

UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE

Faculty of Political Science

Belgrade, September 2026

At the meeting of the Department of International Studies on 30 April 2026, the master's thesis Defence Commission (hereinafter, the Commission) for candidate Juan Gabriel Espejo Ceballos was formed. The Commission, consisting of the following members: prof. dr Filip Ejđus, doc. dr Marko Kovačević, and prof. dr Goran Tepšić, was approved by the Council for the Second and Third Cycle of Studies on the Department's proposal. The Commission evaluates the master's thesis and supervises its public defence.

After reviewing Juan Gabriel Espejo Ceballos's master's thesis, the Commission submits the following comprehensive report.

REPORT

Juan Gabriel Espejo Ceballos's master's thesis, "Finland and Sweden's NATO Accession: Between Military Alignment and Preservation of the International Order," discusses the motivations behind the decision of traditionally neutral countries Sweden and Finland to join NATO. In contrast to prevailing arguments rooted in power relations, military confrontation, and realpolitik, the author argues that these two countries were primarily motivated by a desire to preserve the norms and institutions of the international order. Using an English School perspective, he examines, through document and discourse analysis, how Sweden and Finland's NATO accession influenced this military alliance and changes to the international order. Notwithstanding the introduction and conclusion, the thesis consists of six chapters: "Literature Review," "Theoretical Framework," "Methodology," "Sweden and Finland: From the Neutrality Policy and Non-Alignment to NATO Membership," "Finland and Sweden's Influence in the International Order in Crisis," "Research Results and Discussion."

In the introduction, the author explains that after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, it has become clear that the current international order is in crisis and that countries must confront the security challenges and uncertainty arising from power competition among China, Russia, and the US. In this context, Finland and Sweden decided to abandon their long-standing

neutrality and non-military alignment policy and join NATO. He argues that this decision is better understood as a symptom of a crisis in the international order than as a mere military alignment aimed at strengthening the alliance. The English School helps explain this phenomenon by showing that changes in Sweden's and Finland's security and foreign policies reflect a structural shift in international relations that affects the norms and institutions that define the international order.

The literature review presents key recent documents that analyse NATO expansion and Sweden and Finland's decision to join the military alliance. Abundant academic works were identified in relation to the strategic competition between Russia and the US, and the military strategies that both countries are following to improve their capabilities to face a possible military intervention, mainly in the Arctic and the Baltic Sea, as well as the role that Sweden and Finland play in strengthening the military alliance. The study identified a lack of academic literature on structural changes in the international order stemming from the war in Ukraine and Finland and Sweden's NATO membership.

The thesis's theoretical framework focuses on the societal nature of international relations. International society, or international order, is defined as a higher stage of interstate relations in which common interests, norms, rules, and institutions exist. Following Flockhart, the limits between the international system and society are unclear. However, institutions create order, expressed through norms, values, and international law. The significance of the Liberal International Order and a rules-based international order is clarified through their consideration in the foreign and security policies of Sweden and Finland.

The thesis is guided by the analysis of government documents related to Sweden and Finland's NATO membership, the decision-making processes, their accession to the alliance, a review of press releases, and reports such as the Finland Government Defence Report 2024, the Government report on changes in the foreign and security policy environment of 2026; and Finland's Arctic Foreign and Security Policy of 2024; the Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy of 2024; as well as the report Deterioration of the security environment—implications for Sweden.

In "Sweden and Finland: From Neutrality and Non-Alignment to NATO Membership," the author describes the evolution of both countries' neutrality policy before the First and Second World Wars, through the Cold War, and after the collapse of the USSR. It explains the role of

NATO in supporting an international order based on US leadership and Western institutions, and the approaches that both countries had to the Alliance, mainly through the Partners for Peace program and later on with other frameworks such as NORDECO and the gradual cooperation in military matters after the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, until full NATO membership derived from the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022.

He further argues that the crisis in the international order produced by Russia's invasion of Ukraine led both countries to transform their foreign and security policies as they sought to influence and shape the norms and institutions that constitute the international order. Both countries agreed on the importance of supporting a rule-based international order over a power-based system. Both consider Russia the main threat to European and international security, and China as an actor that challenges the current international order. The US plays a key role in guaranteeing their security, and they focus their policies on supporting the liberal international order led by the US and the West.

In "Finland and Sweden's Influence in the International Order in Crisis," the author analyses the crisis of the international order and the role of NATO, the US, and the EU in guaranteeing Europe's collective security, as well as the need to support institutions that provide stability and peace. This chapter also describes how the military alliance is building its capabilities and Sweden and Finland's role in this objective. It also explains how both countries have taken steps to support norms and institutions such as international law, diplomacy, and sovereignty, while strengthening international and collective security.

As a result, it is argued that Sweden and Finland's membership responds to a crisis in the international order, as their institutions did not guarantee their independence, security, or future development. Military alignment was a necessary step, but they recognised the necessity to support a rules-based international order, with liberal ideas as part of their values to be promoted, formal institutions such as the UN and NATO, and where alliances with the Global South are absent, as they look to maintain the status quo, with the West leading the international order, but where the hegemony of the US is no longer the only scenario to consider. International law, diplomacy, and the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity are the core values and institutions that sustain the international order.

Based on this review, the Commission concludes that Juan Gabriel Espejo Ceballos's master's thesis, "Finland and Sweden's NATO Accession: Between Military Alignment and Preservation of the International Order," satisfies all the formal criteria for public defence.

The Commission:

prof. dr Filip Ejdus

doc. dr Marko Kovačević

prof. dr Goran Tepšić