

Introduction

In February 2022, a war broke out in Ukraine which attracted the world's attention. All eyes turned to witness what would happen to this ruthlessly attacked country and its somewhat unexpected, heroic defence in the face of Russian aggression. The fate of a country invaded by Russia brought the problems of Europe's security architecture to the fore once again, as had been the case several times in the 20th century. It is no stretch to say that one of the most significant results of the Russian invasion has been the initiation of the procedure of the enlargement of NATO in the north of the continent. Two hitherto neutral (or non-aligned) countries, namely, Finland and Sweden, have decided to apply for NATO membership which will inevitably change the geopolitical situation of the Baltic region and the situation of the European north significantly. Today, the procedure of the accession of these two northern states is already in motion, and it seems that, in 2023, they will become full members of the North Atlantic Pact. In this context, it is necessary to ask what the public's opinion is, or, to put it colloquially, what do average people from the USA, Canada, and European member states of NATO really know about their future northern allies? And does what they know go beyond certain stereotypes?

The editors of *Studia Europejskie – Studies in European Affairs* have created the unique opportunity to improve the level of knowledge about one of the two aforementioned countries – and in this edition's case, it is Finland. They have decided to organise a special issue of their journal exclusively dedicated to that particular country, and put it in the hands of guest editors who have invited recognised specialists to share their opinions and views on various aspects of Finland; its history, society, politics, relationships with its neighbours, its economy, culture, security questions etc., and give them the pages of an entire, special issue of their journal. Although Finland is one of the states constituting the northern part of the European Union (EU) and which has held the Presidency of the Council of the EU three times to date (in 1999, 2006, and 2019), public knowledge about its socio-economic, political, and cultural realities as well as its historical experience, is rather limited in countries situated to the south. In this sense, Finland remains somewhat an enigma and still

waits to be thoroughly explicitised or, essentially, ‘discovered’. This lack of information is, however, inspirational to a degree, and the expected Finnish membership of NATO has sparked a new wave of interest in all things Finnish. For researchers in Finland, but also in other European countries, discovering this Finnish *terra incognita* – in a wider-audience sense – actually offers an opportunity to present the results of their own research and bring today’s Finland closer to the international public.

The invitation from guest editors of this special Finnish issue of *Studia Europejskie – Studies in European Affairs* has been accepted not only by Finnish and Polish scholars, but also by their colleagues from Sweden and Germany. It is also important that the arguments of those invited authors have been based on scientific approaches and analyses, thereby characterising each paper’s research.

The guest editors believe that the collection of works proposed as the content of this special issue of *Studia Europejskie – Studies in European Affairs* will bring Finland closer not only to readers in Poland, but also to anybody else who wants to know more about Russia’s neighbour to the west. Bearing in mind the public significance of their work, they wish the readers an engrossing, intellectual adventure which broadens their perspective on the country that was (according to the ancient Roman poet Virgil) once part of *Ultima Thule* and, today, in difficult times, co-constitutes the northern flank of a Europe not free from anxieties about the future, yet full of hope for tomorrow’s success.

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