

## FINNISH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Address to the Inaugural Celebration of the Finnish Institute of International Affairs  
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The Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA) has a well-defined place in the Finnish academic and policy communities dealing with international affairs. The position of the FIIA is defined by a law, enacted by the *Eduskunta*, which provides the general objectives and administrative structure for the Institute. In Finland, hardly any other research institute has such a strong position in the public sphere. However, that position has to be earned by everyday activities.

No research institute can be an island but it must build bridges with other institutes, national and international. To succeed, the FIIA must be able to produce both high-quality research and policy-relevant knowledge that support each other. Mediocre research produces only inadequate and flawed policy advice. Therefore, it is in the interest of the *Eduskunta* and other public bodies that the Institute's work is also competitive by analytical standards.

The Finnish international relations research (IR) community speaks with multiple voices; or, to say the same thing in other words, it is fragmented into competing schools of thought, university departments, research institutes, and networks. No one can seriously argue that we do not have enough variety in the IR field in Finland. We at the FIIA have also a lot of intellectual variety, a strong gender balance and a growing number of international scholars. While the intellectual atmosphere is based on the freedom of thought and expression, the researchers must at the same time be ready to work for the implementation of the Institute's research strategy, approved by its Board in June 2007.

A positive sign in the development of the Finnish IR community is that a younger generation of researchers is marching to the front. This is manifested by the increasing number of young Finns studying at under- and postgraduate levels at universities outside Finland; recent appointments for academic and research positions, both at the FIIA and the universities; and the active contribution of young Finnish scholars to international conferences. To sum up, the future of Finnish IR studies, broadly defined, looks very promising indeed. The main challenge is to generate sufficient resources to support the growing number of talented young scholars; a problem that is not unique to our field.

The FIIA has neither the intention nor the capacity to start coordinating IR research in Finland. However, we are an open institute that is ready to develop alliances, partnerships, and networks with other research and policy-making communities. The Institute can provide a framework for contacts with other actors, but ultimately the responsibility to develop networks falls upon each individual researcher and, in our case, programme directors. Although the FIIA is reasonably well funded by the *Eduskunta*, and we have all the reasons to believe in the continuity of funding, there is no space for complacency and inaction in the Institute's work. This concerns also its external activities, including fundraising to expand the Institute's work.

A main challenge for the FIIA is to develop a balanced and sustainable definition of its role. In the larger context, the Institute has two chief functions: to conduct high-level research and provide useful policy analysis. The law concerning the Institute expresses this dual role in rather broad terms; it is expected to "conduct research" on international political and economic relations and the European Union as well as to "produce reports" on these issues. This formulation leaves room for various interpretations.

It is not easy to serve both of these ends effectively. I have heard it being said that the FIIA is "too academic" and neglects the "production of reports", i.e. policy studies. On the other hand, there are also those who view that because of its particular administrative position and role as a think tank, the FIIA cannot conduct serious research. I strongly feel that both of these comments are misleading. While one has to admit that attempts at fulfilling both the research and policy functions can pull the Institute's work in different directions, these requirements can also be reconciled.

Theory and concept formation is a necessary condition for meaningful applications in the study of political, economic, legal, and environmental issues. Without solid conceptual foundations, the conduct of policy studies runs the risk of deteriorating into journalistic or political commentary. On the other hand, the focus on policy issues and processes helps to open up new perspectives that inform, in turn, the research work. In reality, practically all the work carried out in the Institute is policy oriented. Therefore, the key challenge is to make sure that the policy studies continue to retain high quality and societal usefulness.

Policy studies are an established field of activity in most large industrialized countries. They are pursued by specialized research institutes, various university departments, ministries, and non-governmental organizations. In most cases, institutes conducting policy studies operate publicly; in fact, their visibility and influence depend on the access to media. Media visibility is, in turn, a condition for fundraising which is a *sine qua non* for private foundations and institutions. Visibility can be enhanced by integrating well-known figures from politics, academia, and business in the institute's activities. In other words, in policy studies, extensive and diverse connections are the mainstay of the field. These connections alone are not enough, however; in the marketplace of policy ideas, profound knowledge of issues is also vital.

The think-tank movement started from the United States where it continues to flourish, in different political colors. One can easily list a few dozen think tanks in the United States where they often have specific agendas ranging from the advocacy of the flat tax to nuclear disarmament. In other words, think tanks are also often policy advocates which have their specific audiences and sources of funding. In Europe, there have traditionally been strong national institutes of international affairs which have combined research and policy work. Several institutes in France and Germany come to mind, but relevant examples can also be found in smaller countries such as the Netherlands. The expansion and deepening of the European integration has given rise to an entirely new breed of policy studies institutes in Brussels, London, and elsewhere.

In Finland, the question of policy studies has not been debated to any major extent. A couple of reports have been prepared under the auspices of the Ministry of Justice and the Development Foundation for Local Administration, but they have not sparked any extensive discussion. The strongest tradition of policy studies appears to be in the field of economics where we have several institutes working on different aspects of economic policies. A new trend is manifested in the think tanks that political parties have established, by public financial support, to generate a new wave of policy debates.

For the Finnish Institute of International Affairs the best comparable sister institutes can be found in other Nordic **and Baltic countries** and Western and Central European countries. These institutes have a relatively similar mix of research and policy analysis and operate on largely similar principles and values. A common feature is the search for visibility and policy impact but with honest means. In the case of the FIIA, it is impossible to think that we set for ourselves a specific political goal and start lobbying for it while using public resources. We can express critical views on policies but they must be founded on expertise.

Policy studies give rise to several serious questions, including questions related to their relevance, influence, and integrity. Policy studies has rules that need to be followed if the intention is to produce serious and credible analysis. In many ways, policy analysis is in no way easier than traditional academic research. They have different functions and traditions, but as intellectual activities they complement rather than contradict each other. We at the FIIA want to create a new line of policy studies on international relations without turning our back to academic research.