

Four Discourses on the Northern Dimension in Helsingin Sanomat

SIGRID KAASIK

“It is the biggest, most complicated, and most promising piece of the new Europe. The Baltic Sea links the largest countries on the continent with some of the smallest. On one side is prosperity, on the other the squalid poverty of the Russian out-back – places such as Pskov and Karelia, where village life is reverting to a pre-industrial age.” That is how *The Economist* magazine (18–24 April 1998) has characterized the Baltic Sea Region. Almost 20 million people live on the Baltic Sea coast. The territory of this area is four times as large as the sea itself – 400, 000 square kilometers. That is more than 20% of the territory of the whole of Europe (Kivikari 1996, 33). At least 28 regional co-operating organizations have been established in the Baltic Sea Region, 23 of them founded in the 1990s. The most effective organization among them is the Baltic Sea Council.

One of the newest ideas among the European Union’s (EU) foreign political concepts towards the region is the Northern Dimension (ND). On the one hand, the ND ought to express the interests of the EU in the region (Lipponen 1997 a), on the other, it is clearly connected with the foreign political interests of Finland. Finland has declared it to be the most important Finnish initiative in the EU context that gives Finland a possibility for active participation in the European Union’s policy making.

According to the Finnish Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen, the main aim of the ND is to increase stability in the Northern region through promoting positive interdependence between the Northern European and Baltic countries, and also integrating Russia into the European structures (Lipponen

1998). The main issues of the Northern Dimension are energetic and nuclear safety, co-operation in trade and commerce, transport and telecommunications, as well as reduction of differences in living standards and healthcare in the countries involved (Lipponen 1997 a). These issues are similar to the main areas of co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region (Jauhiainen 1999, 56-63).

Participants in the ND in addition to EU are almost identical with the states which take part in the co-operation within the Baltic Sea Region, since the concept includes mainly the Baltic countries, Norway, Iceland, Poland and Russia. Therefore, the Northern Dimension can be seen as a concept that could also efficiently improve co-operation within the Baltic Sea Region. However, the ND should not be identified with the Baltic Sea Region, because it also includes parts of the Barents and Arctic Regions and EU.

Both the Baltic Sea Region and the ND concept are more based on common goals and problems than on common history and culture. Thus, co-operation is related on the functional level (cf. Haukkala 1999, 89, 90). Especially in the case of the ND, no attempt has been made to naturalize the concept by indicating at shared history or culture, or a common regional identity. It has rather been presented as joint challenges for the future (Lehti 1999, 27, 40).

Development of the Northern Dimension as a European Union’s concept is becoming even more topical in the current situation of enlargement of the EU, for most of the Baltic Sea Region countries will sooner or later become EU members. On the other hand, it is by no means a unique initiative. According to the Finnish Prime Minister, Paavo Lipponen, the ND concept can be compared with the EU’s duty to improve the co-operation within

the Mediterranean region (Southern Dimension) (Lipponen 1997 a, b; Lipponen 1999).

The existence of the ND in reality, however, is still questionable. Finnish high-ranking politicians launched the idea of the ND for the first time in 1994 (Heininen 1999, 34; *Helsingin Sanomat* 29 Oct. 1998). In 1997 Finland made a proposal concerning the ND of the EU to the European Council in Luxembourg. Although several documents have dealt with the concept since that time (including the European Commission's inventory of the current activities that could be seen as part of the ND and European Council in Feira in June 2000 approved the action plan of the ND), the implementation of the concept has not been visible yet.

Since the development of the ND is still an ongoing process, the way it is represented by Finnish media can remarkably influence the opinion of the Finns people about the ND. For example, in 1997, when the initiative was officially launched to the EU, the Finnish media expressed a very positive attitude (Ojanen 1999 a, 17). During the subsequent years, 1998 and 1999, the ND issue was continuously discussed in the Finnish media, including the largest daily, *Helsingin Sanomat* (HS). This means that its role in introducing the concept to the public and starting to form its opinion is remarkable (cf. Heikkilä 1996, 65).

In what follows, I will analyze how HS presented the ND concept during 1998 and 1999: whether it was mainly seen as a means of co-operation or whether the picture given by HS also pointed at elements of competition that the concept probably contains. It is also important to find out whether the ND was presented as something incomplete, still evolving, or whether more attention was paid to the progress already achieved in this development. In addition to that I analyze whether the attitude of politicians and journalists was similar and who was more critical towards the ND.

Method

My analysis is based on the Internet versions of 46 articles of *Helsingin Sanomat* that dealt with the ND concept. The articles were selected from among those published between 1998 and 1999. 34 of them were news stories and 12 columns or editorials. In 22 articles the ND was not the main issue, but appeared mostly within the context of EU enlargement, relations between the EU countries, the development of Russia, and relations between the EU and Russia. In 24 stories the ND was the main issue. Most of the articles dealt with questions of

the political spheres (39), followed by problems of economy, culture and environment.

I will mostly apply Norman Fairclough's method of critical discourse analysis. According to Fairclough, in every text the textual level, discursive practice and socio-cultural context can be depicted (Fairclough 1994, 26; 1997, 78-86). Further, on the textual level, any text can be divided into three components pointed out by Halliday (1978) as ideational, interpersonal and textual. In the present analysis I will observe the ideational (how the representations are produced) and interpersonal (relations between actors and identities in the text) components of the texts. I will also study the linguistic elements used for forming the components of the texts – mostly "conventional" and "fresh" metaphors (Hellsten 1997; Lehtonen 1996; Mustaparta 1996; Lakoff & Johnson 1980), use of the active and passive voice, expressions and wording.

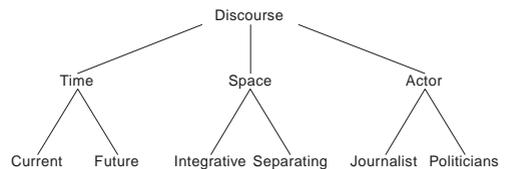
In addition to the textual level I will deal with the socio-cultural context (Fairclough 1997, 85-86) trying to clarify what connections can be found between discourses and background information about the ND countries.

Discourses

One could find four discourses of the ND in *Helsingin Sanomat*: those of the Baltic States, Russia, the European Union and Finland.

In each discourse three aspects can be described – space, time and the actor. "Actor" covers mostly Halliday's (1978) interpersonal component of the text (how the identity and relations between actors are presented) and "space" the ideational level (representations in the text). In this article every aspect is based on two oppositions that can be seen as a pair.

A discourse can thus be shown as follows:



The space aspect includes integrative and separating dimensions. They are formed on the basis of benefit or loss that is expected as a result of the ND for the actors who create the discourse. In connection with this aspect the activity and inner security/insecurity of the actor can be analyzed. The integrative dimension means that the ND is seen in

Helsingin Sanomat in the context of close co-operation that serves the common interests of the actors, that evaluates the geographical neighbourhood and could possibly create a common identity for participants. The importance of the geographical factor in the ND is stressed, for example, in the article “Latvia ja Liettua saivat Pohjolasta tukea EU-jäsenyysneuvotteluihin” (Latvia and Lithuania Got Support for the Enlargement Negotiations from the Nordics):

Lipponen continued to introduce the Northern Dimension policy for the members of parliament of the Baltic Sea Region. /.../ He said that the central influencing factor in the birth of this concept was the European Union’s borderline with Russia. According to Lipponen neither the EU nor Russia has understood the meaning of this borderline. However, the meaning of good-neighbourly relations will become even more important in connection with EU enlargement. (HS 09 Feb. 1999)

Characteristic features of the separating dimension are the actor’s doubts about the motives of the concept and about a possibility of common benefit, which can lead to the decrease of the current co-operation between the neighbouring countries participating in the ND.

The actor aspect expresses the attitude of the media and politicians towards the concept, because they were the most frequent presenters of the ND in HS. Additionally the actor aspect enables one to compare the similarities and differences in the lexical styles of the acting parties within the discourses.

The time aspect involves the current and future dimensions. The division depends on the expectations towards the ND. The current dimension appears in case acceptance of the ND of the EU initiative is presented as a current success. Conversely, in case acceptance of the concept is considered merely a frame that enables one to look for a concrete action and content of the ND, the concept is presented as a future concept. An example can be found in the article “Vuoden 1999 suurin haaste” (The Biggest Challenge of 1999):

The Northern Dimension improved by Finland and other long-term policies of this kind are still only ideas and do not involve any real action that could help Russia out of the crisis. (HS 31 Dec. 1998)

The actors who stress the ND integrative dimension evaluate the current dimension more highly

than the future dimension because the latter dimension does not express the present co-operation. On the other hand, in case of the separating dimension, the current dimension reveals the damage that could be caused by the ND.

In conclusion, it can be said that the presentation of the ND in *Helsingin Sanomat* is contradictory – there is no hegemony of one dimension, but the opposite pairs appear. In every discourse, though, the leading dimension of every single aspect can be found.

Four Discourses of the Northern Dimension: The Baltic States, Russia, European Union and Finland

The Discourse of the Baltic States

Within the integrative dimension, the Baltic States, with a few exceptions were mostly passive. Participation of the Baltic countries in the ND was discussed in the article “Ahtisaari toivoi Venäjän myöntävän virheensä Baltiassa” (Ahtisaari Hoped that Russia Would Admit its Mistakes Made in the Baltic Countries) as follows:

Ahtisaari said that this Finnish concept has been welcomed very warmly and it will become a part of EU policy. /.../ He said that the Baltic countries could take part in the Northern Dimension co-operation already before they joined the EU and even before they started the negotiations with the EU, because this could help them to prepare for EU accession. (HS 13 Nov. 1998)

Within the integrative dimension political issues were discussed. On the political level accession to the EU is one of the most important foreign political goals of the Baltic States and the ND was seen as a concept that could contribute to fulfillment of this task. Sometimes, however, together with the political issues, also the separating dimension appeared.

The Baltic States made the separating dimension visible by stressing the negative features of the ND. The Baltic criticism was most often targeted towards Finland and not towards the EU, since the ND was treated as “tricky” Finnish concept (HS 17 Aug. 1999; HS 06 Nov. 1998). The separating dimension mostly appeared in connection with the changes that would be brought about by the ND in the economic sphere. The Baltic States were afraid that Finland would try to increase its role in the sea transit between Russia and the EU at their expense. In the article “Suomea syytellään Latviassa

maan eristämisestä Euroopasta” (Finland is Accused of Separating Latvia from the Europe in Latvia), Aivars Lembergs, mayor of Ventspils city and director of Ventspils port, presents this point of view:

The Northern Dimension cultivated by Finland, which will be discussed in the EU Vienna summit is not economically reasonable. “It has been created to separate Latvia from the rest of the Europe economically.” According to Lembergs, Finland hopes that the mineral oil transit through Ventspils port would be reduced to 3 million tons a year only, instead of the present 15 tons. (HS 06 Nov.1998)

“Cultivated by Finland” indicates that Latvia considers itself neither the initiator nor supporter of this concept. Furthermore, Lembergs states that the ND may jeopardize Latvia’s economic interests and is therefore, is disadvantageous for the country.

Both journalists and politicians of the Baltic States expressed criticism in *Helsingin Sanomat*. However, high-ranking politicians never criticized the ND. Likewise was the attitude of presidents and prime ministers rather supportive. According to Lithuania’s president Valdas Adamkus the ND would help Lithuania to take part in European co-operation (HS 10 Nov. 1998). The lower rank politicians (who in several cases were primarily businessmen) were more concerned about economic matters. For example, Aivars Lembergs on HS 13 June 1998 and HS 06 Nov. 1998 said that ND’s goal is to exclude Latvia from the Europe and Finland’s aim is to take over the transit between Russia and EU.

As regards Baltic journalists, then HS quoted only critical statements of Estonian and Latvian journalists (Lithuanian journalists were altogether absent from the articles). The most critical was Latvian journalists’ attitude who – like politicians – were mainly concerned about the economic consequences of the Northern Dimension. At the same time, Estonian journalists also expressed a view that Latvia’s fear of getting damaged or cheated by the ND, was an overreaction (HS 02 Sept.1998).

Expressing fears and doubts about the possible negative economic consequences of the ND, the articles dealt with this initiative as if it was something real and threatening already today. Discussing the ND’s political influence in connection with joining the EU, no concerns were expressed about the incomplete and ambiguous content of the concept at the moment.

The ND Context in the Discourse of the Baltic States

The former Estonian minister of foreign affairs, Raul Mälk has noted that the original idea of the ND was expressed for the first time by the former Finnish president, Martti Ahtisaari already in 1994, in his speech at Tartu University, Estonia (HS 29 Oct. 1998). The articles published in Estonian newspapers by politicians and state officials about the ND during 1999 were positive (*Postimees* 14 Jan.1999; 15 May 1999; Raik 1999, 159). This can be observed in the context of the Baltic foreign political goal to join the EU where the ND would help foster this process. Also, Estonian statements concerning the development of the Baltic Sea regional co-operation are well in accordance with the concept of the ND, since the central aim of both is to realise the economic potential of the region, to promote welfare and security of the Baltic Sea states, to remove obstacles from trade, support development of infrastructures, and to involve Russia into co-operation (Raik 1999, 155).

On the other hand, discourse of the Baltic States, depicted in *Helsingin Sanomat*, and attitude towards the ND expressed in the Estonian and Latvian national newspapers are mostly based on the concept of *Realpolitik*. The ND is seen as an instrument used by the Finnish government to promote Finland’s national interests in its neighbouring areas and thereby increase its international prestige (Haukkala 1999, 10). As a first analysis of the ND concept, an article about the interests of Finland and the ND’s possible harm to the Baltic countries was published in Estonia’s largest daily *Postimees* in the summer of 1998 (HS 02 Sept.1998; Raik 1999, 157). Raivo Vare, head of the biggest Estonian port, Pakterminal, stated in the Estonian Radio’s programme *Päevasüda* (Midday) on 16 Nov.1999, that the political issues of the ND were acceptable for Estonia, but in the economic sphere the ND could cause competition with the neighbours. An article of *Helsingin Sanomat* (17 Aug.1999) featured a view of Latvian politicians, according to which the ND might be dangerous for the Baltic States because it mostly takes into consideration Russia. To balance the situation, they suggested that the Baltic States should tighten their contacts with the USA.

Their smallness and fear of getting harmed can partly explain the suspicious and doubtful reactions of the Baltic countries. Their geographical proximity to Russia reinforces these fears even more. In-

deed, Russia as a big and more powerful country has influenced the fate of the Baltic countries throughout their history.

The Discourse of Russia

In Russia's discourse, the integrative dimension of the space aspect was stronger than in that of Baltic States. While in the case of the Baltic countries it was pointed out that someone else might benefit at their expense, no similar worries were expressed in connection with Russia. Russia either stayed passive or applied for an important status in the concept. An example of such self-confidence is given in the article "Duuman puhemies paheksui Karjalakeskustelua" (The Speaker of Duma Despised Karelia-Debate), where the speaker of the Russian Duma Gennadi Seleznev, politely stated:

"I hope that the Northern Dimension will become a fruitful policy and Russia will have a solid position in it." He further expressed hopes that the EU would revise and abandon all the sanctions presently regulating the trade between Russia and Western Europe. (HS 28 Jan. 1999)

In addition to the economic benefit that was stressed by both Finland and Russia, Finland also indicated that the EU and Finland could profit from imposing the Western standards on Russia. For example, in the article "Suomi saamassa läpi aloitteen pohjoisesta ulottuvuudesta" (Finland about to Get the Northern Dimension Initiative Passed) a need to improve the measures of environmental protection in Russia is stressed:

Nuclear waste is not properly treated in Russia. Especially in the Kola peninsula a lot of neglect was observed, where huge amounts of nuclear waste were not taken care of in a proper way. (HS 26 Nov. 1998)

The Russian sources presented only politicians as actors, whereas Russian journalists were not found in this discourse. Politicians emphasized the ND's economic benefit for Russia and its "special" position in the concept. Russia's aim to gain a special and distinguished position also appeared in connection with the Foreign Ministers' Conference on the Northern Dimension in Helsinki in November 1999. While the other participants talked about a need to stop the war in Chechnya, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Igor Ivanov, said that the war had nothing to do with the ND, because it is part of Russia's internal affairs (HS 13 Nov. 1999 a).

Within the time aspect the current dimension dominated. When, however, the need to stabilize the situation in Russia was stressed, the future dimension emerged. The reason for that obviously was that so far the ND had failed to serve this rather complicated goal efficiently. In the article "Suomi paimentaa Venäjä-aloiteitaan" (Finland is Shepherding the Russia-Initiative) it is indicated by the conditional:

If the Northern Dimension came true, Finland would be the first one to benefit. With the EU support Finland could construct a gas pipe from Russia, improve Russia's dangerous nuclear power plants and reduce the amount of polluting chemicals in the Baltic Sea. (HS 11 Dec. 1998 b).

The ND Context in the Discourse of Russia

The clearly expressed self-confidence of Russia is based upon her size and powerful political impact on its neighbours throughout the history. Its size also amplifies all the dangers and catastrophes that can be caused by Russia in the environmental, criminal and economic spheres (Ries 1998, 25). Thus, the Western countries are trying to prevent the accidents by extending financial help to stabilize and modernize the country. The ND concept can also be viewed in this context. Pekka Visuri (1999, 49), however, points out that the attempts made by Finland and EU to stabilize and integrate Russia have up until now not been resultative.

Russia is seen both by itself and by the others as an intermediary country between Europe and Asia. Its history, culture, traditions and religion confirm it. Moscow is more an "Asian" and St Petersburg is a "western" city (HS 22 Oct. 1999; Rislakki 1999, 20; Pyykkö 1999, 74, 76). As regards religion, from the European viewpoint the Orthodox East is opposed to the Catholic West. On the other hand, unlike the Islamic countries, Russia has never disappeared from Europe's mental maps. Apart from being a geographical notion, for Russia, Europe is also an idea (Medvedev 1998, 48-29; 52). Russia has doubts about the European institutions and their pragmatic efficiency, although it might also admire them (cf. *Postimes* 10 Nov. 1999; Ries 1998, 27).

As a possibility to improve co-operation between Russia and Western Europe it has been proposed to give up the binary paradigm of Europe and Russia and find a "post-modernist solution" for the East-West dilemma by defining the "Third". In this

context, the “Third” could be the European North that might be attained by way of promoting the ND (Medvedev 1998, 56, 57; Heikkinen 1999, 18).

The Discourse of the European Union

Since Finland initiated the ND in the context of the EU, Finland expects to get support from the EU in developing this concept. A supportive attitude stressing the integrative dimension, can mostly be found in the official EU documents and not in the statements of the politicians (with a few exceptions, for example in HS 21 July 1998; HS 06 Oct.1998). This appears, for example, in the article “Suomi sai listalle ulottuvuutensa” (Finland Got its Dimension in the List):

On Saturday the summit expectedly and without arguing blessed the fact that the EU will construct the Northern Dimension for itself. /.../ The Northern Dimension will converge the coastal states of the Baltic Sea, the Nordic periphery of the EU, and Russia into targets to be supported in a co-ordinated way. (HS 13 Dec. 1998)

In addition to the EU’s joint discourse of the ND the member states’ opinions too were voiced in the texts. They can be divided into the angles of the Nordics (the non-member Norway was also present here), and Southern Europe. In connection with the Nordic countries (especially Sweden and Norway) the separating dimension emerged. Since formerly modest and non-active Finland originated the ND, the Nordics saw the concept as a competing element that could threaten their political and economic position. Also the common Nordic identity was seen as being jeopardized by the ND, for Finland first and foremost tried to develop itself as a European country. (HS 16 Sept. 1999)

The Mediterranean countries were afraid that the ND could direct part of the EU’s financial support to the North. Doubts about the concept and Finland’s behaviour are expressed in the article “Pohjoiseen kolkkaan rakennetaan neljäntä ulottuvuutta”(The Fourth Dimension is Built to the Northern Corner):

France has asked doubtfully what role the USA in the policy would play. The states of southern Europe have been afraid of losing the EU’s financial support. Sweden has said that Finland tried to become the master of the Baltic Sea and the Baltic countries suspect that Finland wants to snatch their profit from transit trade. (HS 11 Dec. 1998 a)

The angle of the EU member states, however, also included an integrative side. The Nordic countries said that the initiative would offer them a possibility to be visible in Europe. Spain found similarities in its geographical position with Finland that could lead to helping each other:

Spain probably promises that it will continue to support the ND policy. Finland, on the other hand, supports the Barcelona process of the Mediterranean region. The integrative factor is that both states are situated near the EU border, even though the borders are different. (HS 03 Feb. 1999)

In most cases the actors of the EU discourse were politicians of the member states. Their attitude towards the ND was supportive and they encouraged Finland to continue pushing it forward. Criticism and doubts were mostly expressed anonymously as a view of a particular country. Furthermore, the politicians’ views of the concept were also distanced. This indicates that the importance of the ND for the EU was much smaller than for Finland. *Helsingin Sanomat* pointed out that the head of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, never mentioned the ND among the most important policies to be developed by the EU (HS 14 April1999).

The view of journalists of the EU countries was actually absent from the EU discourse. Still, *Helsingin Sanomat* quoted an article by a non-EU Norwegian journalist published in the economic paper *Dagens Næringsliv* that severely judged the ND. The author was talking as a spokesperson for all the Nordics. He wrote that the ND could be seen as a part of Finland’s newly built image where Nokia overshadows the other Nordic countries (HS 16 Sept.1999).

In the time aspect the current dimension predominated the EU discourse. As regards the separating dimension, the initiative was viewed as a concept which is already now weakening the position of most Nordic countries and damaging the Nordic identity and co-operation.

The ND Context in the Discourse of the EU

Lassi Heininen (1999, 41) writes that the EU’s expectations in connection with Finland’s accession to the union concentrated on two issues – Finland’s competence in the relations with Russia, and its experience in the northern and arctic problems that could be exploited in building a bridge between the EU and Russia. According to the Staatskanzlei of the German Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, the EU is

presently facing two main challenges: completing the enlargement to Eastern Europe, and developing an active partnership with Russia (Staatskanzlei, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany 1999). Both challenges are also present in the ND concept (Heikkinen 1999, 16; Patten 1999).

Thus, approving the ND as its political concept, the EU converted it into a tool to be applied in its foreign policy, although there is no foreign policy in its content (Ojanen 1999 b, 57-58). The need for this kind of a tool is caused by the fact that the external relations of the EU seem uneven. Due to the member states' frequently differing positions the development of a joint foreign policy has been unsuccessful (Ojanen 1999 b, 57-58). At the same time, internal activities of the EU also have an influence outside the Union. So the ND might help to realize how much of the "foreign policy" the EU has actually had to-date (Ojanen 1999 b, 66-67).

Regrettably the EU member states have approached the ND as a competing concept at the expense of the other dimensions of the union. Even if there is no real competition, there are still problems and other dimensions, such as the situation on the Balkan Peninsula and the problems of the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean area that some EU members consider to be more urgent than the ND (Ojanen 1999 b, 63). The criticism of the ND by the Nordic countries may be caused by their historic dissent (cf. Kunnas 1999, 11). Moreover, the positions of the Nordic countries and their co-operation have changed in the last 10 years. Norway and Iceland do not belong to the European Union and the other three countries have no common policy within it. Finland was the only Nordic country that joined the second phase of the European Monetary Union (EMU) in the first round (cf. Antola 1999 a, 8).

Dissimilar opinions of the EU member states can thus question the possibility to create a common foreign policy for the EU by means of the ND. Although all the EU members support democracy improvement, in questions of enlargement and improving relations with Russia the states firmly hold different positions (Ojanen 1999 b, 62).

The Discourse of Finland

Unlike the other discourses, in Finland's discourse the integrative dimension of the space aspect was present in almost all the stories. The first articles where it was not in a leading position were published in the second half of 1999. However, instead of the separating side, the pseudo-integrative di-

mension was drawn out by means of irony. For example, in the article "Ulkopolitiikan uusi hokema" (The New Phrase of the Foreign Policy) (HS 20 June 1999 b) it is cynically noted that the ND was created by Finnish politicians to fill the rhetorical vacuum that appeared after invalidation of the treaties between Finland and the Soviet Union.

As the originator of the ND, Finland holds the position of a single opinion former who tries to convince the other actors of the common benefits of the ND. This opinion is expressed in the article "Ahtisaari ja Aznar toivoivat nopeaa ratkaisua EU:n rahoituskiistaan" (Ahtisaari and Aznar Hoped to Have a Quick Solution to the EU's Conflict of Financing):

The President and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Tarja Halonen have confirmed to the hosts that the Northern Dimension would not require additional resources to Russia but a better utilization of the current ones. (HS 03 Feb. 1999)

In contrast to persuading others, *Helsingin Sanomat* addresses Finnish people and explains them the benefits of the ND, namely those in the fields of foreign policy, economy, regional matters and security. The message undermines that "the ND is very Finnish in its spirit" (HS 15 March 1998) and that "Finland proceeds from its own national interests in this policy" (HS 20 June 1999 a). In the article "Penttilä: Suomi lännen Venäjän-politiikan johtajaksi" (Penttilä: Finland Lead the Russian-Policy of the West) the politician Risto Penttilä gives the reasons why Finland should abandon its low profile:

Finland is about to become an EU presidency holder, we are Russia's neighbouring country, people happen to believe that we know something about our Eastern neighbour and we have a concept called the Northern Dimension. (HS 01 Nov. 1998)

Most of the times the main actors in Finland's discourse were Finnish politicians who tried to advertise the ND both in Finland (form the public opinion) and abroad by pointing out the shared benefits that it would entail. The difference between the views of politicians and those of journalists was not great. During 1998 and the first half of 1999 the journalists were supportive towards the concept. At the end of 1998 when the European Council approved the ND as a common concept of the European Union, journalists emphasized Finland's remarkable role in it (HS 11 Dec. 1998 a, b; HS 13 Dec. 1998), even though a couple of months later

they found that the concept still needed a more precise content (HS 31 Dec.1998; HS 10 Feb.1999). The pride and joy was rather caused by the fact that the EU endorsed a ND that had been initiated by Finland than by the fact that the EU got a ND. Thus, the journalists positioned themselves as representatives of Finland like in a story “Suomesta uusi sillanrakentaja” (Finland to Become a New Bridge-builder):

We are not a big state whose activity could be misunderstood. We are considered to be experts of Russia. /.../ And we have a Northern Dimension policy that fits with the new pattern. (HS 22 Oct. 1998)

In 1999 the attitudes of journalists changed and two new features appeared in the articles. Firstly, journalists distanced themselves from politicians and became more critical of the fact that the ND is merely a turn of phrase without any concrete actions (HS 10 Feb.1999; HS 20 June1999 b; HS 13 Nov.1999 c). At the same time, the first ND metaphors appeared. The original idea of the ND was separated from the expression “northern dimension”. For example in the article “Northern Dimension Under the Berlin Sky” (HS 17 Oct.1999) the topic was actually not the ND but the joint embassy of the Nordic countries in Berlin. In metaphors the ND was used as a synonym for the Nordic countries, whereas Russia and the Baltic States were left out (HS 07 Aug.1999; HS 21 Oct. 1999). Although originally the concept was named “northern” and not “Nordic”, in order to keep the Nordic countries apart from the northern part of the continent, in metaphors the connotations “northern” and “Nordic” were harmonized. Compared to the journalists of the other countries present in the discourses, the Finnish journalists’ role was different. While in the other discourses the journalists served as the sources to be quoted for the story, Finnish journalists were authors of the articles.

Since Finland tries to get the idea of the ND naturalized among the other participants, its politicians emphasize the importance of getting the concept visible within the EU context. In the articles therefore politicians brought forward the current dimension when they were talking about the success of the concept so far. The idea that endorsement of the ND would lead to the real expectations towards the ND is attributable to Finnish journalists, mostly in the second half of 1999.

The ND Context in the Discourse of Finland

For Finland the collapse of the old European setup in 1989 meant joining the EU and distancing itself from the traditional reference group (HS 16 Sept.1999; cf. Heininen 1999, 39-40). It also meant a possibility to create a new image. It being impossible to change the facts (Finland’s geographical location in Europe’s periphery and its Russian neighbourhood), Finland tried to change the opinion by creating the ND concept (attempt to improve the periphery and its relations with the European centre). Finland also used its smallness as an advantage showing that also small countries can be equally active on the international arena.

Relations with Russia are one of the most important areas of Finnish foreign policy. This explains why Russia has such an important position in the ND concept. On the one hand, it gives Finland a chance to improve its relations with its eastern neighbour and change the mentality of former relations. On the other hand it is an attempt to make the other EU members realize the importance of Russia, though Russia is not the same kind of a problem for them as for Finland (Antola 1999 b, 51). To the Finnish people the ND concept has been used as an argument that Finland will not lose its identity in the EU (Heininen 1999, 34).

On July 1st, 1999 Finland’s presidency of the EU began. Finland had prepared well, as the presidency meant a chance to be visible in the whole of Europe (world). Late in 1998 the ND was seen as one of the most important goals of the presidency (HS 26 Nov.1998; HS 11 Dec.1998 b). In June and July 1999 when the presidency actually started, it was considered to be selfish by Finland to stress too much the ND as it served primarily its own interests (HS 18 June1999; HS 20 June 1999 a). This was reflected both by Finland’s official programme for the presidency, where the concept was not in the primary agenda, and by *Helsingin Sanomat*’s special EU presidency supplement on July 1st, 1999, where the ND was merely given a mention (HS 18 June 1999; HS 01 July 1999).

The Foreign Ministers’ Conference on the ND held in Helsinki in November 1999 was a disappointment for Finland as the Finnish Minister Tarja Halonen was the only EU Minister of Foreign Affairs present. Spanish and German Ministries had announced, for example, that their Ministers never

intended to participate in this Conference, hence they were not just “absent” (HS 14 Nov.1999). Although the official theme of the conference was the ND, the war in Chechnya got a lot more attention than the actual topic (especially by media)(HS 13 Nov.1999 b).

In the European Council in Helsinki in December 1999 several remarkable decisions about the development of the Union were made (6 new countries were called to enlargement negotiations, Turkey became a candidate country, etc). Although the Council also decided to invite the European Commission to prepare the Action Plan of the ND, neither before nor after the summit was it mentioned in connection with the most important goals and achievements by HS. Nor did *Helsingin Sanomat* pay any attention to the ND during the Council.

According to *Helsingin Sanomat* Finland’s Presidency was effective and everything was organized in a perfect way (HS 12 Dec.1999; HS 29 Dec.1999). Satisfaction and approval of the other member countries and foreign journalists was also considered to be extremely important (HS 31 Dec.1999 b). *Helsingin Sanomat* quoted the Finnish Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen, that the success of its presidency made Finland “an adult member of the EU and opened the door to the inner chambers of the Union” (HS 31 Dec.1999 a). Contrary to the forecasts late in 1998 and early in 1999, however the ND was not one of the biggest issues during Finland’s presidency.

Conclusions

As a result of discourse analysis four basic discourses of the Northern Dimension were detected in the texts: the Baltic States, Russia, European Union and Finland. These discourses can be understood

only within their socio-cultural context, which in turn, enables a political interpretation.

According to *Helsingin Sanomat* Finland’s interest towards the ND is much bigger than the interest of the EU and of the other participants. Finland was present in all discourses and was the only one who tried to convince the others of the importance of the concept. HS presented the ND as “our” (Finnish) initiative. In 1998 Finnish journalists mainly acted as “agents of the ND”, becoming more and more critical towards the concept by the end of 1999. Finnish politicians never criticized the ND. On the contrary, they were the most active in propagating the concept in Finland and abroad.

In the discourse of **Baltic States** the high-ranking politicians interpreted the ND as a concept that improved co-operation both in the region and the EU. Lower ranking politicians and journalists were critical towards the concept because of potential competition it could cause in the economic sphere.

Russia was mainly represented by politicians who expected that the country would achieve an important position in the ND and would get additional financial support through the ND. No fears of the possible economic competition that the ND could cause were expressed.

Official attitude in general, expressed by the **European Union** towards the ND was positive. Though, when it came to the opinions of the particular member states, the concept was often criticized as a possible reason of competition in the economic and political fields. The criticism was expressed in the texts impersonally as a “state’s opinion”. Positive attitude and support were stressed in the opinions of individual politicians. Journalists were missing in this discourse.

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