



Managing financial deregulation: lessons from the 1980's in the Nordic countries*

Seppo Honkapohja, Bank of Finland

Outline

- I. Introduction: the aftermath of WWII in Europe
- II. Close look at the Nordic countries
 - Nordic financial systems in early 1980's
 - Financial deregulation, main aspects
- III. Central issues in financial deregulation
 - Problems in Nordic deregulations
 - Lessons
- IV. Managing the Nordic financial crises
 - Crisis management
 - Lessons

I. The aftermath of WWII

- Destruction from the war and earlier instabilities in 1930's.
- Main concern: How to generate adequate savings to fund reconstruction and industrial development.
 - Often focus on priority sectors such as basic industries, exports and the housing sector.
- Regulatory frameworks to protect financial services industry were kept unchanged.
 - Rationing and controls of the financial system
 - Interest rates were kept stable and below the market levels.
 - Public debt levels were very high after WWII.

- Gradual lifting of financial controls.
 - Some marketable financial instruments in 1950's to 1970's (treasury bills, certificates of deposit, commercial paper).
 - Interest rate controls were gradually lifted, especially during 1980s.
 - This led to tightening of interest margins.
 - Time tables differed a lot between countries.
- Other (gradual) developments
 - Deregulation of financial services (fees).
 - Removal of direct lending controls and investment regulations.
 - Strengthening of competition among financial institutions.
 - Financial assistance (low-rate financing, tax incentives etc.) gradually reformed or removed.

I.1 External dimensions

- Exchange controls in some countries in 1930s and in majority of countries right after WWII.
- Fixed exchange rates regime, capital controls.
- Bretton Woods institutions
 - IMF for loan facilities for countries in temporary difficulties.
 - OEEC (later OECD) for trade liberalization.
 - European Payment Union: clearing balances and credit.
- EEC led to liberalization of real economies.
- OECD engaged countries in process of liberalization of capital movements in 1961.
 - Some countries without exchange controls: Canada, USA, Switzerland, Germany (after 1958).

- Breakdown of the Bretton Woods system in 1971.
 - In Europe, creation of the 'Snake' for exchange rates in 1972
 - The European Monetary System in 1978
 - ERM: fixed and adjustable exchange rates, mutual support
 - Big inflation differentials => realignments in the first years, but few realignments in 1980s.
- Renewed efforts to capital account liberalizations in 1980's.
 - EU: some countries (Germany, UK, Denmark) liberalized before 1986 EU Directive. Netherlands joined at the end of 1986. France joined in 1988.
- Maastricht Treaty in 1992 made free movement of capital a cornerstones of EU.
 - EMS crisis in 1992-93 led to realignments and wide bands for exchange rates.
 - Road to EMU (started in 1999). New ERM for outsiders. Also floaters (Sweden, UK...)

I.2 Liberalization of banking and financial systems

- Timing of domestic liberalization varied among countries.
- EU legislation: important steps from 1989 onward.
 - Single EU banking licence,
 - Single passport for investment services,
 - Single market in financial services etc.
- ◆ Banking crises in Europe (before the current one):
 - Problems with individual banks: BCCI, Banesto, Barings, Credit Lyonnaises and various small banks.
 - Systemic banking crises: 3 Nordic countries in early 1990's and Spain in early 1980's
 - among the "big five crises" of advanced market economies before the current crisis (Reinhard & Rogoff)

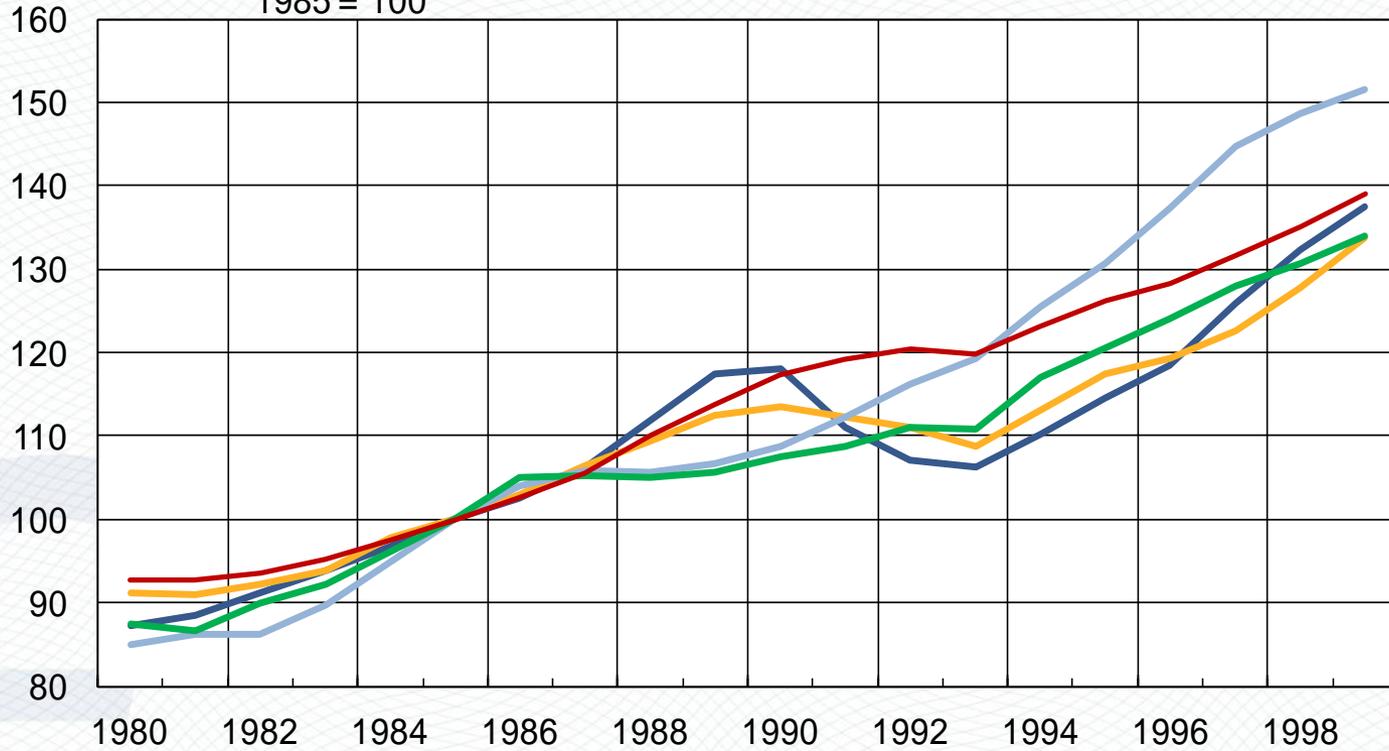
II. Close look at the Nordic countries

- Why important?
 - Three out of four countries developed very big financial crises from liberalization.
- Background on Nordics:
 - Small open economies, total population over 22 million:
 - Wide-spread ties, e.g., common labor market since 1954.
 - Sweden wealthiest in 1970s, Finland weakest (suffered heavily in WWII).
 - Foreign trade and associated payments liberalized early by the end of 1950's.
 - Egalitarian, socially cohesive countries with democratic tradition:
 - Big public sector, strong influence on the economy.
 - Financial repression was an instrument of growth and industrialization policies.
 - More rapid inflation than in much of the western world.

GDP

— Finland — Sweden — Norway — Denmark — Euro area

1985 = 100

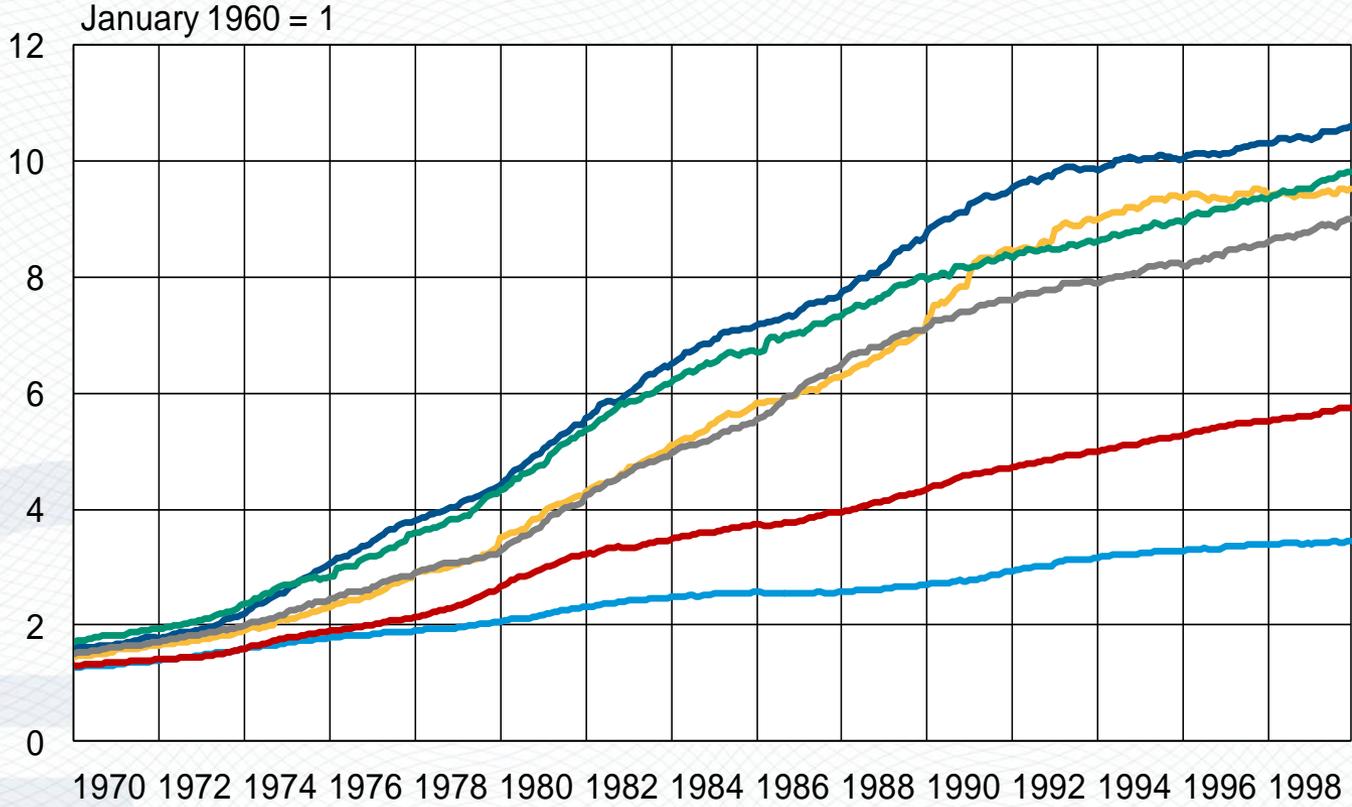


Source: Eurostat.

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Consumer prices

— Finland — Sweden — Norway — Denmark — Germany — USA

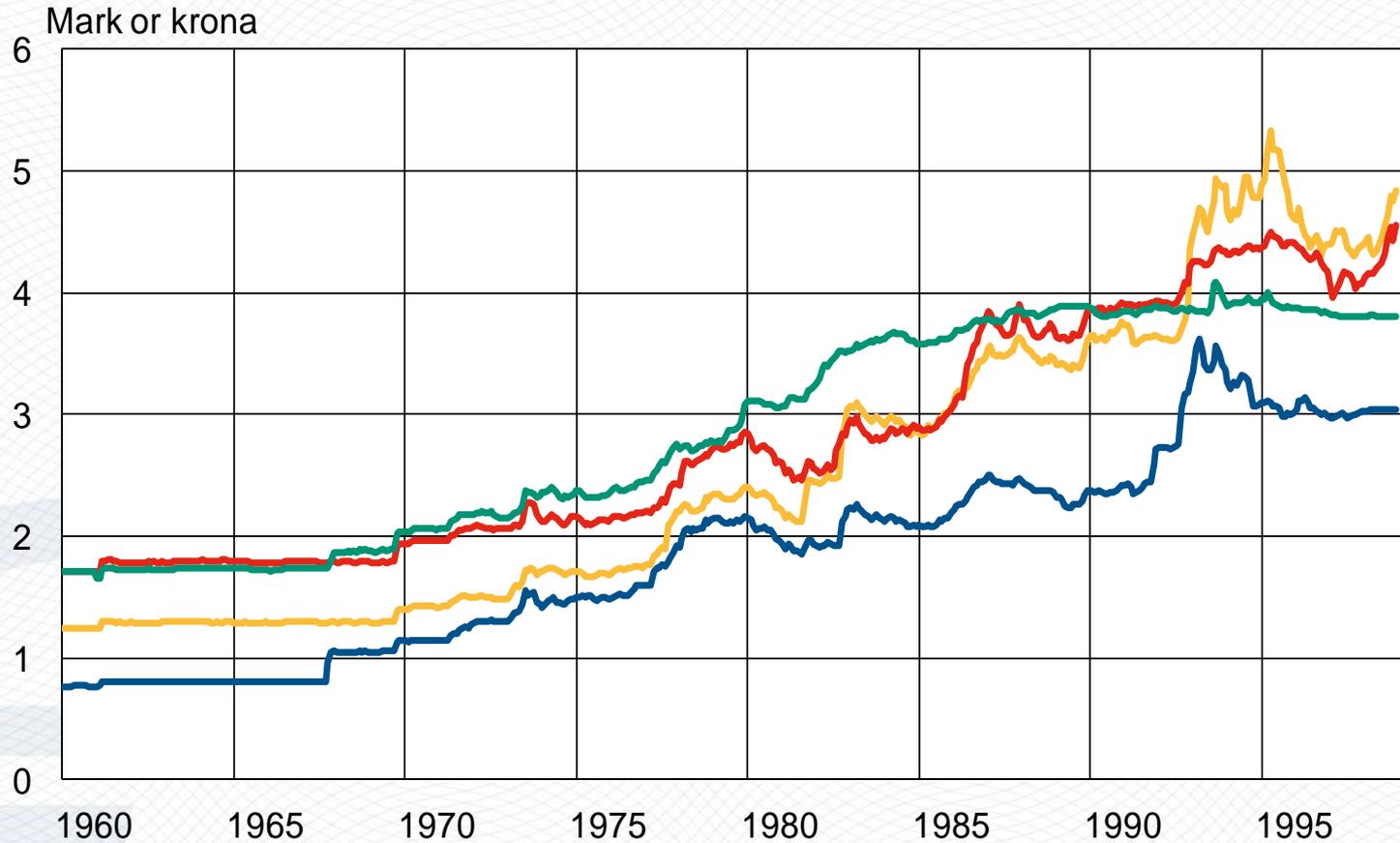


Source: OECD.

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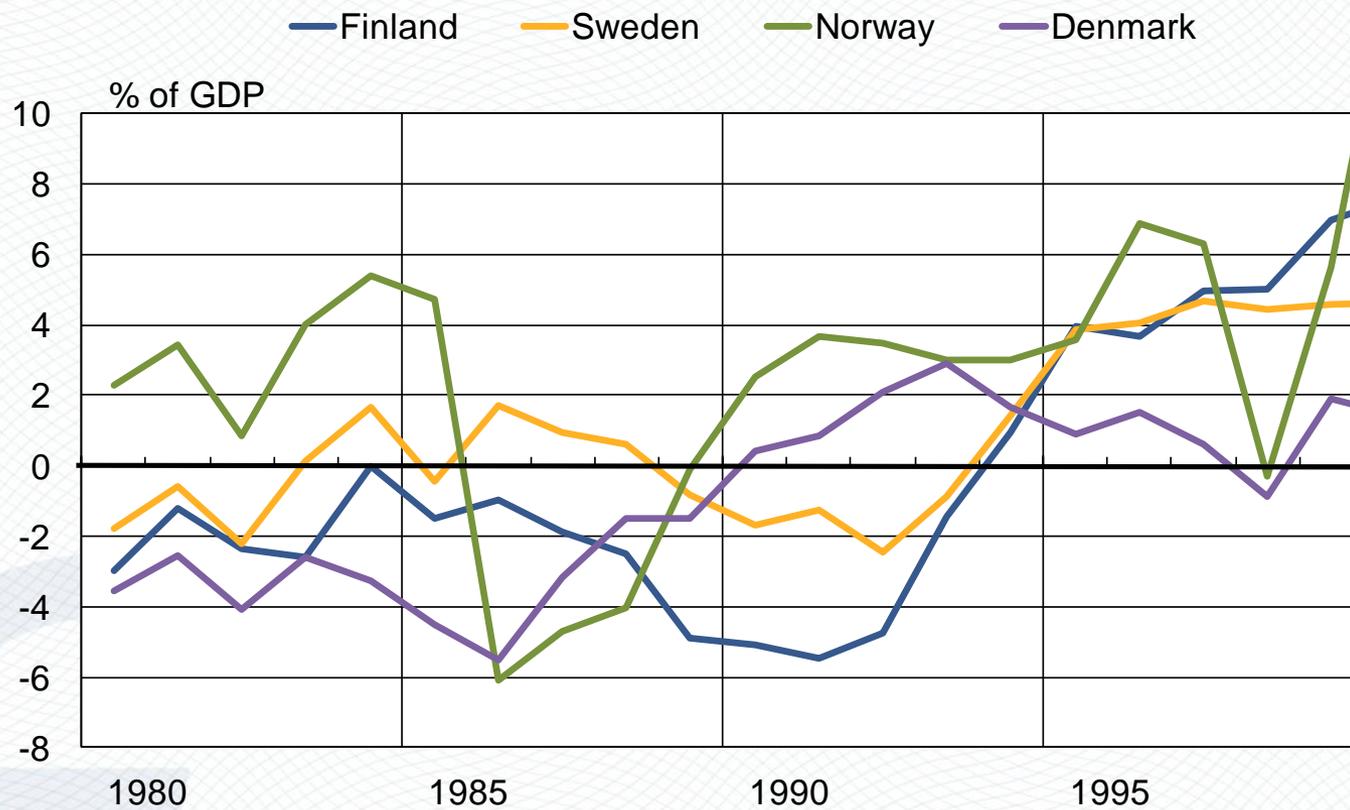
Nordic currencies against German mark

— Finnish mark — Swedish krona — Norwegian krona — Danish krona



Source: Bank of Finland.

Current account



Source: European Commission.

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II.1 Nordic financial systems in early 1980's

- Denmark had a more liberal system.
 - Details will not be discussed.
- Financial systems were tightly controlled:
 - Interest rate controls by the Central bank.
 - Central Bank controlled credit flows in the economy.
- Banking system dominated by a few large banks and many smaller banks.
 - Mostly private ownership of banks,
 - capital largely raised from the private sector
 - Banks rationed credit to households and firms.

- ◆ Exchange rates pegged to currency baskets.
- ◆ Capital account controls:
 - Permits for long-term movements,
 - no short-term financial movements,
 - Foreign trade finance relatively free,
 - Foreign exchange for travel rationed.
- Non-bank systems:
 - Stock, bond markets and insurance sector kept small,
 - no major non-bank intermediaries (except special finance companies),
 - activities of foreign banks very restricted.
- ◆ Supervision focused at compliance in lending and accounting, no risk supervision.

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- ◆ Competition restricted by regulation of interest rates, entry into financial market, etc.
 - Also new bank branches restricted.
 - Subsidiaries of foreign banks not allowed.
 - Strong legal system ("Rule of law")
 - e.g. bankruptcy procedures.
 - Very stable banking systems:
 - Very low loan losses,
 - inefficiencies: large personnel and branch networks.
 - Tight controls protected independent monetary policy.

II.2. Main aspects of Nordic deregulation

- Growth of international trade and internationalization of firms.
 - This created pressures to liberalize.
- Growth of international financial markets.
 - IMF, OECD, EU sought liberalizations of markets and capital flows.
- Leakages and loopholes in the controls emerged.
 - "grey" domestic financial intermediation in late 1970's and 1980's.
- Liberalization involved numerous individual acts
 - see slide for Finland.
 - Volatility in macroeconomic developments from the liberalization.

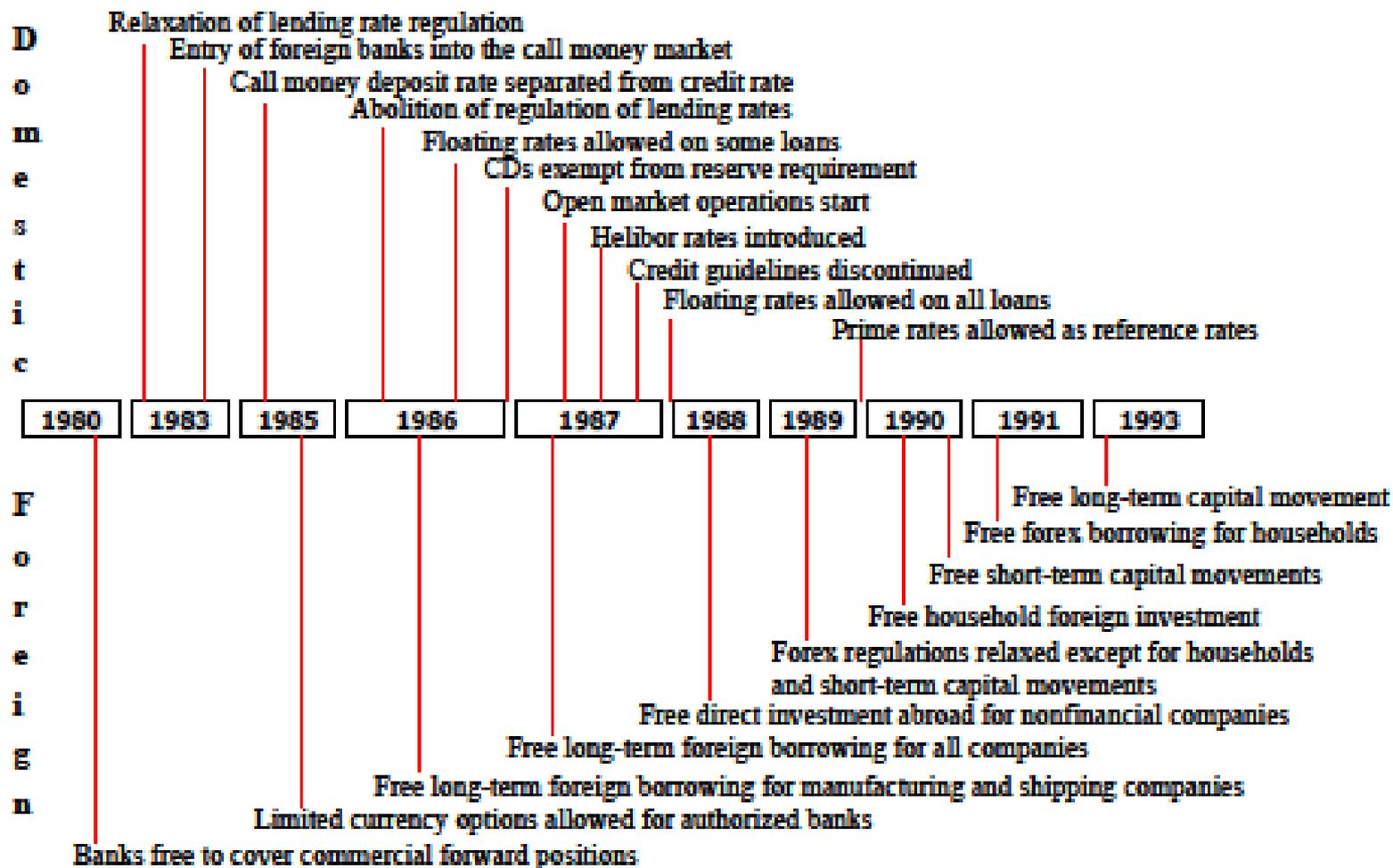


Chart 3B. Deregulation of financial markets in Finland

Source: Englund & Vihriälä (2003)

III. Central issues in financial deregulation

- Liberalization of financial and foreign exchange markets limits the leeway of domestic economic policy.
- **Impossible trinity:** with free markets one cannot fix exchange rate, domestic interest rate and quantity of finance.
- Order of liberalization:
 - Domestic market before international capital movements or vice versa?
 - Which order for different markets in terms of maturity, sector finance, derivatives etc.

- Other issues:
 - Which order for currency denomination (domestic vs. foreign)?
 - Which order for exports and imports of capital?
 - Should there be response to market pressure?
 - When might deregulation steps be reversed?
- Nordic countries liberalized domestic and currency markets and capital movements in tandem.
- Decisions about taxation of finance:
 - Is debt finance favored?

III.1 Problems in Nordic liberalizations

- Bad timing, espec. for Sweden and Finland
 - big steps were taken in 1985-86, when business cycle suddenly turned upward.
 - Collapse of OPEC cartel -> lower oil prices. (Norway)
- A boom developed in Sweden and Finland.
 - It turned into a systemic banking, currency and economic crisis at the start of 1990's.
 - Collapse of Soviet Union was a big shock for Finnish exports.
 - Norway experienced only a banking crisis.
 - Denmark had banking problems but no systemic crisis.
- Other problems:
 - Narrow focus on executing the acts of liberalization was insufficient.
 - There was little aid to markets, firms, households and banks in adjustment toward competition with flexible prices.

- **Problems continued:**
 - Very little realization that liberalization to market-based finance implied increased risks.
 - Risk management viewpoint became important for banks.
- **No reform of financial regulation:**
 - Not only compliance regulations,
 - risk assessments and systemic viewpoint were missing.
- **Macroeconomics:**
 - The fixed exchange rate systems came under pressure.
 - Nordics moved to floating of Forex rates in 1992 and adoption of inflation targeting.

III.2 Lessons

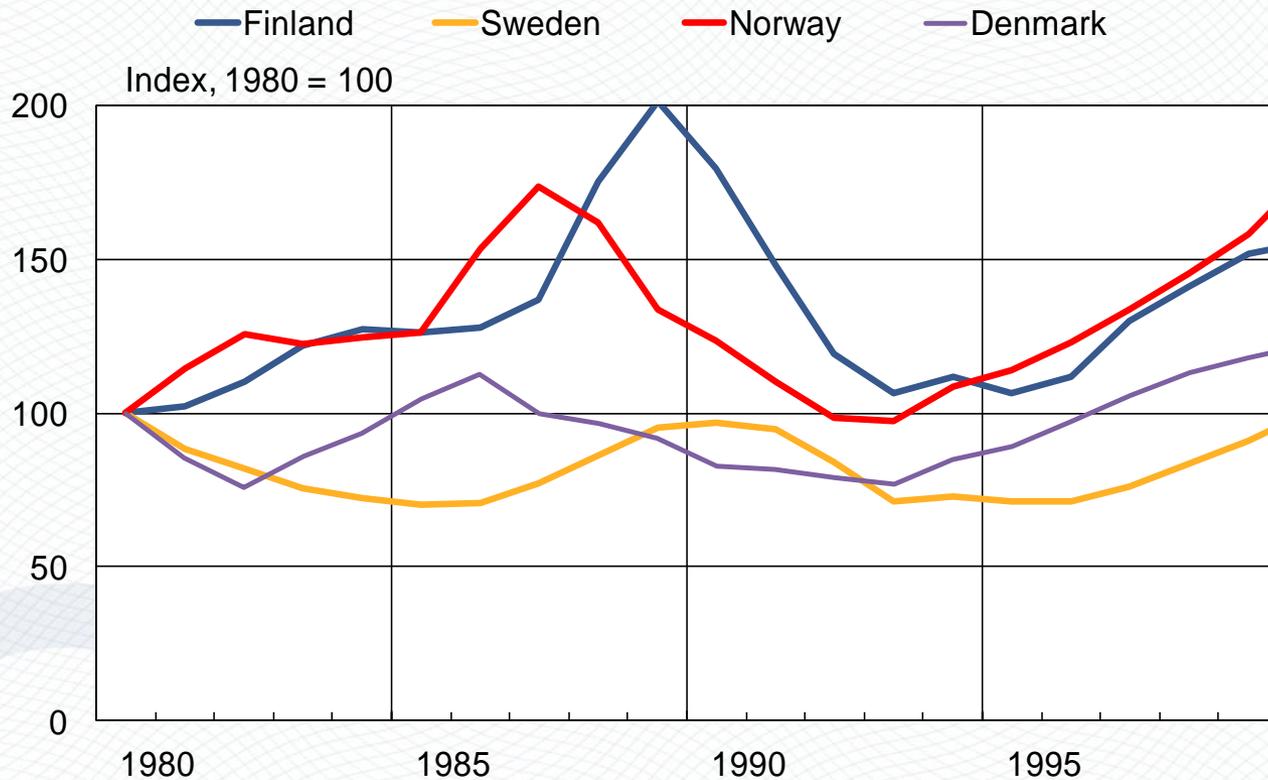
- Dangers from lack of financial knowledge
 - Traditional way of thinking becomes a trap.
 - This reform is much more than technical adjustments.
- ◆ A cautious and gradual approach is probably better than a 'big bang'.
- ◆ Important to time well acts of liberalization:
 - To avoid pro-cyclicality.
 - Strengthen capital ratios of banks well before.
 - Reform the supervisory system in advance.

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- **Macroeconomic aspects:**
 - Reforms for the taxation system.
 - Make exchange rate flexible before opening capital movements.
 - **Liberalization has long-run benefits for growth and development.**
 - But there are limits. A fully laissez faire financial system is likely to be unstable.
 - **In case a financial crisis emerges:**
 - Take swift action to maintain stability and confidence of the banking system.
 - Contain moral hazard when dealing with banking crisis.

IV. Managing the Nordic financial crises

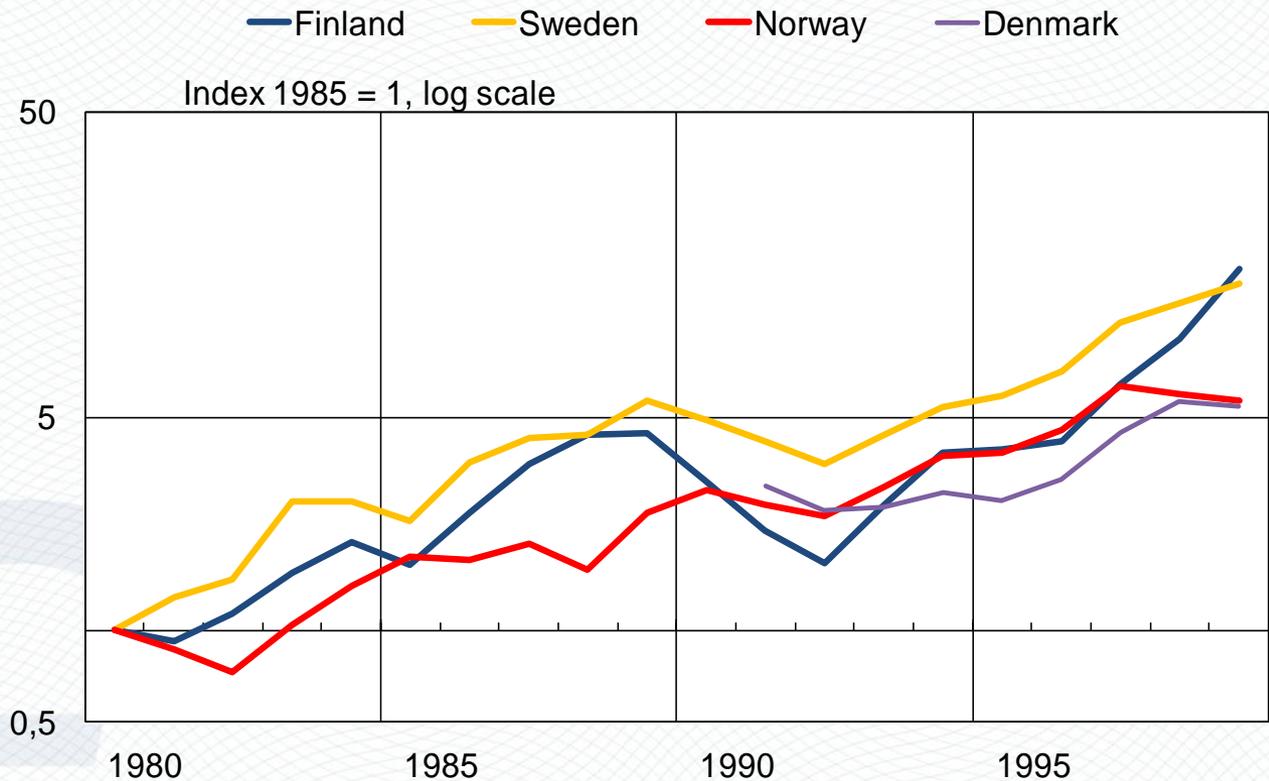
- At the start of 1990's the boom turned into systemic banking, currency and economic crisis.
 - Denmark had banking problems but no systemic crisis.
 - Norway experienced only a banking crisis.
 - Finland experienced a big shock in exports which deepened the crisis.
- Financial crises (see slides):
 - Big declines in real estate and share prices.
 - Bank lending turned negative after rapid growth.
 - Loan losses and negative operating profits for banks

Real house prices



Nominal house prices deflated using the consumer price index.
Sources: Statistics Finland, Statistics Sweden, Norges Bank, Statistics Norway and Bank of Finland.
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Real share prices

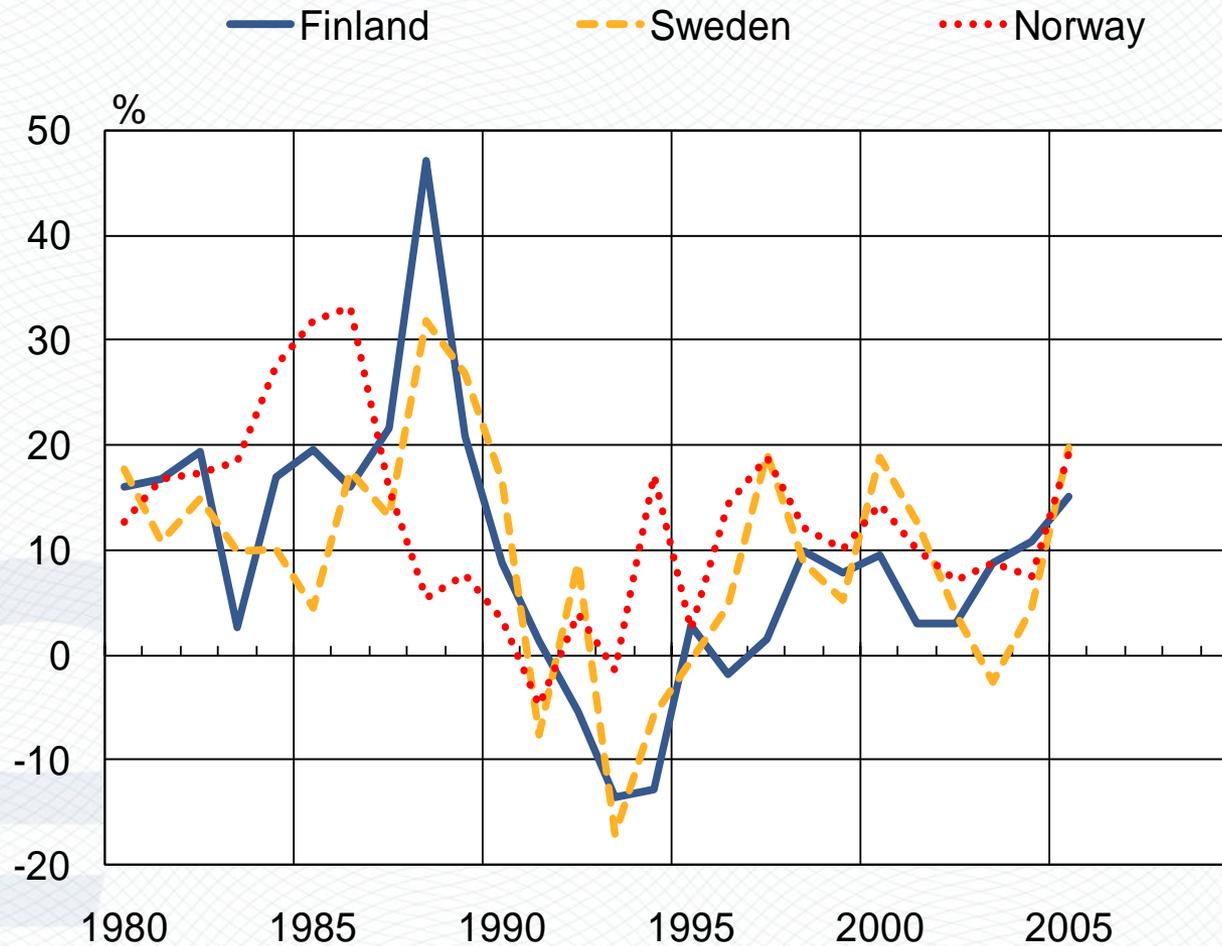


Nominal share prices deflated using the consumer price index.

Sources: IMF, ECB and Bank of Finland.

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Figure 6. Lending growth

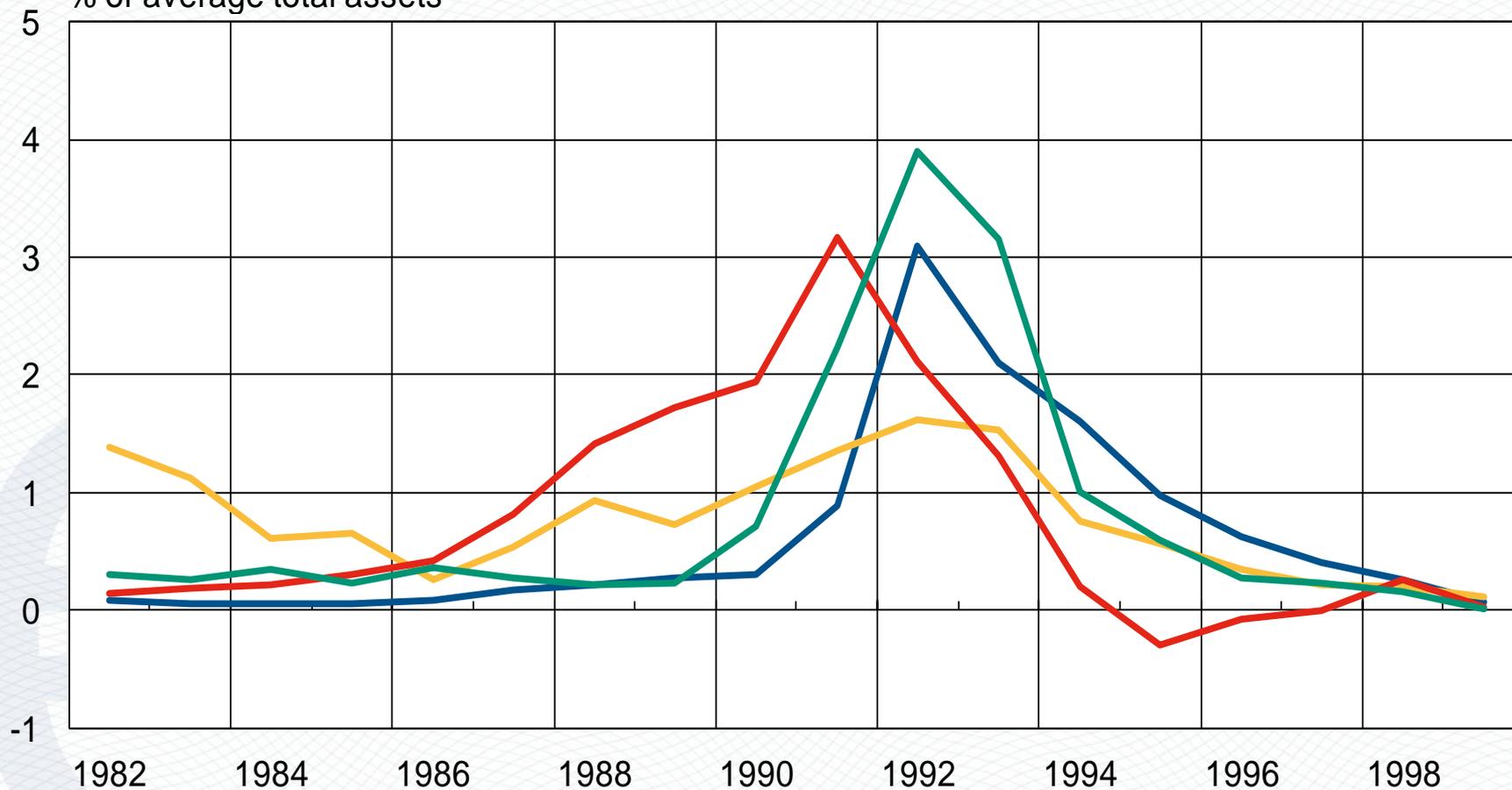


Sources: OECD and Bank of Finland.

Nordic banks' loan losses

Finland Denmark Norway Sweden

% of average total assets

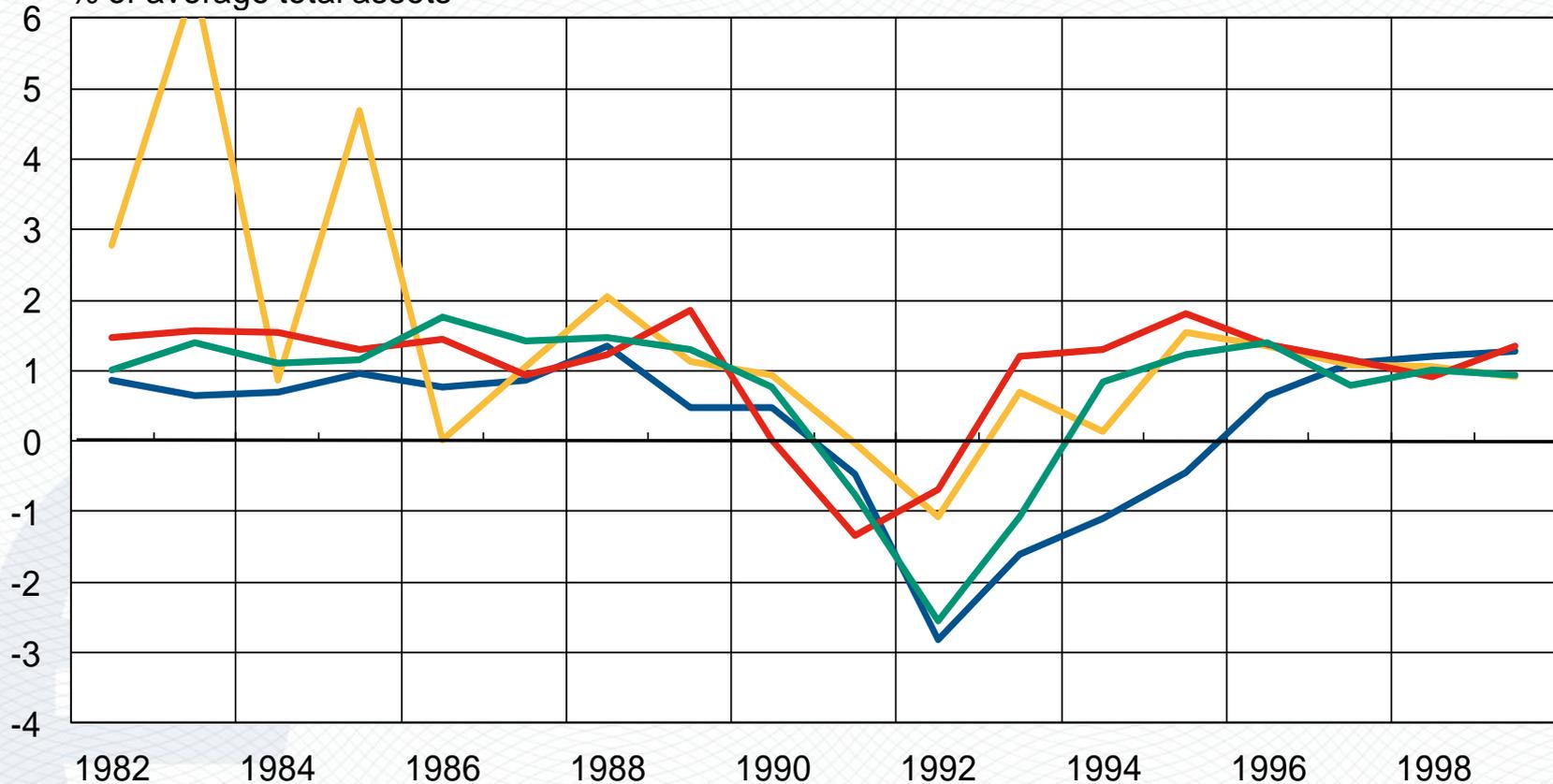


Source: National central banks.

Nordic banks' operating profits

— Finland — Denmark — Norway — Sweden

% of average total assets



Source: National central banks.

IV.1 Crisis management

- **Finland**

- 1st measure: Bank of Finland took control of Skopbank in September 1991.
- Government set up the crisis management agency.
- Public support: preferred capital certificates to banks, with strict requirements.
- Policy-makers made promises to guarantee banks' obligations, also further public support.
- Support to be converted into shares if not repaid.

- Finland (continued)

- Banks became profitable again in 1996
- Improved efficiency (staff was halved, etc.)
- Major restructuring of banking system:
 - savings banks largely disappeared,
 - one big commercial bank was merged to another.
- Nowadays 60 percent of banks owned by foreigners

=> Biggest part of the crisis was in the Savings Banks system.

• Sweden

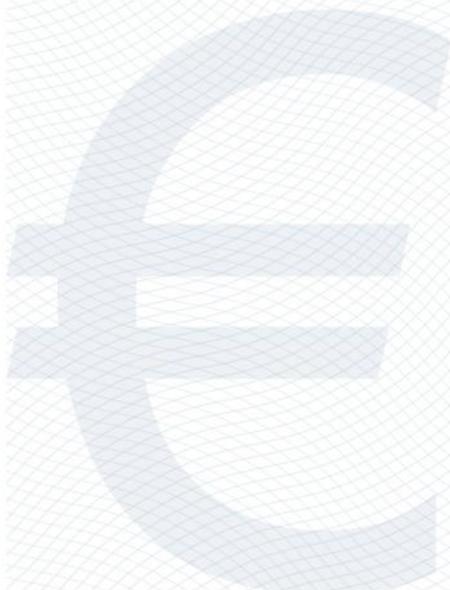
- Crisis erupted in autumn 1991 with Första Sparbanken; government gave a loan and FS merged with other savings banks.
- Nordbanken (3rd largest comm. bank) was 71% govt owned and had to be recapitalized.
- Many banks made heavy credit losses.
- In autumn 1992 blanket creditor guarantee by government.
- Crisis resolution agency set up, public support with strict criteria in risk reduction and efficiency.

- Sweden (continued)

- Some banks did not need public support.

⇒ In the end nearly all support went into two banks, Gotabanken and Nordeabank.

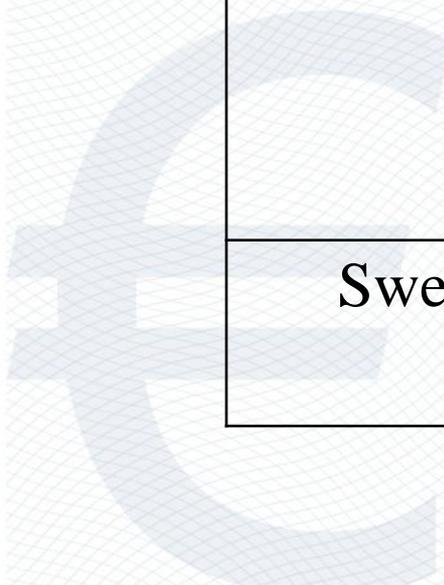
- Nordeabank became a pan-Nordic bank "Nordea".



• Norway

- Crisis erupted in autumn 1988.
- Initially private guarantee funds provided support and bank mergers took place.
- In late 1990 private funds were exhausted, so government guarantee funds set up in early 1991.
- Support had to be converted into solvency support.
- In autumn 1991 capital support needed.
- In Spring 1992 several banks, incl. three biggest commercial banks were nationalized

- Norway (continued):
 - no blanket guarantee by government, but specific announcements about securing depositors and creditors.
 - Banks situation started to improve in 1993.
 - One of nationalized banks was sold in 1995 and two other banks were sold later.
 - Government still owns over 30 percent of one bank.
- => In the end the Norwegian tax payer made money out of the crisis (not so in Finland and Sweden).



| | Gross cost | Net cost |
|---------|--|-------------------------------------|
| Finland | 9.0 (% of 1997 GDP) | 5.3 (% of 1997 GDP) |
| Norway | 2.0 (% of 1997 GDP), 3.4 (present value, % of 2001 GDP) | -0.4 (present value, % of 2001 GDP) |
| Sweden | 3.6 (% of 1997 GDP) | 0.2 (% of 1997 GDP) |

IV.2 Lessons

- ◆ **Prevention of major crisis** is the first priority.
 - stability-oriented macro policies
- How to diagnose an overheating situation?
 - rapid credit expansion
 - strong increase in leverage
 - big external deficits in open economies
- ◆ Political-economy reasons can be a major obstacle in crisis prevention.

- Crisis management:
 - Maintaining confidence in banking system is crucial.
 - Broad political support; political guarantees to banks' obligations in Finland and Sweden but not in Norway.
- Role of central banks:
 - Liquidity support in Norway and Sweden.
 - Bank of Finland had to take over a problem bank.



◆ Crisis resolution agencies in all three countries

- Administrative separation from central bank and ministry of finance,
 - capital injections to banks,
 - guiding the restructuring of the banking system,
 - Treatment of "old shareholders" was mixed.
- Asset management companies ("bad banks") to deal with non-performing assets
 - Norway: banks had their own bad banks,
 - Finland and Sweden had public agencies.
- => Nordic practices in crisis resolution have been praised afterwards.

Thank you !

For more detailed discussion see:

- Honkapohja, S., 2014. Lessons from the Financial Liberalization in the Nordic Countries in the 1980s, in Woo, W.T., Pan, Y. , Sachs, J., Qian, J. (Eds.), *Financial Systems at the Crossroads*, World Scientific Publishing, Singapore, pp.135-163.
- Honkapohja, S. 2014. Financial Crises: Lessons from the Nordic Experience, *Journal of Financial Stability*, forthcoming.