and economically benefit the autonomy arrangement. The Premier and Centre Party leader Erlands-son also stressed that according to international law, the status of Åland was a decisive factor in the EU’s acceptance of derogations in the Åland Protocol. The Unaligned expressed doubts that the statement in the Åland Protocol amounted to official recognition of Åland’s status according to international law.

*The EU as a potential tool for the benefit of autonomy*

Another interesting theme was the understanding of the EU and its organs as a way to expand Åland's room for manoeuvre vis-à-vis Helsinki. This was expressed among all parties except the Unaligned and Harry Eriksson from FS. The European Court of Justice was particularly stressed as a way to put pressure on Finland when deemed necessary. During the debates, the Centre Party leader claimed that a 'No' vote could lead to greater dependency on Helsinki and would therefore weaken the functioning of the Ålandic autonomy.

*Connections to Finland and Sweden*

During the Ålandic referendum process, it was stressed that Finland's and Sweden's choices were of crucial importance. The Centre Party and the Unaligned especially emphasised that Åland's ties with Sweden were of utmost importance not only economically but also culturally. One Centre Party MP expressed fears that Finland would not demand making Swedish an official language of the EU if Sweden did not join. The Liberals' pro-EU membership stance was conditional on the EU memberships of Finland and Sweden.

*Gender Equality*

Although this topic was primarily debated during the early stages of this process, three female MPs from three different parties (the Social Democrats, FS, and the Liberals) stated their belief in the strength of EU equality directives in relation to national and regional legislation. However, they also admitted that the overall situation in the Nordic region was better in than the EU average terms of gender equality.

*Alternatives to EU membership?*

One of the common criticisms of the Åland Government by the 'No' camp (the Unaligned

and Harry Eriksson) and the Liberals was that they refused to put forward a concrete alternative to EU membership during the whole EU referendum process. During the referendum process, a few ideas regarding this were proposed by certain MPs. Olof Erland hypothesised about a potential Nordic union outside of the EU. The Unaligned proposed remaining a part of the EEA through a special agreement, citing that this was precedented in the EU. The fact that an alternative to EU membership would require a new political process was stated by Premier Erlandsson as one of the reasons a 'Yes' vote was a safer option than a 'No' vote.

*5.4 Concluding Remarks*

With the decision to join the EU on 2 December 1994, the Åland Islands remains in an exceptional situation. In the Nordic region, it remains the only territorial autonomy which preferred EU membership as opposed to another special arrangement while remaining outside of the EU. It should be noted that both the EU and Finland made significant accommodations to realise Ålandic EU membership instead of viewing the autonomy of Åland to be inherently incompatible with the aims of European integration. Considering the consequences of this decision, it is surprising that more attention has not been given to the EU referendum process on Åland.

This highlights the need for a differentiated analysis of territorial autonomies in relation to the EU. Although being a part of a state, territorial autonomies may have different sociopolitical realities that need to be taken into account. In the case of Nordic autonomies, the EU question provides an interesting framework not only for analysing the divergence of the paths chosen but also the multiplicity of perspectives on the EU found within the autonomies themselves. Parliamentary debates such as the ones analysed in this report provide an excellent insight on this. It is important to stress the diversity of opinions on

the EU in territorial autonomies and not to portray them simply as monolithic actors. This report applies this approach for the case of Åland during the EU accession process. By doing this, it has shown that the EU question was a divisive issue for the Ålandic political parties, which needed to take internal division and external developments in the region into account.

The referendum process on Åland provides important insight into the historical context of the decision taken 25 years ago. This report contextualises the decision of the Åland Parliament to join the EU in 1994. Hopefully this will contribute to create a better understanding of the Ålandic concerns regarding the EU during its quarter-century as a part of the EU, as well as enable a deeper understanding of potential related issues that may arise in the future.

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