

English Abstract

Jukka Kokkonen

Peace on the border

Eastern Border of Finland and the means of protection in 1490–1809

The border between Finland and Russia – or the eastern border as it is called in Finnish – is in part one of the oldest borders in Europe. Its oldest sections date back to 1595–1597 and 1621, to the demarcations that took place after the peace treaties of Tälssinä and Stolbova, respectively, were concluded between Sweden and Russia. In those days, the present territory of Finland comprised the eastern part of the Swedish realm.

The wars between Sweden and Russia recurred after every few decades. From the Late Middle Ages until the beginning of the 19th century, the two countries fought altogether nine wars over the eastern border and the territory of Finland. The periods of peace lasted a few decades at the longest, after which a new conflict arose and led to violence. Those who suffered the most from all this were the inhabitants along the eastern border; they were tormented not only by the military acts but also by the guerrilla attacks that frontier people made from the opposing side leading to destruction and banditry. For life in the border region to be possible and to some extent safe, the inhabitants had various means of survival at their disposal. These could be divided into two: on the one hand, there was the so-called border peace procedure that took place in the northern parts of the eastern border and, on the other, there were certain other armed or non-armed defensive arrangements that either the inhabitants themselves developed or that were commanded by the military officers and the state.

In short, the notion of border peace⁹⁶⁵ referred to a written or an oral agreement that was made with the population living on the other side of the border either during the war or under a threat of war. The idea was to prevent the hostilities from breaking between the two parties. It was a separate peace agreement: the border peace kept the parties out of hostilities, although there was a war going on elsewhere. In addition, border peace agreements guaranteed that peaceful contacts, above all

border trade and traffic, could continue without problems. The border peace procedure also helped to protect the inhabitants from forest bandits and dangerous wanderers, who were a common nuisance in the border region in those days. When problems emerged in the cross-border relationships, the parties tried to solve them together quickly and peacefully, so that the situation would not escalate into an open conflict.

Document sources reveal that there were at least eight border peace agreements or serious attempts for border peace agreements on the eastern border, the oldest one already in c. 1490 and the latest one during the Swedish-Russian war in 1788–1790. The historical basis for the border peace procedure was laid down already in the Middle Ages: there were peace movements within the Roman Catholic Church (Peace of God [Pax Dei], Truce of God [Treuga Dei]) in the Continental Europa and later the centralised rule of prince that led to the declaration of land peace and peace legislation, which helped create order and peace instead of violence and disorder within the realm. When the power in Sweden was concentrated in the hands of the Wasa family from the 1520s onwards, the questions of war and peace remained totally with the centralized administrative machinery. The sovereign power alone had the monopoly to decide on war and peace. The decision to negotiate and cherish border peace agreements was the responsibility of the Crown and its authorities.

In the 16th and 17th century, there was direct trade between the Western Europe and Russia through the Arctic Ocean and the White Sea. Business relations across the eastern border were part of global trade, and they were crucial for the livelihood of both parties. The tradition of border peace agreements derived at least partly from the old custom of trade peace agreements that had secured free international trade and peaceful journeys in the Middle Ages.

Similar border peace arrangements existed in the late Middle Ages and early Modern Era also in other parts of Scandinavia, between Sweden and Denmark-Norway, and in the British Isles between England and Scotland. Those agreements have also been characterised by a tradition of violent military action, but also by networks of peaceful cross-border contacts, gradual adaptation to peaceful coexistence with neighbouring states and a will to maintain mutual peace.