

# The Eye of the Beholder: the Finns, Finland and Paris, 1870-1940

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Louis Clerc<sup>1</sup>

Nature is a temple in which living pillars  
Sometimes emit confused words;  
Man crosses it through forests of symbols  
That observe him with familiar glances

Excerpt from *Correspondences*, Charles Baudelaire<sup>2</sup>.

Images and perceptions are a constant problem for the researcher in the History of International Relations. None in the fields of humanities would nowadays write that the relations between states are explainable without references to those troublesome “mental forces”. Often, a researcher will have to find out in the discourses and conceptions what John C. Farrell and Asa P. Smith call “the gap between appearance and reality<sup>3</sup>”, and to ponder the place and the effect of this gap in the actions of the leaders of foreign policy.

There are numerous examples when images, prejudices, conceptions, ideologies have been so strong as to influence the policy of a given state. The way French leaders apprehended German power and their own capacity of action before the Second World War is a famous example of the strength of representations<sup>4</sup>. As a whole, values, norms, symbols, images, ideologies, representations of reality, religious or spiritual conceptions form a web of influence in foreign policy. To some extent, even the perception of national interest can be described as a representation: the interest of one’s country can be a representation, where events, information, assessment and prejudices mix to form a vision of the actual world.

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<sup>1</sup> Doctorant en histoire des relations internationales, université de Strasbourg, université de Turku.

<sup>2</sup> La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers / Laisser parfois sortir de confuses paroles ; L’homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles / Qui l’observent avec des regards familiers Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1861), *Spleen et idéal*, IV. *Correspondances* (Livres de Poche, Classiques, Paris, 1999, p. 55).

<sup>3</sup> *Image and reality in the World Politics*, ed. John C. Farrell & Asa P. Smith, Columbia University Press, NY, London, 1968, p. v.

<sup>4</sup> René Girault for example comes to terms with this problem in the reedition of his work on the French conception of Power, in his last book, *Etre historien des relations internationales* (Publications de la Sorbonne, Série internationale n°56, Paris, 1998).

Authors such as Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, Pierre Renouvin, Robert Jervis, René Girault, Robert Frank, Juhani Paasivirta or Michael Berry, in their works on various subjects, have expressed for the History of International Relations what Baudelaire puts on in the poetic form: the “statesman”, far from being a balanced machine considering things and interests with a perfectly rational glance, is the object of images, prejudices, ideologies, etc... Their effect is often hard to grasp, and to study them should be an exercise of humility and restraint. But ignore these forces altogether and limit oneself to the study of “hard forces” would be as hazardous as exaggerating the effect of representations. From the experience of research, it should be possible to approach a reasonable method, which would take these forces into consideration without exaggerating their effect.

The method should be different for each case, but some general rules can be set here, if we follow Arnold Wolfers when he writes that the researcher should be “mustered all the evidence that history, personal experience, introspection, common sense, and the gift of logical reasoning put at one’s disposal”. It is to the same working method that Marguerite Yourcenar hints at by saying that one should mix erudition with the “sympathy” for the men of the past<sup>5</sup>. In the study of the role of images in foreign policy, we should thrive to use erudition, the study of the documents, but also the feeling of proximity with the actors of the past, to understand how they could think as they did.

A good knowledge of the main actors is thus an indispensable first step when one tries to see the effect of images on foreign policy. What Duroselle and Renouvin call the “Statesmen” are the main leaders of foreign policy, and to know their mental landscape is a prerequisite to understand the way images and representations can influence their political actions. It is an interesting paradox that the same Duroselle and Renouvin who demanded from the researchers to broaden their focus from the “actions of the Kings” to the structures of the relations between human communities, should ask them also to concentrate so much on the Statesmen: objects of the “driving forces”, they are by no means passive objects, and the representations they have of their environment is important for a good understanding of their action. Statesmen do not only “sign written papers”, but they also conceive reality in a certain way and implement their own version of reality. Representations on a personal level are often the key to understand the actions of a leader of foreign

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<sup>5</sup> Refer to Marguerite Yourcenar, *Mémoires d’Hadrien, suivies de Carnets de notes de Mémoires d’Hadrien* (Gallimard, 1974, Paris), p. 330, and to Antoine Prost, *Douze leçons sur l’Histoire* (Points Seuil, Paris, 1996).

policy<sup>6</sup>. They can be as complex and as varied as is human action and reflection.

Another level can be useful to study, and it is the influence on the foreign policy decision of the actors of groups in a given society. These “societal influences”, the role of “real groups”, of the “environment”, should be studied with precautions, and don’t always give good or definite answers concerning the behavior of the statesman. But this angle can help to identify the values, the views of the world which the real group ruling a country’s foreign policy can be sensitive to<sup>7</sup>.

But finally, the most difficult step is to ascertain the role of these representations, their influence in the foreign policy decisions and actions. It is a difficult process, as one can be pushed to underestimate or on the contrary to overestimate the role of these “mental forces”. It is good to consider these forces in the maelstrom of influences that weight on the leaders of foreign policy: a foreign policy is a public policy, the product of the many interactions, conceptions, calculations present in a given society at one given time. As such, it is subject to many influences, among which images and representations. Certain concepts that are considered by the actors as obvious (national interest, foreign states and their power, one’s own power and role in the world, etc...) are in fact constructions based on images, biased appreciation of reality, prejudices, and interpretation. This is of course not always true, but the role of subjectivity and reconstruction of reality can be a major one in the conduct of foreign policy: often, the leaders of a country see the world abroad through the lens of their own representations, and interpret its turmoil with in mind their own codes and images.

In the case of the relation between a small national community and a great power, the role of images and representations can be overwhelming. Two things can be noted quickly. First of all, there is often little information about a given small state in the great power’s foreign policy system, or the information remains at a low level, a knowledge among experts. In that case, images, representations can be overwhelming in the few a leader of foreign policy has

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<sup>6</sup> Two good examples of the role personal conceptions and images play in the foreign policy conceptions of a leader can be found in the books of Martti Ruotsila concerning Churchill and Finland (*Churchill ja Suomi, Winston Churdhillin Suomea koskeva ajattelu ja toiminta, 1900-1955*, Otava, Helsinki, 2002) and mostly in the extensive biography of George Clemenceau by Jean-Baptiste Duroselle. In this book, Duroselle constantly puts forward the role of images and conceptions in the public action of Clemenceau (Clemenceau, Fayard, Paris, 1988), to such an extent for example as to draw a direct parallel between the admiration of Clemenceau for classical Greece and his contempt for Imperial Rome or Prussian Germany.

<sup>7</sup> One excellent example of using this angle of approach is given by Michael Berry in his study of the relations between the United States and Finland, *American Foreign Policy and the Finnish Exception, Ideological Preferences and Wartime Realities* (Suomen Historiallinen Seura, Studia Historica 24, Helsinki, 1987).

at a particular moment. Secondly, a small state is seen mostly through the vision of the global system and the interest of the great power. But this vision of national interest itself can be influenced by images. As well, inside this iron frame of this representation of the great power's national interest, representations can influence the way the small states is seen in the global system. Representations can thus find a place in the many influences weighting on foreign policy actions towards small states. Patrick Salmon puts it in a nutshell when writing in the case of Great-Britain's representations about Finland, that : « They thus ranged, in the case of the British Foreign Office, from views on major policy issues such as the need to maintain a balance of powers in Europe or to avoid undertaking military commitments on the Continent, to the presumption that Norwegians were 'legalistic', Swedes 'militaristic' or 'slow-witted' and so on. Without adding up to anything so precise as a 'policy' towards Scandinavia, such views inevitably coloured routine diplomatic exchanges... »<sup>8</sup>.

In the vast historical movement that gave birth to the consciousness of a Finnish nation, some Finns set as a goal for their action to present abroad this process of national construction. Their effort did not only aim at "selling" abroad the Grand-Duchy's fight against "russification". They also wanted to prove Finnish national worthiness, to present Finland and the Finns as one of the "nations" which blossomed in Europe during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Modest in size, this national gathering was to be presented as a developed, intellectually and artistically successful nation. It should be emphasized as the result of old Finnish traditions, expressed in literature and memories, the repository of a glorious past and the seat of an active and successful economy.

Considering the Europe of their times, Finns such as Leo Méchelin, Eero Erkkö, Rudolf Holsti or Wenzell Hagelstam wanted to be a part of it. They felt a link with, and a fascination for this Europe while walking through the streets of Paris, London, Berlin or even Rome, Geneva and Stockholm. They wanted the young nation which they were representing to be part of what they saw as a vast gathering of knowledge, ideas, conceptions and creations. As the vanguard of their nation, they felt more than ever what George Maude has called a "sense of kinship" with "civilized" Europe<sup>9</sup>. This action towards foreign

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<sup>8</sup> Salmon, Patrick : *Scandinavia and the Great Powers 1890-1940*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> This subject is dealt with in many studies of Finland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the creation of Finnish national identity. For some general information, Juhani Paasivirta's *Suomi ja Eurooppa, autonomiakausi ja kansainväliset kriisit 1808-1914* (Kirjayhtymä, Helsinki, 1981) and *Pienet Valtiot Euroopassa, Kansainvälisen järjestelmän muutoksia 1800- ja 1900- luvuilla* (SHS, Studia Historica 139, Helsinki, 1988) are especially interesting. Concerning the Inter-War period, one will also find general information in a book from the same author, *Finland and Europe, The early Years of independence, 1917-1939* (SHS, Studia Historica 29, Helsinki, 1988). George Maude discusses the "sense of kinship" between the Finnish elite and "civilized" Europe in the third chapter of his

societies was thus not only conceived as a tool of influence in the fight against russification, but it was also a deeper claim, the quest for an ideal that some Finns foresaw for their nation.

These attempts at presenting Finland abroad did not lose their purpose following the attainment of independence in 1917: they remained a part of Finland's external action. Their focus shifted from propaganda in favor of the "Finnish cause" to a more or less conscious effort to justify and "explain" abroad Finnish neutrality, the solidity of the Finnish state, the national worthiness of Finland or the democratic nature of its regime. Used by a small state as a tool of its foreign policy, this "biased presentation" of Finnish realities is easily observable until the Second World War and even beyond it.

This article will briefly discuss one dimension of this effort, namely the way it was directed towards France, and received there. It will attempt to deal with two sets of issues:

First of all, what were the general patterns according to which the Finns presented themselves to France and the French until 1940?

Secondly, how did different groups in France receive this image? Particularly, attention will be given to the effect the image of Finland had on French foreign policy and its attitude towards Helsinki.

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What can one say of the efforts made by the Finns to present their national construction and situation in the Russian empire to a French audience before the year 1918?

As a rule, these efforts mostly aimed at presenting Finland as a developed and "European" national project. Several themes existed in this discourse, especially culture, the arts, Finnish economic achievements, etc... The main elements of this presentation can be gathered from a score of publications in French available before 1918 in Paris and written by Finns or those French people eager to perpetuate a certain image of Finland.

Some of these texts are well known, like the French translation of Zacharias Topelius's *Finland framstäldt i teckningar*. Written in 1845, this book was published in French in 1853. We find another example with the volume edited by a group of Finns around Léo Mechelin, *Suomi yhdennellötoista*

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thesis (Finland and Britain 1854-1914, External Ph. D. thesis in History, University of London, March 1970), Russia's European Annex. Mari-Liis Aroella also sheds an interesting light on this feeling of kinship among Finnish writers and artists in her Master's thesis, *Jeunesse oblige! Images de Paris dans les jeunes littöatures estonienne et finlandaise des annöes 1890-1920, m emoire de ma ıtrise*, nov. 1995, Universit e Paris III Sorbonne Nouvelle. She writes about this will of a new writer's generation to discover Europe as the spiritual home of their national feeling: "Jeunesse Oblige! Said the Young Estonians. As well as the Young Finnish or the Fire Bearers, they saw this youth as the necessary element that gave them the gratifying role of intermediaries between Europe and their fatherland...".

vuosisadalla (La Finlande au 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle). Here again, this book published in 1893 was translated in to French in 1894 by Gabriel Biaudet.

Other texts are less well known, like those by Rafael Erich, the efforts of Léo Méchelin at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to publish a newspaper in Paris (*L'Européen*), his participation as a lawyer in the international debate about the special status of Finland or his leaflet presenting Finland for the 1900 Paris World Fair<sup>10</sup>.

However, if we take this literature as a whole, four main dimensions can be found. These are major dimensions of these publications which show how the Finns try to present their national construction in France.

The first dimension of this discourse stresses legal themes. The Finns aimed at presenting to the French public the “special status” of autonomous Finland. This status was described as a good compromise, based on good will and mutual agreement, ensuring good relations between Finland and Russia. This result of the Tsar’s will was presented as legally binding for the Russian authorities. Legal specialists such as Léo Méchelin were particularly important in this regard, as they used their training and scientific network to defend this special status in French-speaking publications, especially in the face of the “russification” movement. This Finnish legalist discourse<sup>11</sup> managed to

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<sup>10</sup> The literature used in this article has been gathered from various sources during research both in France and in Finland. In France, the main sources for contemporary written material concerning Finland are the Nordic Fund of the Sainte-Geneviève Library (Fond nordique, Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, Paris), the BDIC (Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine, Nanterre) and the National University Library of Strasbourg (Bibliothèque Nationale Universitaire, Strasbourg). In Finland, the University Libraries both in Turku and Helsinki have been very useful (Turun Yliopiston Kirjasto, Helsingin Yliopiston Kirjasto, Åbo Akademi Bibliotek). So has been for example the book collection of the National Archives of Finland (Kansallisarkisto, Helsinki). The book by Martti Julkunen and Anja Lehkoinen, *A Select List of Books and Articles in English, French and German on Finnish Politics in the 19th and 20th Century* (Institute of Political History, University of Turku, 1967), although selective, is an invaluable working tool in this domain. Concerning Léo Méchelin, this Finn is a fascinating character inside the movement of national construction in autonomous Finland. A cosmopolitan, multilingual liberal, he was one of the rare Finnish politicians to have an eye on France and to consider propaganda in Paris as worth the effort. Until his death in 1914, he was the leading figure of Finnish political, economic and cultural propaganda towards France. He was not the only one, but was possibly the most influential character in a very limited group of politicians and activists interested by France in Finland. General elements can be found in a short book edited by Pirkko Leino-Kaukiainen, *Léo Méchelin, 1839-1914* (Helsingin Kaupunginmuseo, Memoria n°4, 1989). Méchelin, a major figure in autonomous Finland, has been largely ignored by biographers and the historical research at large. The only biography about him would be better qualified as an hagiography, written by a close friend and collaborator of Méchelin, Th. Rein: *Léo Méchelinin elämä* (Otava, Helsinki, 1915).

<sup>11</sup> The notions of respect for the law and moral superiority are often linked in the Finnish discourse aimed at foreign actors. Finland likes until 1940 to present itself as a country abiding to international legal standards (whether they are the laws of the autonomous status or those of

convince many in France, especially in the circles of national rights activists or international law specialists. The land mark of this legalist discourse is the address against the February Manifest in 1899. This address met with some success in France, and many members of the intellectual, academic or artistic elite signed it. What amounts to a significant section of this elite signed up for Finland next to symbolic figures such as Anatole France or Emile Zola.

If this legalist dimension was closely linked with the political fight against the Russian attempts to dispose of the autonomy status, the artistic dimension was more about presenting Finland and the Finns as a flourishing culture. The understanding here was that the Finnish people, to be recognized as a “nation” in Europe, were to be seen as the continuation of “national” traditions. Finland also had to appear as the place of vivid artistic and cultural production. This “national romantic” view is summarized by Eric Hobsbawm when he speaks of “the discovery of popular tradition and its transformation into “national tradition”<sup>12</sup>. It is the presentation of this national tradition, this national culture, literature, handicrafts, to the French public that can be termed the artistic dimension of the process. In essence, it was a presentation and a glorification of a specifically Finnish culture, which was presented as having a “national spirit” of its own. In this domain, the celebrations of the 1900 Paris World Fair, with the erection of a Finnish pavilion distinct from the Russian one, are highly symbolic. The Fair was the occasion to present for the first time to a large French audience the artistic production of a nation in the making. This artistic dimension had an important effect on the French elite at the beginning of the century. Finland started to emerge in this respect, too.

Finally, there was an economic dimension to the discourse presented here. It appeared in texts arguing how much Finland had achieved economically, and how successful it was in its attempt to fill the economic gap between itself and the rest of industrialized Europe. The collective work *Suomi yhdennellätoista vuosisadalla* (*La Finlande au 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle*) developed this theme of the economic achievements at length. The images of Tampere as the “Manchester

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the League of Nations). Especially during the Inter-War period, Finland like the other Nordics indulges often in lecturing the Great Powers about the moral superiority of Nordic neutrality and democratic system. Patrick Salmon, in his book *Scandinavia and the Great Powers, 1890-1940* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), deals at length with this question, pp. 170-180. He reminds the reader of the “cliché” Nordic politician of the Interwar period, lecturing the big states about their obligations regarding international laws and standards.

<sup>12</sup> Hobsbawm is quoted, p. 200, by Marina Vituhnoskaja in her contribution to the book *Imperial and national identities in pre-revolutionary, soviet and post-soviet Russia* (ed. Chris J. Chulos et Johannes Remy, SKS, *Studia Historica* 66, Helsinki 2002), “Karelians in the context of Russian imperial policy during the pre-revolutionary decade”.

of the North” or the electricity production in Imatra are examples of images that the Finns tried to pass to the French enlightened audience<sup>13</sup>.

After these three specific sets of issues, the dimension that comes last is a general one, blending the other ones into a general claim: Finland and the Finnish people were presented as a “nationality” of Europe, oppressed by Russia but most importantly distinct from it. At the beginning of the century, and in the wake of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (the century of national movements), the “oppressed nationalities” issues was very topical in France. Intellectual debate between for example Ernest Lavisse and Georges Sorel, discussions revolving around such notions as “nation”, “people”, “state”, were particularly fierce in Paris. In these conversations, Finland managed to appear on the side of Poland, Czechoslovakia or others as a national project, bearing all the marks of an organized, developed national gathering. It is clear, therefore, that the Finns were at least successful in this attempt to show their national worthiness and their link to Europe. We will see that this image of Finland as a separate “national” entity inside the Russian empire corresponded also to a vision in France that already drew a symbolic line between Russia proper and the nationalities of the empire’s Western border.

We thus find a clear effort by some Finns to present the Finnish process of national construction in France. But this effort in Paris was relatively less developed than the one aimed towards other countries (Great-Britain, the United-States or Germany for example). We can find some reasons for this fact that France and Paris didn’t appear as worthy of efforts as Washington or London.

First of all, the Francophile tradition in Finland was very weak before 1918, as it would continue to be in independent Finland. One can argue that most of the scholars and publicists that were the backbone of the propaganda

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<sup>13</sup> There is an interesting parallel here to be done between these dimensions of the Finnish effort of presentation towards France and what Juha Sihvola wrote in *Helsingin Sanomat* at the beginning of May 2003 about the “national writing of History” in Finland (HS, 7<sup>th</sup> of May 2003, *Historian kansallinen tehtävä ennen ja nyt, Vieraskynä*). Sihvola underlines the persistence in Finland of a trend in historical writings, which more or less consciously aims at treating historical subject with an agenda, in order to present Finland and its history in the best possible way. Sihvola points at three sets of issues that would compose this national writing of History: what he calls the “therapy of Soviet friendship”; the demonstration of Finnish European roots; and finally the performances of what he calls “Oy Suomi Ab”, the Finnish model of economic development and performance. The similarity is striking with the dimensions we underlined, showing how political, economic, artistic, mental elements mix in these attempts to show the better face of Finland abroad. The limits between propaganda, national construction, management of national identity, good will and outward lies are often difficult to set in these issues. The example of Virtual Finland, the official Finnish portal on the Internet, is interesting: where to draw the line between presenting the best sides of Finland and projecting abroad what amounts to propaganda concerning the situation of the country or its history?

effort evoked here could speak or write in French. But this surely had more to do with their education in imperial Russia than with any wish to be especially understood in France. One can find during the 19<sup>th</sup> century some Francophile circles in Finland, among a certain school of historians (as shown by Juhani Mylly in his recent book<sup>14</sup>), in the limited club of roman and classical languages specialists<sup>15</sup> or among the new generation of Finnish artists and writers. But these Francophile circles were spread very thinly and their influence was marginal. Paris had a strong appeal to artistic circles (painters, writers for example of the Fire Bearers generation, etc...), but for political models and influences, the Finns looked elsewhere: for the Finnish elite, Paris was for the heart, London or Berlin for the head. This shows particularly when we compare the action of the Finns in Paris and their action in London for example.

The particular situation of France on the international scene was also a problem for the Finns. Paris had managed, by allying militarily with Russia in 1893, to get out of the diplomatic quarantine Bismarck had imposed to the French after their defeat of 1870. If the relations between Saint-Petersburg and Paris were not without repressed feelings, they were for both countries an essential element of their international policy. Paris and the French military saw in Russia the strategic balance to Germany. The strategic alliance was vital for France in times of peace, and, should the war come, the general thought was that Russia would provide the cannon fodder and resources that France needed. On the other hand, Saint-Petersburg and the Tsar became more and more dependent from French money. The Russians found increasing amounts of cash on the Parisian financial market, in order to finance their economic development: the railroad network, the first industries, and such things. The relation between one of the most politically backward regimes of Europe at the time and the country of the Paris Commune, as strange as it may seem, was fuelled by strong mutual interests.

For the Finns, these relations between France and Russia were a problem: between 1914 and 1918, lots of them wished for a German victory against the ally of Russia. There was an ambiguity, one in many ways characteristic of French-Finnish relations: if some Finns could find in France models of democracy and discourses of freedom for the oppressed nationalities, the hard facts of international life made Paris an ally of the oppressor.

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<sup>14</sup> Kansallinen projekti, historiankirjoitus ja politiikka autonomisessa suomessa (Kirja-Aurora, Turku, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> Arthur Långfors is here one of the main figures. Tauno Nurmela evokes his role in francophile circles in Finland in his memoirs, *Lettres de mon paradis perdu* (Publications du Département d'Etudes Françaises, n°1, Université de Turku, Turku, 1999).

These relations between Paris and Russia also made the action of the Finns in France more difficult by bringing to France many pro-Russian publications. The views of Russia concerning the “Finnish problem” were spread via a network of papers and books, and with the blessing or the absence of reaction of the French authorities. Leaflets, books, articles were produced by the Russians in France with the help of French authorities<sup>16</sup>. Some elements concerning this role of Russia and the French government into “influencing” the press can be found both in the classical thesis of René Girault, *Emprunts Russes et Investissements Français en Russie*<sup>17</sup> and in the *Histoire Générale de la Presse française*, an extremely detailed history of the French press<sup>18</sup>.

The situation was made even more difficult for the Finns in Paris during the First World War. In his *Histoire de la Finlande*<sup>19</sup>, Aurélien Sauvageot describes shortly the action of pro-Finnish circles in Paris between 1914 and 1917. From his account, this action was a limited and difficult one. The war with Germany had official France considering any claims of national identity in the Russian empire as anathema. Nationalities were to be silent when the war was on, and the censorship went to great length to enforce this rule. Exceptions exist, but most of the national claims in the Russian empire were seen before the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia as spurred by German propaganda. In the World War, freedom for the “oppressed nationalities” was subordinated to the war interests of France and its allies.

But what kind of reception did these efforts of the Finns find in France before 1918?

Outside the official circles of French foreign policy leaders, this reception depended largely on the way Finland symbolized some debates or views existing already inside France. A group of people in the French elite could be receptive to the discourse of the Finnish propaganda in the frame of their general views: Finland for them was a symbol of something.

This group which could feel sympathy for the Finnish cause was limited in France, but it shared features of its own and could be near from the

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<sup>16</sup> A good example, clearly linked with Finland, of this pro-Russian production can be found in the book by the Lieutenant-Général M. Borodkine, published in 1912, *La Finlande comme partie intégrante de l'empire russe* (Librairie H. Welter, Paris, 1912). But this production was very wide and dealt mostly with economic matters (the whole point being to persuade the French to subscribe to Russian loans, for example).

<sup>17</sup> *Emprunts russes et investissements français en Russie, 1887-1917* (réédition, Comité pour l'Histoire économique et Financière de la France, Ministère de l'Economie, des Finances et de l'Industrie, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1999).

<sup>18</sup> Dir. Bellanger, Claude ; Godechot, Jacques ; Guiral, Pierre ; Terrou, Fernand : *Histoire Générale de la Presse Française, Tome III : de 1871 à 1940* (Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1972).

<sup>19</sup> *Histoire de la Finlande* (Imprimerie Nationale, Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, Paris, 1968).

circles of power. It was an emanation of the French political and intellectual debate of the times (roughly 1880-1917). For this group, Finland was first and foremost seen in the context of the “oppressed nationalities” debate. Georges-Henri Soutou, in a book he edits in 1995, reaches the same conclusion than we do on this subject and on the characteristics of this group<sup>20</sup>. He qualifies them as a group of “Radical (in the French sense) leftists, non socialists, with international connections and an eye on international matters”.

This quote describes well this group of French that could see Finland with a positive view. We could nevertheless complete this appreciation of Soutou on a few points concerning the precise case of Finland.

The term of “radical leftist” cannot be explained outside of the French political context. Political liberals, individualists, entrenched in the local level, the “radicals” in the French sense occupied a position on the center-left of the political spectrum. They found their origin in the end of the French 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the fight for the Republic spawned these republican, anti-clerical groups<sup>21</sup>. They could be sensitive to notions of freedom, liberty of the oppressed nations and opposition to autocratic Russia in the memory of the principles of the French Revolution. Finland was seen through this political prism as the land of a weak and rightful people fighting for freedom. As a whole, the “freedom for nationalities” speech was a part of the political discourse of leftist groups at the time in France. Finally, the radical groups revolved mostly around personalities: publicists, journalists like the team of the *Mercure de France*, historians or academics like Leroy-Ladurie, Paul Boyer or Charles Seignobos, politicians, artists, etc... These characters are the same that we observe writing about the “Finnish cause” in newspapers, books or reviews.

Soutou also notes that these sympathizers with the nationalities cause were non-socialists. In the case of Finland, it was only partly true: French socialists were also sympathetic to Finland. The Finnish cause was used by them as an example of the methods of tyranny in Russia, and the Finns appeared to them as the symbols of the fight against the Russian tsarist regime. Jean Jaurès, the leading figure of French socialism at the time, wrote often for

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<sup>20</sup> Castelbajac, Ghislain de ; Gasquet, Sébastien de ; Soutou, Georges-Henri : *Recherches sur la France et le problème des nationalités pendant la Première Guerre Mondiale (Pologne-Lithuanie-Ukraine)* (Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, Mondes Contemporains, Paris, 1995).

<sup>21</sup> This quick description is very far from telling the whole story about a political phenomenon that is largely specific to France, the French political evolution and political philosophy. Radicalism in France can be seen in more details in the work of Serge Bernstein, for example: *Histoire du Parti Radical, T.I La recherche de l'âge d'or (1919-1926)* (Presses de la FNSP, Paris, 1980), *T.II Crise du radicalisme (1926-1939)* (Presses de la FNSP, Paris, 1981). In English, a useful source on the political landscape of the French Third Republic is the *Historical Dictionary of the Third French Republic, 1870-1940*, by Amanda S. Bourque, Patrick H. Hutton and Amy J. Staples (Greenwood Press, Westport, CT, 1986).

the Finnish cause in *L'Humanité*. Some of the journalists in this paper, the official voice of the French socialist movement, came from *L'Européen*, a paper created by the action of Léo Méchelin.

In the interest of this group for Finland, one can thus find characteristic patterns.

Finland first of all was less considered, less well known than other nationalities, for example Poland. Historical reasons here are very important: Poland was nearer to the French for reasons that dated way back to the Napoleonic era. On the other hand, the Polish rebellions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had been followed with some interest in France. But there is also here something deeper at stake, which is a certain way in France of seeing Europe: the North and the Baltic for the French are often seen as very far, way farther than mere physical distance could suggest. This psychological remoteness finds many illustrations in the French foreign policy during the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>22</sup>.

Considering this remoteness, Finland was considered mostly in the frame of debates that existed in France. The reasons to be interested in Finland in France before 1917 changed according to the actors we deal with. Someone like Charles Seignobos<sup>23</sup> could see in Finland the symbol of nationalities oppressed by autocratic rulers. Geouffre de la Pradelle, on the other hand, was sensitive to Finland as a symbol of the contempt of the Russian Tsar for international standards and laws. Law specialists like him could try to defend what they saw as a threatened legal status. Socialists could see Finland as a victim of the Russian tyranny, while partisans of the newly born "Europeanist" movement were inclined for other reasons to side with oppressed Finland. Fed on suspicion towards Russia and the tsarist regime that was widespread in these groups, the sympathy for Finland existed for all these reasons in groups of the French elite.

However, the Finns were mostly considered in the debate about oppressed nationalities, which was strong in France at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The part of French elite described above represented what Georges-Henri Soutou terms an idealistic way of seeing these problems of nationalities in Europe. For these groups, nations like Finland had to be freed from the shackles that empires had put on them, their rights recognized, and their

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<sup>22</sup> Claude Battesti gives an example of this lack of interest in France towards the North and the Baltic Sea when she speaks of the naval policy of Napoleon the 3rd, in her thesis *La marine de Napoléon III, une politique navale*, (Thèse sous la direction du Professeur Michel Vergé-Franceschi, SHM, Vincennes, 1997. 2 tomes).

<sup>23</sup> A famous French historian, Charles Seignobos is one of the front figures in France of the historical method, with works such as *Introduction aux études historiques*, written with Charles-Victor Langlois in 1898 (Paris, Kimé, éd. 1992), or *La méthode historique appliquée aux sciences sociales*, published in 1901 (Paris, Alcan, 1901). He is with Ernest Lavisse one of the historians that wrote about Finland in reviews and papers at the beginning of the century.

national “genius” accounted for. Once free, they would acknowledge France as their helper and become allies with Paris. This image of Finland was present in the same groups we isolated.

But these visions of Finland did not always stem from naive admiration for Finland and the Finns. Some of them were balanced accounts of the ups and downs of a national construction. But even then, the general feeling was positive and Finland evoked to some in France a strong and successful national construction, oppressed in its rights by an autocratic empire. The book by Pierre Morane on Finland and the Caucasus is a very good example of the complexity of this vision. Morane describes Finland in warmly positive terms, along the lines of political and social debates that were widespread in France: Finland the young people, the developed, creative national construction, the people starving for freedom... At the same time, Morane points at some issues like the status of the Jews in Finland which he sees as problematic. But the overall appreciation is massively positive<sup>24</sup>. The comparison one can draw with the other part of Morane’s book, dealing with the Caucasus, is very interesting: Finland appears in a much more positive way than Morane’s beautiful but backward Caucasus.

This comparison is also interesting if we consider that Finland was seen in the context of a symbolic line separating Russia and all things deemed “Russian” from Europe. It is an important conclusion of Sophie Coeurée’s book concerning the vision of Russia in France during the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>25</sup> that the French, before 1917, applied to Russia a symbolic dividing line. Representations and images separated Russia proper, deemed uneducated, autocratic, backward but potentially powerful, and the nationalities of the Russian Western border (Finland, Poland, the Ukraine, etc), which were seen as more educated, developed, flourishing than Russia. This development is interesting: even someone as fond of Russia as Paul Boyer could admit that this huge country was not really in Europe. Many French commentator could, at the same time, consider Russia positively as a good and important ally for France and think of it as a feudal semi-barbaric state. Russia and the Russians were considered very ambiguously, and, if seen through a symbolic dividing line, the Western nationalities of the Russian empire like Finland were considered as nearer to “Europe”.

This movement of sympathy for Finland, depending mostly on the way Finland could symbolize some French domestic debates, can be traced all

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<sup>24</sup> Pierre Morane, *Finlande et Caucase* (Au Seuil de l’Europe, Plon, Paris, 1900). Morane was a journalist for *Le Correspondant*, and he collects in his book several articles he wrote for the paper about the Russian empire and its people.

<sup>25</sup> Sophie Coeurée, *La grande lueur à l’Est. Les Français et l’Union Soviétique, 1917-1939* (Seuil, Paris, 1999).

the way to 1918. But if we plan to ponder its effect on the French foreign policy before 1918, then we have to be modest. It is a matter of fact that positive views towards Finland existed in France, and that they had an audience in some circles among the French elite. But it would be a great leap of faith to exaggerate this movement and to say that it had a direct and overwhelming effect on French foreign policy before 1918. In the frenzied atmosphere of the First World War, France had imperatives of its own: the alliance with Russia was one of them. Most of all, the political world in France was generally divided over the nationalities issue, and a realist conservative assessment of the nationalities situation was also widespread in political circles. This way of seeing the problem largely balanced the idealistic approach discussed earlier.

George-Henri Soutou, again, is an interesting source concerning this realistic assessment of problems of nationalities in the French foreign policy. Soutou and his co-authors (especially Sébastien de Gasquet) conclude in the case of Ukraine and Lithuania in the same way that we would like to do in the Finnish case. Concerning Finland, we also find two different approaches towards the problem. The realistic approach stresses the necessity for France to keep a functioning and unified Russian ally. Should the situation change, the nationalities have to be conceived as directed towards Germany, able to repel its influence and to counter Germany. This view of the nationalities issue in Russia was at full swing during the War, when France saw the Russian help as invaluable against Germany. The other view stressed the importance of these nationalities rights to self-determination and saw them as possible allies to France, unified in the same values. It was the one we described before concerning Finland.

These two ways of seeing nationalities can be traced, sometimes in the positions of the same leaders. Clemenceau is a fine example, who, as described by Jean-Baptiste Duroselle<sup>26</sup>, often navigated between these two views. But Clemenceau is mostly a good symbol of how much the realist assumptions could be strong: once Prime Minister of France, Clemenceau saw the question of Finland essentially through the prism of the war with Germany. Russia being an ally of France, national claims were to be avoided as a source of stress for the empire. This view on the general situation of France was overwhelming during the war: clearly, Finland and the Finns had nothing to offer in exchange for the French support to their national claims. On the other hand, a short window of opportunity appearing during the winter of 1917-1918 sees the sympathy for the Finns reappear at the head of the French state. Stephen Pichon, Minister for Foreign Affairs in the Clemenceau government

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<sup>26</sup> Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *Clemenceau* (Fayard, Paris, 1988).

between 1917 and 1919, seems to be the most directly influenced by this sympathy<sup>27</sup>.

During the winter of 1917-1918, the recognition of Finnish independence by France comes as a surprise in a context marked mostly by suspicion towards national claims. Those are often seen as spurred by German influence in an attempt to weaken Russia. But it comes out of the study of this event that Finland as a symbol of national righteousness came for once to correspond with the perceived interests of French policy. This conjunction was also made easier by personal factors, like the presence of Stephen Pichon as Minister for Foreign Affairs in France. Considering the chaotic situation in Russia, France thought it possible to create points of stability on the Russian territory. This assessment of the situation created a course of action which was to recognize some of these groups, among which nationalities: Finland, seen as a developed entity, was a good candidate for that. Paris recognized its independence on the 4<sup>th</sup> of January 1918. But this recognition was but a moment, an improvisation. It was helped by the role of French agents in Finland and a general atmosphere of improvisation and chaos in the French policy towards Russia at the time.

The role of this positive image is therefore not easy to comprehend. The personal factors, the thoughts of actors are important to ascertain. We can see for example that in contrast with the suspicion and caution on the Finnish case that Clemenceau shows, Stephen Pichon displays a much more positive attitude. But the main thing is to consider the question in terms of influences. France during the winter 1917-1918 was in a period of complete reevaluation of its policy towards Russia. The general chaos in the Russian zone brought many improvisations, all of them trying by different means to achieve the reconstruction of the ideal Russia conceived by the French: an allied strong state, acknowledging French economic and strategic interests, and directed against Germany. In one phase of this French action towards Russia, Finland appears as a good candidate to constitute poles of stability on the Russian territory. Many factors help this development: the positive image of a developed national gathering, the presence at the head of the French state of people influenced by this idea, comes to correspond with a vision of the

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<sup>27</sup> The terms of the letter Pichon sends to the French representative in Helsinki the 4th of January 1918 are interesting in this regard. Pichon writes that France wishes to recognize Finland's independence, and welcomes Finland in the « society of the free nations... » (Archives Diplomatiques Françaises, série Guerre 14-18, sous-série Russie, vol. 710, Russie-Finlande 1918, Stephen Pichon to Petrograd, London, Washington, Rome and Helsinki, 4th of January 1918, Helsinki n°2, 10h45). The terms of this recognition and the ones used by Pichon until February in the relations with Finland are interesting also if compared with the recognition of Ukraine.

French interest. Finland as a symbol for once corresponded with Finland as a geo-strategic interest.

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How did efforts to present the Finns in France adapt to a new situation after 1918? We can say here that if it went on, some new aspects came up after the end of the First World War alongside the old ones.

First of all, we can see the same will among some Finns to present Finland “at its best” in France. After 1917 this task fell mainly to the Finnish representatives in France, along a few general guidelines: Finland as a stable country, Finland as a Nordic neutral, Finland as a national success, etc... Carl Enckell, and more importantly Harri Holma from 1927 to 1943 contributed heavily to this image building work in France<sup>28</sup>. Some publications can be found also during this period, whose aim is to present Finland to a French audience. They can be translations, like the book by J.O. Hannula on the Civil War of 1918<sup>29</sup>, collective works like *La Finlande en 1937*<sup>30</sup> or works written by French speaking authors<sup>31</sup>. This presentation of Finland during the Inter War period had a significant part in selling to the French audience the discourse of neutrality and Nordic cooperation: Finland was to be seen as a peace-loving neutral with its neutrality guaranteed by peaceful Nordic neighbors. The literature also stressed the success of Finnish national construction and the democratic nature of the Finnish regime and institutions. When it was directed towards France, this production also tried to present historical facts about Finland in the most acceptable way: the German involvement in the Civil War of 1918, essentially, had to be presented as a life or death choice made in front of overwhelming odds, and the German orientation of the summer 1918 as an accident in a troubled context.

We can also observe the same tendency in Finland after 1917 to direct the effort of presentation less towards France than towards Great-Britain or the United States. Paris was often seen as less important than London or

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<sup>28</sup> There are various sources concerning the work of Carl Enckell and Harri Holma. The official papers of the two ambassadors are in the archives of the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs (Ulkoasiainministeriö, Helsinki). Some of their private papers are in the National Archives (Kansallisarkisto, Helsinki) and, for Holma, in the Manuscripts Fund of the Helsinki University Library (Helsingin Yliopisto Kirjasto, Käsikirjoitus kokoelma, Helsinki). On the French side, documents can be found in the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs (Archives Diplomatiques, Quai D’Orsay, Paris) and in the National Archives (Archives Nationales, Paris). These papers give a good insight in what was the action of the Finnish representatives in France, especially in spreading a certain image of Finland.

<sup>29</sup> A book translated by Jean-Louis Perret, *La Guerre d’indépendance de Finlande en 1918* (Payot, Paris, 1938).

<sup>30</sup> A book of presentation of Finland published in 1937 in French by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Finnish-French Trade Association.

<sup>31</sup> Like for example Jean-Louis Perret with *Portrait de la Finlande* (Plon, Paris, 1937).

Washington, Berlin of course or even Stockholm. The managing of Finland's image in France thus became more and more the job of personalities: ambassadors, representatives, but also French people, publicists, journalists, politics... As was the case before 1917, this image was propagated in French also by writers, linguists, publicists and academics who were ready to help for several reasons. Sections of the French elite could be sensitive to the anticommunist morale of Finnish history (like for example Jacques Bainville, the extreme-right wing historian and journalist of the Action Française movement), they could be attached to the expression of Finnish culture, admire the Finnish way of life, etc... But we can see that, like before 1918, the French elite reacted to Finland along the lines fixed by their domestic debates, appreciations, values and views. Along these lines, Finns in Paris during these years often found a group of people ready to help in the spreading of an image of Finland. This image became in a way very important when times of war came back. Finland was quite unknown in France, and the limited knowledge available on this country came mostly from images. Those were so sometimes more decisive in the French decision making about Finland than actual facts.

The Inter War period shows also the same ambiguity in the coexistence of two ways of considering Finland. First of all there existed a "value-driven" way, which considered Finland mostly in a positive way, as the symbol of some debates existing in France. There was also a more realistic assessment, or at least pseudo-realistic: Finland was considered as a strategic pawn in the game of European and mostly French security, and assessed in terms of its role in what was seen as French national interest. As for the recognition of Finnish independence, these two assessments, when they corresponded, created an action towards Finland. To their effect can be added a third dimension, which is a personal dimension: Finland could be considered as a good or bad partner or could have some personal advocates in the French foreign policy hierarchy.

It is thus possible to see a potential sympathy in France for Finland, based mostly on a view of this country as a symbol of values congenial to some groups in France. On the other hand, it is also possible to see a view of Finland through the prism of the perceived interests of French security. But these two views share a fundamental common feature, which is that Finland was considered mostly through views of the world, assessments, debates, which were domestically active in France. The French, in their many different ways, saw this remote, largely unknown country through the way they saw the world at large, and through what they hoped for the world.

If we talk about what the French thought of Finland after 1918, we have to progress from the inside-out and with many precautions: knowing France and the many ways to see the world that different groups had in France is the first and essential step if we want to understand the views about Finland

in France. We can then consider this French view of Finland under four general patterns:

Finland in a remote and barely known zone. To study the relations of France with Finland is to be constantly reminded that the foreign policy of France has few to no interest for the North and the Baltic as a geostrategic region. It is conceived in turn as a door to Russia, a zone dominated by France's competitors (Germany but also Great-Britain...) or a backdoor for Poland's influence. This general lack of interest for the region makes the role of images and mental conceptions, as well as the role of the few available channels of information, yet more important.

Finland as a partner. Finland was considered through what official France remembered of its diplomatic relations with Finland. Here can be seen the role of ambassadors, representatives, but also habits of relations, etc...

Finland as a symbol. Finland could be considered as a symbol of domestic debates in France. We have seen that it symbolized the debate on nationalities before 1918. After this year, it could become a symbol of anti-communism, of the wish for peace in France, etc...

Finland as an interest. Finland was seen also in the frame of what the French considered of the strategic, actual interests of France. In the troubled years of the Inter-War period, these elements were important: Finland was considered through rather constant patterns in similar "complexities"<sup>32</sup>, similar general problems (the Russian situation, Germany, the competition with Great-Britain, etc...).

To study the French attitude towards Finland during the Inter War period is to discover that these elements blended in the reasons why France acted towards Finland. Sometimes, Finland appeared both as a positive symbol and a place of strategic interest for the French policy leaders. The personal factor could also be of importance, creating some particular moments of relation between the Great Power and a small country that was considered mostly through what views of the world were current in France itself.

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To take this subject generally, and by way of conclusion, it might be pointed out that two things are all important in the representation of Finland and the Finns in France.

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<sup>32</sup> I am indebted to Esa Sundbäck for the formulation of this idea in English, namely the fact that Finland is rarely considered in itself but often through the frame of larger problems inside Britain's foreign policy. As Sundbäck puts it, "We are then faced with the question of what was general and what particular in this phenomenon" (Esa Sundbäck, *Finland in British Baltic Policy, British political and economic interests regarding Finland in the Aftermath of the First World War, 1918-1925, Suomalaisen Tiedakatemian toimituksia*, 315, Helsinki, 2001, p. 16). The problem with France is that it has no Baltic policy, but the idea is the same: Finland as a part of larger foreign policy issues.

First of all, there was a wish in Finland to be recognized as a Western country in all respects, with all the apparatus of civilization, and to present this apparatus abroad. A typical example of this effort can be found in the introduction by Zakarias Topelius to the book *La Finlande au 19ème siècle*, in its French version from 1894. Topelius writes, and it is almost a programme: “This country (Finland), as powerless and unknown as it can be next to richest countries, claims nevertheless, humbly but with no hesitations, its place in the European culture...”

This effort was at first linked with the political, cultural and legal fight for the “Finnish cause”, before 1918. It then became a part of the discourse on neutrality, on Finland as a functioning democracy, Finland as a prosperous neutral, Finland as a peace-loving country, etc... This discourse is relayed in France less than in other countries, because several problems prohibit its development there: the alliance between France and Russia before 1918, the lack of a Francophile tradition in Finland, the German influence in Finland or other problems.

Yet, in the Finnish case, the goal is to be acknowledged as “one of them”, as a European country. Robert Jervis, in his book about *The Logic of Images in International Relations*<sup>33</sup>, writes about how it is possible for a country to shape its image abroad, and how this image can be a way to influence the views and policies of other countries “on the cheap”. Seikko Eskola, in a contribution to the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary book in honour of Olli Vehviläinen<sup>34</sup>, writes that the press in democratic Europe, in 1939, was ready for a wave of enthusiasm towards Finland. This is interesting: Finland, apart from its actual significance or insignificance on the European strategic scene, had managed in countries like France to project an image that was rather positive (with the notable exception in France of its relations with Germany).

The second point is to know how France received this image. One important thing is that it is received in the context of the visions of the world, both mental (ideological, etc...) and actual (strategic, political, etc...) that dominates in the leading groups of France at one given time. We spoke about images, but it seems that no image in international relations is able to act as an influence in the foreign policy of a country if it doesn't strike a chord within the domestic scene of this country. Finland was seen through the prism of the French internal situation and French debates. Groups could lobby for Finland, the image of this country (in a context of scarce data) could influence, and so could the view of French strategic interests, ideological preferences, views of

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<sup>33</sup> *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (Princeton University Press, 1970).

<sup>34</sup> “Finland on the verge of the Winter War-from the Democratic European Perspective” - *The Road to War, essays in Honour of Professor Olli Vehviläinen on the Occasion of his 60th birthday*, 4 June 1993 (129-153), collectif, Hietanen, Silvio ; Hyrkkänen, Markku ; Takalo, Terho ; Tuominen, Kirsi-Marja (éds.) (*Acta Universitatis Tamperensis*, ser. B, Vol. 45, University of Tampere, Tampere, 1993).

the world, etc... All these elements, actual, mental, personal, blend with current events to form the attitude of a country like France towards a small country like Finland.

In parallel, Sophie Coeurée and the archives of the period suggest another very interesting point: throughout the period, Finland is mostly seen in the context of a fundamental divide, a symbolic border perceived between Europe, “Us”, and the “Other”, basically Russia. In this big divide, Finland is, more and more through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, perceived as being on the “Us” side of the border.

It is thus clear that Finland draws always closer to “Europe” for the French. We have in purpose qualified the recognition of January 1918 as a “first recognition”: born of a particular context, this French decision was only the start of a process of “slow recognition” of the worthiness of Finland to be independent, a process that would go on until the Winter War. In 1917, Finland was seen mostly as a rebellious nationality in the Russian empire. Three contexts were mostly important: the influence of Germany, the Russian situation, the debate in France over the oppressed nationalities. Sympathy for the oppressed and a vague disdain or at least mixed feelings towards Russia are then confronted to hard strategic facts and the necessities of the fight against Germany. Finland is seen through that, with also the fact that France doesn’t concern itself too much or too often with it.

By 1939-1940, Finland had become a state in Europe, seen by most as viable, neutral, and peace-loving<sup>35</sup>. France reacted to this country’s situation through patterns that owed as much to the vision of Finland as a possible partner, Finland as a symbol of debates and problems present inside France as to Finland as a possible place of interest for French policy. Twenty years had shaped the image of Finland as part of Europe, able and most of all worthy of surviving in the Europe that Paris wished for.

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<sup>35</sup> As Juahni Paasivirta puts it, “a peripheral but essentially viable, progressive little state” (p. 364, Juhani Paasivirta, *Finland and Europe, The early Years of independence, 1917-1939*, SHS, *Studia Historica* 29, Helsinki, 1988).