

Territoriality, State, and Nationality in the Making of Borders of Finland: The Evolving Concept of Border in the Peace Treaties between Russia and Sweden, 1323–1809

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This paper examines conceptual change in negotiating borders in the European North. By analyzing the definitions of the status given to Finland in peace treaties between Russia and Sweden, the paper strives to enlighten how through the centuries Russia was involved in negotiating key concepts of European political language, state, territoriality and nationality. With the theoretical discussions in conceptual history as starting point, the paper illustrates how a concept of state, separated from the person of the ruler, emerges in mediaeval and early modern peace treaties, and how the estates of the ruler gradually gain status as political units. With special focus on how notions of a linear state border were attached to the territory of Finland, the paper discusses broader processes of the development of ideas of territorial state and linear state borders. The paper asks how and at which political junctures new understandings of sovereignty appear in the treaties between Russia and Sweden and how international recognition of territorial integrity and the rights of citizens were introduced as part of the relations between the two countries. The broader aim of the paper is to contribute to a comparative discussion on how state-making and bordering processes in the European North were linked to political modernization, and how and to what degree the redefinition of borders and territories were connected to new kinds of conceptualizations of state, sovereignty and nationality characteristic to modern politics.

Keywords: territoriality, state, sovereignty, nationality, border, Finland, Russia, Sweden

In Finnish historical textbooks, the peace treaties between Russia and Sweden are often presented as milestones in the formation of the borders of Finland. As many historians have pointed out, this pattern is in sharp contrast to the way Finland is referred to in the texts of the agreements. For example, Matti Klinge has emphasized the fact that in the text of the Treaty of Fredrikshamn, concluded between Sweden and Russia in September, 1809, it is not Finland but six Swedish provinces on the eastern side of the Gulf of Bothnia that are named and ceded to Russia; it is only later that they came to constitute an administratively separate, territorially-clearly-defined Grand Duchy of Finland in the frame of the Russian Empire (Klinge, 1975; Jussila, 1999).

In my paper, I will study what kind of references to Finland as a political space or a separate geographical unit can be found in the texts of the peace treaties in detail. My analysis is based on a critical rereading of the peace treaties between Russia and Sweden,

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from the so-called Treaty of Nöteborg (1323) to the Treaty of Fredrikshamn (1809). I approach the question from the perspective of conceptual history. My starting point is that in order to interpret the status given to Finland in different treaties, it is necessary to simultaneously analyze broader changes in the understanding of basic political concepts, such as state, territoriality, sovereignty, and nationality.

I will examine how a concept of state, separated from the person of the ruler, emerges in mediaeval and early modern peace treaties, and how the estates of the ruler gradually gain status as political units. Additionally, I will explore the development of the ideas of territorial state and linear state borders, especially how notions of the territory of Finland were attached to the negotiations and definition of linear state borders. I am interested in how and at which political junctures new understandings of sovereignty are adopted as part of international relations. How do the ideas of international recognition of territorial integrity, sovereignty, and the rights of the citizen and groups appear in the treaties between Russia and Sweden? Finally, what kind of legacy do the treaties leave for conceptualizing Finland in terms of political space within the Russian empire?

The broader aim of the paper is to contribute to a comparative discussion on how state-making and bordering processes in the European North were linked to political modernization, and how and to what degree were the redefinition of borders and territories connected to new kinds of conceptualizations of state, nationality, and sovereignty characteristic to modern politics?

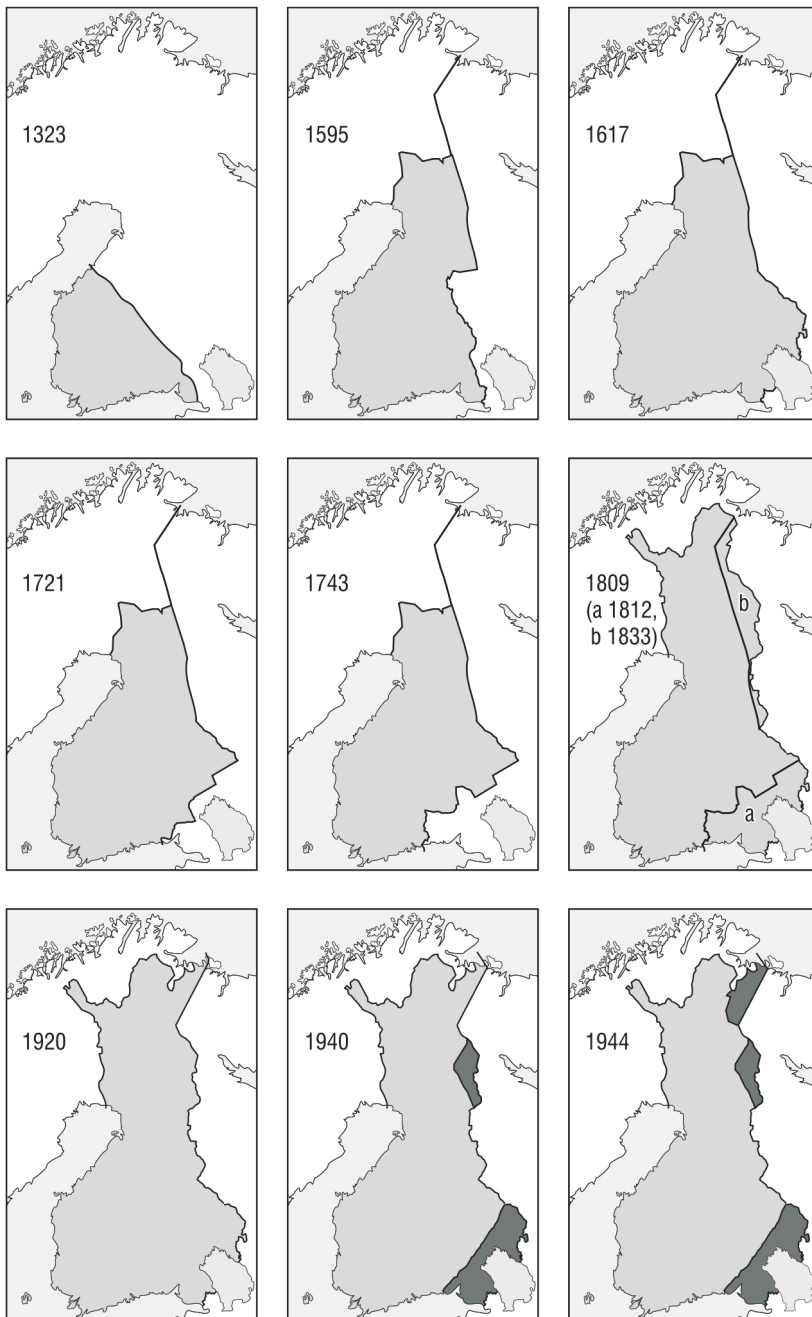
Finland as a Sovereign Territorial Nation State?

Historical textbooks often depict the formation of the borders of Finland with maps that present a state-like unit with clearly demarcated borders that seem to have existed since the Middle Ages. The fact that such a sovereign Finnish state has only existed since World War One is mentioned in most cases, but at the same time, references to periods of “Swedish” or “Russian rule” accentuate that a Finland as an age-old political entity or an original ethnic community has always existed, even if temporarily pressed under the yoke of a foreign power.

In this sense, the maps tend to project the modern idea of a *sovereign, territorial nation state* back in history. This hidden message of boundary lines of textbook maps is in stark contrast with what is known in light of the current historiography of state and nation formation in the European North. In terms of conceptual history, all the parts of this equation need to be put under careful conceptual analysis. What kind of conceptualizations of statehood, territoriality, nationality, and sovereignty do we actually find in medieval and early modern peace treaties, and what notion of a Finland was connected to them?

As the British historian Quentin Skinner has shown, it is highly questionable whether it is possible to identify a *concept of the state* that would be clearly separate from the per-

1. In this context the goal is to bring new perspectives to the important discussions concerning the Swedish conglomerate state (e.g. Gustafsson, 1998) and the Russian empire (e.g. Kappeler, 2001; Miller, 2008).



The Boundaries of Finland in Transition
(Fennia, 2002, 180: 1–2)

sona of the ruler and his personal estates and possessions in Medieval times (Skinner, 1989). Secondly, from the recent research on early Nordic state-formation, we know that it is only at the time of the formation of a modern centralized state apparatus in the late Middle Ages and Early modern period that a new understanding of *territoriality* in terms of strict border lines is born (Katajala, 2006).

The third problem of the textbook maps is the historical projection of the modern nation and *nation state* back in history. While we can certainly identify a push in early modern Europe towards centralized territorial states, the idea of a Finland as separate political space under Swedish rule was not part of the self-understanding of the contemporaries. For example, as Osmo Jussila and Matti Klinge have shown, the idea of Finland as a state and as a nation was first solidified in the minds of the leading Finnish elite during the 19th century (Jussila, 1968; Klinge, 1975). In the sense of a modern nation or political community, the formation of a Finland first began during the latter part of the 19th century when civic organizations and newspapers activated broader elements of the population within a shared political and social arena (Stenius, 1986; Liikanen, 1995; Pulkkinen, 2001).

Perhaps the most difficult problem of the maps is connected to the concept of sovereignty. Following the criticism against the “Myth of the Treaty of Westphalia,” the notion of the “Westphalian age” characterized by fixed territorial notion of sovereignty and the integrity of borders can be seen as severely biased (Osiander, 2009). Instead of a fixed “Westphalian notion of sovereignty,” modern political language is obviously characterized by competing conceptualizations of borders that represent political innovation intimately associated with the revolutionary political movements of the modern period. In the course of these struggles, the concept of sovereignty became an elementary part of the new political discourse that challenged existing notions of the legitimation of power and introduced revolutionary claims for reframing and recasting political landscapes (Kalmo, Skinner, 2010; Ball, Farr, Hanson, 1989).

This politicization cannot, however, be understood simply in terms of the emerging hegemony of ethnic-national claim for self-government. Rather, as a form of political innovation for reframing political arenas, the notion of popular sovereignty reflects the contested nature and internal contradictions of the democratic principles (Rosanvallon, 2009). Evidently, there is a deep antagonism between principles of “dynastic sovereignty” (personified by the ruler and the idea of the integrity of his estates) and “popular sovereignty” (“we, the people” as the ultimate source of power and the principal nominator for sovereign territory). In this sense, sovereignty belongs obviously to the so-called “movement concepts” that, with the breakthrough of modern politics, became “temporalised” as “tools for steering historical movement” (Koselleck, 1979).

Following Reinhardt Koselleck’s *Sattelzeit* notion, it is easy to question the idea of a fixed concept of territorial sovereignty typical of the “Westphalian” period. The time of the break-through of modern politics can, on the contrary, be understood in terms of a gradual shift from dynastic power structures to more-or-less democratic forms of government which thoroughly changed the significance of the concept of sovereignty. In the context of popular political mobilization, new ideas of popular sovereignty turned

borders into frames of emerging political arenas, and into markers of sovereign polities where “we, the people” had the final say. In this manner, the concept of sovereignty became intimately associated with political innovation that challenged existing notions of the legitimation of power and introduced claims for the rights of the citizen, especially in the case of the so-called young nation-states. At what time and at what political juncture were these ideas connected to the notion of a Finland as a separate political space?

State and Ruler in the Treaty of Nöteborg 1323

When reading the text of the treaty of Nöteborg of 1323, it is obvious that we are not analyzing an agreement between two modern states. It is explicitly indicated that the agreement is not between two states but two rulers; Yuriy Danilovich, Prince of Moscow (1303–1325), Grand Prince of Vladimir (1317–1322), elected Prince of Novgorod (1322/1322), and the then-7-year-old Magnus IV of Sweden (1316–1374), represented by envoys that included Hanseatic merchants from Gotland (Rydberg, 1877).

The position of both rulers was vague, and in this sense, we can talk about contested or unstable sovereignty; both had an obvious need of legitimization as sovereign rulers. The question may be asked whether one of the functions of the Nöteborg agreement was indeed mutual recognition that would strengthen the position of the rulers in regard to loyalty of their vassals and solidify their control of the counties and castles mentioned in the treaty. In this sense, sovereignty did not simply mean gained authority for the use of power, but can also be understood as recognition of the claims for authority.

Especially interesting is the position of Yuriy in regard to the emerging state structures of the republic of Novgorod. Yuriy’s position as the ruler of Moscow was, to a high degree, dependent on the support of the Khan of the Golden Horde. At the time of the treaty, Yuriy’s role as a ruler of Novgorod was probably more dependent on the authorization of the council of the city state, as is indicated in the text with the reference to “*tota communitate Nogardie*.” In both the cases of the child ruler Magnus and the elected prince Yuriy, the dynastic sovereignty was vague, and in need of mutual recognition in terms of royal reciprocity, equality, and trust offered by the treaty.

It well may be said that this symbolic recognition was the more important part of the treaty than the territorial definition of the border. The geographical references to the border are more precise only for the Southern part concerning areas of interest involving the castles the two parties had built for controlling trade and carrying taxes. Furthermore, in explicit terms, the treaty of the princes is not an agreement between Novgorod and Sweden over state territory, but about rule over regional units, that is, the counties named in the treaty. In this sense, the concept of state is obviously not separated from the person that is the ruler. The Treaty does not define the border of the state territory of Sweden or Novgorod, or that of Finland. Indeed, Finland is not even mentioned in the text of the treaty (Gallén, Lind, 1991; Liikanen, 2011).

From Teusina (1595) to Stolbova (1617): Recognizing Autocratic Rule or Territorial States?

The next Peace Treaty highlighted in the Finnish historiography was signed in Teusina, 1595.² It is obvious that at the time a clear change had occurred in terms of understanding statehood. Already in the description of the parties, states are mentioned in addition to their rulers. The agreement was signed by plenipotentiary envoys on behalf of the Great Lord King Sigismund and the Swedish realm (*rike*), and Fjodor Ivanovits, autocrat of all Russia. As in the case of Nöteborg, the positions of the rulers were extremely vague, and they were in need of support and recognition. Sigismund, King of Sweden from 1592, was fighting over the crown with his uncle until Sigismund was deposed in 1599. Fjodor was holding the Russian crown from 1584–1598, but with Boris Godunov as the *de facto* ruler. In regards to sovereignty, it can indeed be asked whether we can talk about *de facto* sovereign rulers. In broader terms, it almost seems as an illusion to think of some kind of original absolute sovereignty of the ruler which is later fragmented (cf. Kalmo, Skinner, 2010). On the bases of the first treaties concerning the European North, it is more plausible to conclude that this kind of fixed sovereignty concept may have never existed.

In terms of understanding borders and territoriality, the Teusina Treaty does not indicate clear changes to modes of thinking of earlier times. Finland is now explicitly mentioned as a geographical entity, but not as a political unit with defined borders. In fact, in terms of demarcation of borders, this also concerns Sweden and Russia. The border is again defined in terms of ceded counties, not as an agreement of state boundary. This seems to verify the conclusion of recent research that territorial control of space was in fact less important to the partners than control over water routes and trade (Korpela, 2008; Katajala, 2006).

When it comes to state and territoriality, we can recognize a more clear change in modes of thinking with the Treaty of Stolbova (1617). The Swedish and Russian states are now both explicitly mentioned as partners of the treaty (Sveriges Chrono and Ryske Rijket). There seems to be also a more elaborated understanding of territorial control attached to the concept of state. Ceded areas are still defined in terms of county borders, but these are obviously understood to form more undeviating state borders at the same time. The concept of border is used in this new way e.g. in connection to the ceding of Kexholm county to Sweden, as well as when ceding back numerous occupied castles and their surrounding territories to Russia.

Finland is referred to in the document as a politically recognized unit but only in the title of the King of Sweden which includes the Grand Duke of Finland. At the time, Finland did not form a separate administrative unit, and in other parts of the Treaty it was not referred to in political-administrative terms. In the text, Finland is mentioned

2. Interestingly, Finnish historical writing has largely bypassed the Treaty of Plussa (1583) that ended the Livonian War (1558–1583) and concerned mainly Ingrian areas on the shores of the Gulf of Finland. Obviously, the Treaty focusing on the areas from Ivangorod to Kexholm has suited ill for the tradition of discussing the birth of the “borders of Finland.”

several times as a geographic concept in matters of trade, and there is a reference to the towns of Finland; however, the territory of Finland is not an issue agreed in the treaty in explicit terms.

In broader terms, the treaty has been seen as a turning point from the traditional pursuits of controlling trade and water routes towards the control of territory. Stolbova meant a great victory for Sweden, but at the same time, it marked an end of the pursuit for control over Russian trade. It is said that when Gustav II Adolf gave an account to the estates of the Diet about the victorious peace with Russia, he only briefly referred to the plans concerning trade politics that had for centuries been in the centre of the animosity between the parties, and instead concentrated on strategic border issues (Attman, 1948).

This might be understood as part of the forming of the concept of a new kind of sovereignty connected to strengthening the central government and autocratic administration. However, still even at this point, we should perhaps only talk about seemingly strong autocratic rulers; the titles of Gustav II Adolf and Fjodor Ivanovits cover the first page of the treaty, but their positions were far from stable and in need of both internal and external recognition. Gustav was 23 year old, and he had been in power for six years after the dynastic struggles between his father, Charles, and Sigismund of Poland and other competing internal candidates for the Crown. Michael Romanov was 20 year old, and it was his first recognition as the rightful tsar of Russia in the agreement that put an end to Swedish claims to the Crown of Russia. This recognition finally ended the “Time of Troubles” with no recognized Tsar between 1610 and 1613. In this sense, the sovereignty concept of the treaty was perhaps not only connected to strengthening the notion of territorial state, but also an instrument of legitimizing dynastic rule and autocratic administration.

Nystad (1721)—a Treaty over Political Space?

In terms of shifting understandings of the concept of state, the treaty of Nystad seems to be a product of conflicting tendencies. It was an agreement between powerful rulers with strong absolutist ambitions, and at the same time, a treaty between states in a new broader sense that concerned not only administrative institutions, but also their citizens. In the document, the parties gave mutual guarantees to one another in the name of the “powers, countries, subjects and inhabitants” (Fredsfördrag, 1843).

This also now concerned the Grand Duchy of Finland, which was explicitly mentioned as a political territorial unit. In the Treaty, the Tsar granted that he and his heirs or successors would forever abstain from claims on the Grand Duchy which was restored to Sweden after the Russian occupation during the war. A significant restriction was, however, attached to this recognition of Finland as a political unit by adding that this applied to the “now restored Grand Duchy under what form or name it happened to have.” What was new and exceptional in the treaty was that the definition of state border was not based on boundaries of the old counties, but was consciously drawn across them.

It can be interpreted that the new definition of Finland as a separate political space was, in the first place, connected to the return of the occupied areas. It had perhaps been

easier for Sweden to negotiate the restitution of the occupied areas as one territorial unit, and to get guarantees over the future territorial integrity of the area. In this sense, the treaty also introduced and recognized the notion of territorial integration in explicit terms. With clear references to the rights of the citizens of the ceded areas, it represents, at the same time, a more general shift in European political thinking in regards to understanding political spaces.

Treaty of Fredrikshamn 1809: Finland in a European Frame

Concerning the idea of a Finland as a recognized political space, the text of the Treaty of Fredrikshamn seems to represent a partial return to earlier bordering practices. The definition of the border is mainly done in a manner similar to the medieval fashion of ceding counties. Neither Finland nor the Grand Duchy are mentioned in this connection, and the area to be ceded is defined in the form of a list of names of counties that were to be ceded. In this sense, we can recognize a return to earlier bordering practices which are in contrast with the general line of conceptualizing state and sovereignty in the treaty.

In many parts of the agreement, a broad concept of state is used, and the parties of the treaty are defined in a broad sense. The Treaty is between “us, our states and subjects.” The rights of the subjects are, however, not part of the agreement as broadly outlined as in the Treaty of Nystad. In this sense, a clearly more limited scope of civic rights was subjected to negotiation between the two states.

The formulations concerning political space and the rights of the citizen within a given political space might be connected to the unequal positions of the partners. Alexander I was negotiating with Napoleon over the future of the whole of Europe. The Swedish army was defeated, and Swedish territory was occupied far beyond the Finnish-speaking areas on the eastern side of the Gulf of Bothnia. This imbalance was manifested in the treaty, notably in the title of Alexander I, which was half a page long and already included the title of Grand Duke of Finland (StorFurste til Smolensko, Lithauen, Wolhynien, Podolien och Finland). The fact that the emperor had already taken the title of the Grand Duke of Finland before the agreement of January 1809 can be seen as a symbolic gesture to mark that key matters of the treaty were considered not to need negotiation with or the consent of Sweden.

This might partly explain the much discussed problem why the matters concerning the future of Finland are not settled in the treaty along the lines of the promises that Alexander I had made to Finnish estates in Borgå during the war. In Borgå, at least according to a later Finnish interpretation, Alexander had guaranteed the status of Finland as a nation and conferred a constitution to it. Regardless of the accuracy of these interpretations, it seems that Alexander held these as matters to be organized in a broader European frame, and not in negotiation with Sweden.

Indeed, the agreement can be in a high degree read as a European peace treaty. The interests of Napoleon and the allies of Russia were an explicitly expressed priority signaling a new, broader kind of geopolitical context for understanding sovereignty. *Système*

Continental, the forcing of Sweden to join the blockade against Britain, was an indisputable key issue. In fact, the dictates in the treaty that concerned European-level politics were recorded in the articles II and III, and thus preceded matters of ceding areas and defining borders that took place in articles IV and V. In this manner, it was made clear that the decisions of Tilsit between Alexander and Napoleon concerning the political map and the future of Europe were not negotiated, but dictated to Sweden (Klinge, 2010). In this sense, the peace treaty should maybe not be read in terms of a return to earlier notions of state, territoriality, and nationhood. Perhaps the visions Alexander presented in Borgå concerning the status and the constitution of Finland were parts of bigger plans of constructing a new European state system along the lines that Alexander and Napoleon had designed in Tilsit, a system that the parties were never able to agree on in practice in the end.

Conclusions: From Mutual Recognition of Rulers Towards Fragmented European Sovereignty Concepts

Although the notion of a Grand Duchy of Finland disappears from the last treaty between Sweden and Russia, it is obvious that looking at the concept of state in a longer time frame, we can recognize a trend towards a more-strictly territorially defined frame of government, which in the end, included even the idea of guaranteed rights of the inhabitants. At the time of Napoleonic wars and the Vienna congress, these ideas became an elementary part of a new constitutional thinking which is known to also have affected Alexander I.

In the first treaties analyzed in this study, states exist in a sense of a power sphere of the ruler that were defined in terms of regions. In the last treaties, there is a clear idea of state borders between countries with centralized administrations. In terms of changing significance of territoriality, there is a line of development from competing strategies of controlling trade and tribute-gathering towards territorially strictly-defined centrally governed political space, the integrity of which is given international recognition.

Lastly, in terms of nationality, we may conclude that nationality or ethnicity were not regarded as bases for negotiating borders for all of the analyzed period. However, it is obvious that from the 18th century on, we can identify conceptual changes that turned the Grand Duchy of Finland from a titular symbol of the might of the ruler towards an institutional frame of politics. Finland was referred to as a territorial political unit, and the rights of its citizen were discussed and designed according to the dominant political ideas within the European state system. Hopefully, this line of development can contribute to broader discussion concerning the transition of dynastic states towards modern centralized (nation) states, and polities based on the idea of popular sovereignty. In any case, it points to the obvious need for comparative research on conceptual shifts in negotiation and conflict over the borders and territorial structures of the conglomerate states in the European North.

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Территориальность, государство и гражданственность в создании границ Финляндии: возникновение концепта границы в мирных соглашениях между Россией и Швецией в 1323–1809 гг.

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В статье автор исследует концептуальные изменения в переговорных процессах о границах в Северной Европе. Анализируя то, как определяется статус Финляндии в мирных договорах между Россией и Швецией, автор показывает, как сквозь века Россия участвовала в обсуждении ключевых понятий европейского политического языка, государственности, территориальности и гражданственности. Начиная с теоретических дискуссий в истории понятий, автор прослеживает, как понятие государства, отделенное от личности правителя, возникает в мирных соглашениях средневековья и раннего Нового времени и как владения правителя получили статус политических образований. Через рассмотрение того, как понятие линейной государственной границы было связано с территорией Финляндии, в статье обсуждаются более обширные процессы развития идеи о территориальном государстве и линейных государственных границах. В статье ставится вопрос о том, как и через какие политические образования возникают новые представления о суверенитете в мирных соглашениях между Россией и Швецией и как в отношении между двумя странами были введены международное признание территориальной неприкосновенности и гражданские права. Цель статьи состоит в развитии сравнительной дискуссии о том, как возникновение государства и процесс установления границ в Северной Европе были связаны с политической модернизацией и как и в какой степени переопределение границ и территорий были связаны с новыми концептуализациями государства, суверенитета и гражданственности типичные для современной политики.

Ключевые слова: территориальность, государство, суверенитет, гражданственность, граница, Финляндия, Россия, Швеция