

**CAN EUROPE BE TOLD FROM THE NORTH?  
TAPPING INTO THE EU'S NORTHERN DIMENSION**

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## The Challenge

The European Union has been furnished with a Northern Dimension (ND). The initiative, taken originally by Finland in 1997, has landed on the Union's agenda yielding policy documents, high-level conferences and some projects pertaining to Europe's North. It outlines, in terms of the spatial markers used, a sphere that reaches far beyond the northernmost North. The initiative aims, in one of its aspects, at turning northernness into a representational frame and regime that nurtures communality and influences the relations between the Union, its northern member states, some accession countries and Russia as well as Norway as non-applicants. The neo-North embedded in the move offers a joint arena for those already 'in', actors on their way 'in' and the ones that remain 'out'. In essence, it mediates in their relations, and contributes to what Christiansen, Petito and Tonra have called the "fuzziness" of the European Union by blurring established divisions.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter probes, using the initiative as a starting-point, into the question whether Europe can be told from the North. It seeks to explore the constitutive aspects of the discourse waged around the Northern Dimension, including what remains in the shadows and what is obscured from sight. The North is hence not approached as a marker with a given content and unproblematic status. Instead, the aim is to expose its open, contingent and unstable nature and, in that context, view critically the ontological and methodological orientations that have pertained to research focusing on the initiative.

In its final part the chapter moves on to explore the vistas of the EU - and Europe more broadly - against the backdrop of changes in the representational frames underlying the European configuration. In particular, the question is pursued how these vistas resonate with a marker such as the North. It is assumed that some of them are more open to northernness informing policy responses whereas others reject such a marker out of hand as a non-European departure. The catapulting of northernness into a legitimate

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<sup>1</sup> Christiansen, Thomas, Fabio, Petito and Tonra, Ben, Fuzzy Politics Around Fuzzy Borders: The European Union's Near Abroad. *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 35, No. 4, (Dec. 2000), pp. 417-31.

departure in the context of the Union's representational politics should - against this background - be quite indicative as to the balance between the different configurations and the way their relationship is unfolding.

### **Success or Failure?**

One of the obvious issues surrounding much of the ND-related debate pertains to whether the initiative has been successful or if it should be predominantly regarded as a failure. Those with a positive attitude towards the initiative claim that it has clearly advanced since having been presented in 1997.<sup>2</sup> The way the initiative has been presented has stayed within the limits of what is acceptable in the discourse on the EU and it has become legitimate to 'speak' Europe from the point of the North. It is stressed that the initiative has been recognised and provided with some status. Consequently, the Northern Dimension no longer stands out as a proposal advanced by a single member state and figures, instead, as an item common for the Union as a whole constituting a theme on the Union's agenda to be tackled and followed up in a variety of ways.

But these achievements notwithstanding, the question remains whether the initiative has been a successful one. Making it in to the sphere of intra-Union diplomacy does not seem to satisfy the critics.<sup>3</sup> For example, there are no mechanisms of negotiation that would allow for a constant exchange of views, and hence progress remains very much dependent on the will and the diverse interests of the countries in charge of EU-presidencies. David Arche remarks that often the reception of the initiative has been "lukewarm". At worst, "it was regarded with cynicism and suspicion".<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See, Heininen, Lassi, "Ideas and Outcomes: Finding a Concrete Form for the Northern Dimension Initiative," in Ojanen, Hanna (ed.), *The Northern Dimension: Fuel for the EU?* (Programme on the Northern Dimension of the CFSP No. 12). The Finnish Institute of International Affairs & Institut für Europäische Politik, 2001, pp. 20-53.

<sup>3</sup> See various contributions in Bonvicini, Gianni, Vaahtoranta, Tapani & Wessels, Wolfgang (eds.), *The Northern EU. National Views on the Emerging Security Dimension*. (Programme of the Northern Dimension of the CFSP, Vol. 9). The Finnish Institute of International Affairs & Institut für Europäische Politik: Helsinki, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> See Arter, David, "Small State Influence within the EU: The Case of Finland's 'Northern Dimension Initiative'". *Journal of Common Market Studies*, (Vol. 38, No. 5, 2000), pp. 677-97.

The proponents have mostly been on the defensive in lacking broadly plausible arguments (installing a new spatial marker into the discourse is taken to be too abstract) that would work in favour of the ND whereas it has been relatively easy to gain support for the opposite view. The initiative, seen as a routine move by one of the member states, thus remains quite contested. The dominant view seems to be that for it really to count, the initiative has to yield quite tangible results in terms of institutions or specific processes. The media, for one, has been rather suspicious about the move. The landing of the initiative on the EU's agenda is not viewed as constituting proof of its significance and, in fact, the opposite is held to be true. The Northern Dimension is quite often seen as an expression of provincialism and regarded as a kind of 'noise' from the fringes with the rule being that the EU is spoken into existence at the core. More specifically, the initiative is comprehended in terms of a conduit that quite harmlessly channels some worries specific to the EU's northern borderlands.

The conspicuous pessimism as well as the predominance of rather critical appraisals in the ND-related discourse calls, no doubt, for interpretation. Moves of closure tend to prevail, and they do so particularly in the public debate. But what explains the negative mood that seems to dominate much of the commentary and what more precisely are the discursive codes that go against 'speaking' North in a broader European context in the first place? Why is the Northern Dimension not given the benefit of doubt instead of jumping to conclusions already at an early stage of its lifecycle? At least two different reasons appear to account for this state of affairs.

It seems that the debate has been rather shallow in historical and fixed in ontological as well as epistemological terms. The North's history has been largely forgotten, i.e. there is no drawing upon the past as a discursive resource. There has been no reminding of that the marker constituted, up to the Napoleonic wars, a core pole in the construction of Europe. It has a long history of constituting an internal - and not external - marker of Europeanness instead of being seen as a pristine, God-given and autonomous frontier to be continually pushed back towards the fringes. Yet only scant efforts have been launched to bolster the credibility of the

North as a relevant representation by the utilisation of its considerable temporal heritage.<sup>5</sup>

More generally, the marker remains embedded in perceptions of immobility and permanency. It is depicted, similarly to the other main markers on the compass, as being frozen, fixed and pre-set as a natural geographic marker. Given its position as part of the 'deep structures', northernness is so firmly naturalised and sedimented that it is difficult to comprehend that in the end also the North forms a discursive construct with changing boundaries and meaning. It is conducive to change over time, and may therefore also be opened to influence as a geopolitically informed marker of power and space. It bends to performative discourses. Having been northernised, i.e. pushed further towards the edges, and emptied of its previously rather rich political, social and cultural content, it may, at least in principle, also be re-furnished with such qualities.

The inclusion of a genealogical perspective - one providing the history of the present in terms of the past - and breaking with the prevailing essentialist and naturalising tendencies obviously leads to more general questions about centrality and peripherality- or, for that matter, the core departures in the construction of political space. If centrality and peripherality are not given and geographically fixed properties but qualities that change over time, what makes for a centre and how did a marker such as the North turn into a sign of utmost peripherality? How was it deprived of its previous political and social content and what are the dynamics and changes detectable over time? Moreover, could the current post-Cold War situation stand for a 'formative moment' and invite for a new 'regime of truth' - to employ some postconstructivist terminology - allowing the North to re-conquer some of its former positions in a Europe with region-building as a major constitutive principle? Questions pertaining to genealogy seem important, but so far they have been largely absent from the discourse, including the scholarly efforts of placing the Northern Dimension and the 'neo-North' in perspective.

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<sup>5</sup> For an exaption, see Lehti, Marko, "Competing or Complementary Images: The North and the Baltic World from the Historical perspective" in Haukkala, Hiski (ed.), *Dynamic Aspects of the Northern Dimension*. Jean Monnet Unit of the Turku University, 1999, pp. 21-45.

This is to say that there seems to be some friction governing interpretations as to the significance of the initiative. This, then, appears to account for the somewhat shallow nature of the debate and the lack of a historically informed insight. Although it is readily admitted (with all the talk concerning the new situation that has emerged with the fall of the walls) that Europe now harbours an exceptional openness and might experience a change of historical proportions, there has hitherto been little confidence in that some of the answers could come from the periphery and pertain to markers such as the North. This is nothing surprising as such taking into account that as to the choice of representational frames, it has almost without exception been the core that has defined the edges.<sup>6</sup> The self-evidence of sovereignty has been beyond doubt and there has been very little space for regionality as a contending principle. The core preserves its sovereignty inasmuch as it copes with the administering of existence and is able to use its right of defining order, including the usage and meaning given to the cardinal geographic markers. This has been the normal state of affairs and a revision would constitute, it appears, a radical break with far-reaching consequences.

There is, consequently, a need to explain away and downgrade the ND. The North constitutes - according to a dominant reading - a site imbued with passivity, escapism, dependency and a considerable degree of helplessness. It is the land of the shadows and death, or more concretely, a source of troubles rather than an asset and a resource to be drawn upon in coping with radical change and in the construction of a new, post-Cold War Europe. The idea of a broad North co-constituting what Europe and the EU is about, lacks in credibility. It hence tends to be foreclosed that such a marker - signalling the effort of bringing about a European mega-region - could suddenly provide the ground for some autonomous initiative.

It is hence to be expected that the debate has predominantly focused on the specific processes of promoting the ND and has been rather factual, statist and outcome-oriented. The stress has been on the instrumental rather than the ideational. This also applies

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<sup>6</sup> The theme has been elaborated by Ambjörnsson, Ronny, *Öst och Väst. Tankar om ett Europa mellan Asien och Amerika*. (Stockholm: Natur och kultur, 1994).

to the scholarly discourse where the North has been viewed and tested, it appears, against a factual background rather than regarding it as a representation and a kind lens or prism through which the world is being viewed. What escapes scrutiny, therewith, is that the installing of a new and different lens may, as such, have a rather profound impact. It reshuffles the comprehension of basic issues, and does this quite apart from anything factual. Switching over to a new lens makes Europe look different: some things are magnified and become more visible whereas others become shaded and slip out of sight.

In fact, the lens metaphor appears to be very apt here; the initiative has provided - one may claim - the North with an improved standing as a coinage through which the environment is viewed. The marker works in terms of framing. Northernness has advanced - in this perspective - by gaining an accepted standing within the confines of the EU as a site of power. This, then, appears rather significant as such and has to be accounted for. It has to be tackled as a generative move in the sphere of speaking power and space, and not only evaluated in view of the consequent, and often more specific processes set in motion or the 'hard', empirically measurable outcomes. A move pertaining to codes impacting the very construction of the EU has been made by one member country advocating the introduction of a different lens, and the discursive rules governing what can be legitimately purported as a basic departure have proved to be flexible enough for the Union to approve of northernness as a representational frame and ordering devise.

### **Postmodern Voices**

Scholarly analysis surely deviates from the ND-coverage and debate in the media. A fuller and more nuanced picture has been provided, although also the research focusing on the ND seems to call for a decoding as well as an exploring of its shades and shadows.

What seems apparent is that the many postmodernist IR-scholars actively engaged in the debate about the Baltic Sea<sup>7</sup> and Barents co-operation<sup>8</sup> (Stokke and Tunander, 1994) have been less observant regarding northernness and the Northern Dimension. They clearly departed from that the Baltic and Barents configurations are not natural but rather arbitrary in essence. They are premised on regionality and yet constructions worth supporting. However, in the case of the ND, the choice has been one of remaining at the sidelines. The features of multiperspectivism, the aims of transcending borders and paving space for non-state actors, or number of other unmistakable features of postmodernism embedded in the initiative have not tempted analytical curiosity. The efforts of breaking out of the confines of the traditional geopolitical and realist understandings that characterised the Cold War period have not been extended further, and there has actually been scant interest in the Northern Dimension among those that have previously engaged themselves in combining postmodern scholarship, regionalism and politics. The school - as it has been called - tends to view region building as a practice instead of regarding regions and related markers simply as (re-) discovered entities. They have contributed to the regionalist 'revolt' that has taken place in Northern Europe over the past years and feel, in general, at home with cascading identities as well as marginal, obscure, anti-heroic and openly constructivist themes such as the North.<sup>9</sup> They have shown themselves to be quite fast in sensing new options and chances open to spectacle, but have nonetheless abstained from embracing northernness, the ND and the role of regionality in the context of the EU. As testified by Iver Neumann:

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<sup>7</sup> See among others, Neumann, Iver, B., A region-building approach to Northern Europe. *Review of International Studies*, (Vol. 20, No. 1, 1994), pp. 53-74., and Wæver, Ole, "Regionalization in Europe - and in the Baltic Sea Area". *Co-operation in the Baltic Sea Area. Report from the Second Parliamentary Conference at the Storting*, Oslo 22-24 April 1992. Stockholm, Nordic Council, (NORD 1992:24), pp. 16-21 as well as Wæver, Ole, "Culture and Identity in the Baltic Sea Region" in Joenniemi, Pertti (ed.), *Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region*. (Taylor & Francis: New York, 1993), pp. 23-48.

<sup>8</sup> See Stokke, Olav, Schram and Tunander, Ola (eds), *The Barents Region. Cooperation in Arctic Europe*. (Sage Publications: London, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> See Wæver, Ole, "The Baltic Sea: A Region after Post-Modernity?" in Joenniemi, Pertti (ed.), *Neo-Nationalism or Regionality?* (NordREFO 1997:5, Stockholm, 1997), pp. 293-342.



A tightly knit epistemic community of 'Nordic' foreign policy intellectuals played a conspicuous role in producing the knowledge that was used to prop up these several ideas. The battle-cry was that under the prevailing postmodern conditions, state sovereignty is relativised in favour of a new European medievalism where different political issues are settled on different political levels.<sup>10</sup>

The question thus emerges what might explain this relative neglect among scholars that have been less constrained by rules that in general apply to IR and foreign policy research. The omission is worth exploring at some length as it might help to bring into the open some of the limitations embedded in the discourse on the EU's Northern Dimension.

Obviously, several explanations are on offer, although interpreting the silence of the 'school' is a speculative endeavour as such. There might, despite the fact that the ND appears in general to be a theme preferred by the postmodern regionalists, be the feeling that the groundwork has largely been done and the novelty of constructing regionalist regimes may simply have worn off. There is no need for repetition or projection into an even larger sphere. The analysis already carried out may be taken to be equally applicable to the ND as the Baltic and Barents projects (although it used to be assumed that the path of broadening would be one of the Nordic region extending into a Baltic direction).<sup>11</sup> No extra effort is called for - despite the fact that the Baltic and Barents projects focus on carving out specific regions whereas the Northern Dimension is more about the constitutive principles in the context of the EU and Europe at large as such. This is so as the train was set in motion already some time ago. The postmodern scholarship restrained itself, it seems, to the more short-term issues and regionalist vehicles with concrete visibility instead of dwelling upon a broader, more abstract and sedimented signifier such as the North.

It could also be of relevance that Finland, as a state, succeeded in making a move prior to the scholarly community

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<sup>10</sup> Neumann, *A region-building approach to Northern Europe*, p. 67.

<sup>11</sup> See for example Lehti, *Complementary or Competing Images: The North and the Baltic World from the Historical Perspective*, 1999, and Wæver, Ole, "The Baltic Sea: A Region after Post-Modernity?" in Joenniemi, Pertti (ed.), *Neo-Nationalism or Regionality?* (NordREFO 1997:5, Stockholm, 1997), pp. 293-342.

having developed ideas regarding the North as a more general vision and policy frame that reaches beyond the already existing regional arrangements. This, then, left scholars in the somewhat inconvenient position. They had either to stay aloof or assume a position of backing an idea and a proposal put forward by a particular statist actor. And what may have further contributed to the unease consists of the initiative being set up in a manner that immediately pushes things over for the EU to settle. It reduces, one could suspect, the influence of the local actors with societal concerns replacing statist ones and, instead, invites the Union to increasingly influence, steer and strengthen its grip on the Baltic, Barents, Nordic and Arctic constellations.

The emergence of the neo-North could also be seen as something unwarranted in inviting the EU to pursue politics towards homogeneity and uniformity. It would hence work by narrowing down the space available for the regionalist 'revolt' - one usually celebrated by the postmodernists - to unfold. The ND could be viewed, if this is the way the initiative functions, as a disciplinary kind of move, one aiming at rolling back the recent "fuzziness" rather than contributing to it. The initiative aims, as concluded according to one analysis at "the construction of a unified international actor, a modern subject with eternal essence". It is, as such, admitted that the move of bolstering northernness might contribute to the erasure of the reified East-West border and invite for a vision of 'Europe' understood as increasingly open to diversity. However, the verdict comes in the end down on the side of seeing the ND as "being highjacked and subsumed within a more traditional modern discourse".<sup>12</sup> The initiative is, along the lines of such critique, too much championed for its tendencies of harmonisation and control: It devises political space among clearly outlined and exclusive political units, the 'ins' and the 'outs', and does so without really allowing multiplicity and overlapping regionalist configuration to unfold. It is criticised, more generally, for its rather modern aim of exporting some of the already existing qualities further on towards the fringes of the European configuration.

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<sup>12</sup> Browning, Christopher, "The Construction of Europe in the Northern Dimension". *COPRI Working Papers*, (No. 39, 2001), p. 30, 48.

This view appears to be justified in the sense that the EU assumed, at least initially, a rather passive stand *vis-à-vis* the Baltic and Barents configurations, although this position has changed over time. A somewhat similar pattern is to be traced in the case of the ND. The European Commission appeared, at first, hesitant about the initiative but then made it part of a policy that aims at the construction of common European space by a flow of pre-given policies that merely flow in one direction, from the core outwards.<sup>13</sup> Regionality has been used to bolster the EU as it is, not in terms of altering the union.

The 'school' may also find an excuse in that the Northern Dimension is too much top-down and pre-given in character. It can be seen as quite establishment-driven, openly political, centralised and distinctly lacking in the bottom-up type of engagement and activism that has been to some extent present both in the cases of the Baltic and Barents Cupertino. A further reason could be that there is uncertainty about whether such an umbrella concept is really needed. Why to advocate a departure that is not explicitly tied to regionalism or linked to a specific regionalist project? It may also be that representations such as the North are taken to be too imbued in peripherality and emptiness in order to have a chance. It is too cumbersome to problematise their ontological status that tends to be perceived as given and natural. Being located at the deepest level of discursive structures, it is not conducive to change. The 'school' has a reputation of focusing on "change within continuity", and the "branches" of discursive "tree" more than the "trunk", the latter being regarded as too sedimented and frozen.<sup>14</sup> There might, due to such a tendency, exist a rather profound epistemological kind of disbelief in northernness in the first place.

It has to be added, however, that the discursive rules underlying the postmodern approaches in no way prohibit a probing into the larger issues underlying the formation of political space that loom in the background. The theories of the 'school' are, in principle, able to cope with change and deal with cardinal markers of political

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<sup>13</sup> Browning, *The Construction of Europe in the Northern Dimension*, pp. 17-29.

<sup>14</sup> See Diez, Thomas, "Europe as a Discursive Battleground: Discourse Analysis and European Integration Studies". *Cooperation and Conflict*, (Vol. 36, No. 1, 2001), pp. 5-38.

space - as exemplified by Iver Neumann's work<sup>15</sup> on the relationship between Russia and the eastern marker. A tackling of the EU-related initiative by elevating northernness into a core issue is by no means off limits, although the extension of the 'liberating moment' of the postmodern turn is still to be extended to include also the neo-North.<sup>16</sup>

### **Mainstream Voices**

Be it as it may, the scholars that have taken an active interest in ND tend to be part of the academic mainstream. They have, for the most part, a background in various international and foreign affairs institutes.<sup>17</sup> This state of affairs has contributed to the ND being largely trapped within a modernist discourse. Regionality has not figured as an issue and constitutive principle worth serious attention.

Those parts of mainstream research that have engaged themselves actively in the theme have even shown some understanding *vis-à-vis* the initiative, though within bounds. Their aim has not been one of contributing to a disempowerment of the initiative from the very start and the verdict is still out as to whether the record is one of success or failure. The standard position appears to be that it is too early to tell.<sup>18</sup> Some progress has been detected, although the achievements are taken to be rather modest.

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<sup>15</sup> Neumann, Iver, B., *Uses of the Other. The 'East' in European Identity Formation*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Browning, 2001, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> For a couple of contributions from the critical geopolitical school that go against the tide, see Moisio, Sami, "Pohjoisen ulottuvuuden geopolitiikka: pohjoinen periferia ja uuden euroopan alueellinen rakentaminen (On the Geopolitics of the Northern Dimension: the Northern Periphery and the Construction of a New Europe)". *Terra*, (Vol. 112, No. 3, 2000), 117-28, and Paasi, Anssi, *Territories, Boundaries and Consciousness. The Changing Geographies of the Finnish-Russian Border*. (Chichester: John Wiley, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Arter, David, "Small State Influence within the EU: The Case of Finland's 'Northern Dimension Initiative'". *Journal of Common Market Studies*, (Vol. 38, No. 5, 2000), pp. 677-97; Antola, Esko, "The Presence of the European Union in the North" in Haukkala, Hiski (ed.), *Dynamic Aspects of the Northern Dimension*. (Jean Monnet Unit. University of Turku, 2000), pp. 115-132; Haukkala, Hiski, "Introduction" in Haukkala, Hiski (ed.), *Dynamic Aspects of the Northern Dimension*. (Jean Monnet Unit: University of Turku, 1999), pp. 9-20.

There has been little to report once the searchlight has been focused on various ND-related processes and the measurable outcomes. For example, with money being used as a yardstick of success, the Northern Dimension has basically been depicted as "cheap talk".

These 'yes-but' answers seem to originate with researchers joining other types of commentators in focusing on various EU- and state-related processes pertaining to the initiative. Scholars, then, largely share the view that judgement has to be related to interests, actorness, processes and measurable outcomes. The ND undoubtedly has some potential, albeit it has to mature - so the argumentation goes - into a budgetline of its own, provide some concrete structural outcome or amount to tangible projects. In other words, the regulative rules of the discourse tend to downgrade the more long-term, visionary and framework-related aspects of the ND and instead direct attention towards the more concrete, short-term and project-like aspects. A typical claim consists of arguing that the initiative remains "stillborn", "a bag of hot air" and stands out as "lip service" if it does not yield concrete and empirically measurable results. The politics of naming and the 'talking' of the ND into existence, i.e. that of exploiting the symbolic potential of the North in the EU's establishment of frames of representation, is not seen as constituting a policy in any true sense of the word.

What lurks behind an elevation of the initiative's various institutional and material aspects and, conversely, a downplaying of its symbolic and ideational aspects pertaining to policy perspectives, seems to be an anchorage in the usage of a rationalist and rather individualised frame of analysis. The North is seen as given to experience in terms of objective reality, and perceived as being open to investigation as such. The stress on objectivity is understandable in the sense that it guards against accusations of siding with some particular political agenda and engaging in 'speculative' type of endeavours. The assumption tends to be, it seems, that there has to be a pre-set package of interests pertaining to some specific actors, and this, then - once detected and analysed - yields the ground for unbiased evaluation. And in order to be on the safe side in the arriving at conclusions, there has to be a final desired outcome that is in line with what is to be predicted on the basis of such a package of interests. Void of any final outcome,

analysis focuses on the various processes and the way the interests involved materialise in the context of these processes.

Such an objectivist fixation implies, in one of its aspects, that there has been little interest in looking beyond the formal diplomatic process and the states as rather contained and pre-defined actors. The cardinal markers of political space and constitutive principles are considered as settled and unchanging. They are seen as *fait accompli*. No efforts of comparing the workings of northernness in an EU-context with those discernible in some other fields, for example tourism, advertising, photography or literature (recent experiences indicating the North marks a growth industry) have so far seen the light of the day. There has, in a similar vein, been a lack of interdisciplinary approaches using cultural geography or anthropology as inroads into enquiry - to name two disciplines that have been more sensitive to borders, bordering and the employment of non-statist representational frames. Should the traditionally derogatory image of the North be preserved in order to secure the dominance of the Western marker, or should the "dead lands" of the North be allowed to be part of "the new Europe"?<sup>19</sup>

There are, along the more objectivist and interest-oriented lines, studies for example on the Danish, Estonian, Latvian and Swedish attitudes *vis-à-vis* the Northern Dimension.<sup>20</sup> However, northernness has, as a representation, been of little interest within such a setting. It has been objectified by being depicted as a

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<sup>19</sup> See W. Brian Newsome, "Dead Lands" or "New Europe"? Reconstructing Europe, Reconfiguring Eastern Europe: "Westerners" and the Aftermath of the World War". *East European Quarterly*, XXXVI, No. 1, March 2002, pp. 39-62.

<sup>20</sup> On various country-specific contributions, see for example, Heurlin, Bertel, "Denmark and the Northern Dimension". *DUPI Working Papers*, (No. 11, 1999. Copenhagen: Dansk Udenrigspolitisk Institut); Mui\_nieks, Nils, "A European Northern Dimension - A Latvian and a Swedish Perspective". Report from a seminar organised by the Olof Palme International Center and the Latvian Institute of International Affairs. Riga, Latvia, December 10-11, 1999; Novack, Jennifer, "The Northern Dimension in Sweden's EU Policies: From Baltic Supremacy to European Unity?" in Ojanen, Hanna (ed.), *The Northern Dimension: Fuel for the EU?* (The Finnish Institute of International Affairs & Institut für Europäische Politik: Helsinki 2001), pp. 78-106; Raik, Kristi, "Estonian Perspectives on the Northern Dimension", in Haukkala, Hiski (ed.), *Dynamic Aspects of the Northern Dimension*. (Jean Monnet Unit of Turku University, 1999), pp. 151-66. For various national views, see also Bonvicini et.al., *The Northern EU. National Views on the Emerging Security Dimension*. Helsinki 2000.

wrapping or by viewing the marker as an element needed in the marketing and selling of the ND-package. The factual approach implies that the constitutive aspects of the Northern Dimension have remained largely unnoticed.

It seems that the frame used has, in general, been constructed in a manner that does not allow for the empowering of the North as a lens or a prism, i.e. a representation with an impact that reaches beyond the instantly factual, institutional and process-oriented. The linkages between the level of symbols, facts and interests have remained poorly developed. Representations such as the North have not been singled out and placed in perspective as something that also incorporates and influences the way interests are formulated in the first place. This lack of comprehension appears to explain why the northern element, though an integral part of the initiative, has for the most part been side-tracked. It has stayed void of attention and does not gain the eminence it deserves as a departure allowing, at least in principle, speaking 'Europe' also from a peripheral perspective. The usage of the Northern marker in an EU-related context appears to be largely buried in silence. It is seen in factual terms instead of being tackled head-on by enquiring into its role and meaning, including the denaturalisation and re-politicisation underway that paves the way for different ways of conceptualising boundaries and political space, and thereby also a variety of 'Europes'.

Such a down-grading of the initiative's symbolic aspects and endeavours of policy framing also clarifies why there has been scant interest in the numerous clashes that emerge once northernness gets elevated and is invited to compete for space and attention at the expense of some more established representations. What gains the upper hand, the Nordic/Scandinavian or the northern departure, what is the North's relationship to representations such as the Baltic, Barents or the Atlantic and how do the various relevant actors devise their own favourite version of the North once it has been established that the North has turned broader in scope than previously and actually constitutes one of the key sites in the debates on the unfolding of the post-Cold War Europe? If not a binary code (and the other of the South), how does the North relate and resonate with the other cardinal markers of the East, West and South? Finland - and perhaps also Norway and the US - favours

representations that open up the North towards the East and Russia.<sup>21</sup> Sweden, Germany and the Baltic countries tend, for their part, to prefer a Baltic North instead of the northern North, and Denmark has also opened up for an Atlantic (western) vision of the North (although Denmark primarily operates with a Baltic North) as indicated by the ministerial conference to be organised on Greenland during the Danish EU-presidency towards the end of 2002 on the Northern Dimension under the rubric 'the Arctic Window'. Denmark also intends to ask the Commission to prepare a report of the Arctic Region and revise the Action Plan. This contest and the consequent diversification of the North has so far largely escaped analysis as northernness as a representation or a frame has ranked relatively low to start with.

### **A High Level of Ambitions**

For sure, also the empiricist, individualist and rationalist approaches carry some weight. The initiative has, after all, been launched by Finland and there are, indeed, national interests in the background. The statist actors involved have for a large part seen - as testified by Nicola Catellani - the initiative as something short-term, interest-oriented and a policy tool to be utilised particularly in the context of issues pertaining to the financing of various projects relevant for northern Europe.<sup>22</sup> The EU deals with the initiative in intergovernmental terms, it is part of the Union's external affairs, and the ND has, in some of its aspects, a project-like nature either stressing the need to fix various economic, social and environmental problems residing in northernmost Europe or focusing attention on the region's exceptionally rich natural resources. There is much in

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<sup>21</sup> See Rhodes, Edward, "The United States and the Northern Dimension: America's Northern European Initiative" in *International perspectives on the Future of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region and the Northern Dimension*. (Report from a think-tank seminar. Björkliden, Sweden, June 2001), pp. 41-56; Van Ham, Peter, "Testing Cooperative Security in Europe's North: American Perspectives and Policies", in Trenin, Dmitri and van Ham, Peter, *Russia and the United States in Northern European Security*. (The Finnish Institute of International Affairs & Institut für Europäische Politik, Programme of the Northern Dimension of the CFSP, Vol. 5, Helsinki 2000), pp. 57-88.

<sup>22</sup> See Catellani, Nicola, "The Multilevel Implementation of the Northern Dimension", in Ojanen, Hanna (ed.), *The Northern Dimension: Fuel for the EU?* (Programme on the Northern Dimension of the CFSP. Finnish Institute for International Affairs & Institut für Europäische Politik., No. 12, Helsinki 2001), pp. 54-77.



the logic and the unfolding of the initiative that lends itself easily to a rationalist, empiricist and interest-oriented scrutiny.

Hanna Ojanen, for one, follows such a line of enquiry.<sup>23</sup> However, it is worth noting that she also extends her analysis in some ways beyond these more ordinary departures by stating that the gist of the initiative consists of a Finnish effort to 'customise' the EU, i.e. to mould it to one's own liking. The effort is to provide "the Union with a more Finnish face".

Notably, she does not downplay the role of Finland, a peripheral actor and a newcomer to the EU, and narrow the move down to interests, specific projects, financial schemes and short-term policies. Instead, room is provided for issues pertaining to policy framing. The initiative is upgraded and approached as something rather ambitious with Finland endeavouring at influencing the very figure of EU. Ojanen furnishes the initiator with exceptional subjectivity as to the possible outcomes - as does also David Arter in a somewhat similar study on Finland and the Northern Dimension. Finland's aim in launching the initiative has, in his view, been one of "building the political capital with which to relocate Finland from being a new and geographically peripheral to become a core EU member".<sup>24</sup> Finland is seen as having turned innovative and influential "on a wider agenda". More broadly, Arter explores a theory of change in arguing that there is a comparative advantage in being "small but smart" (in relation to large countries that tend to ride on continuity and strength in terms of resource-power). This combination of being small but smart might account for success encountered in the process of agenda-setting, although Arter deems that Finland has been less effective when it comes to implementation of the ND in more concrete manner.

Both Ojanen and Arter provide the impression, although without exploring the theme in detail, that an unusual twist is visible in the power-relations between the core and the periphery. Finland has been empowered to think and operate in a long-term fashion and to pursue policies on the level of symbols and broader policy

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<sup>23</sup> Ojanen, Hanna, "How to Customise Your Union: Finland and the Northern Dimension of the EU". *Yearbook of the Finnish Institute of International Affairs*. (Forssa, 1999), pp. 13-26.

<sup>24</sup> See Arter, *Small State Influence within the EU in the North*, p. 695.

frames that pertain to the overall figure of the Union. It has become conceivable that a peripheral actor located at the Union's outer border may exercise considerable influence. The initiator has been able to gain leverage due to the fact that the EU's new border overlaps with Finland's own external border. A small and peripheral (i.e. not central in terms of westernness) member - and therefore a *priori* powerless according to the standard conceptualisations and theories - is not merely small but may potentially (if also smart) turn so influential that it becomes somewhat difficult to account for such a leverage. Yet Ojanen claims, through the terminology she uses, that Finland is not only adapting to the EU but also influences - by combining location with a load of ideational resources - what the EU is about. Finland is, in other words, interfering with the core's sovereign rights of ordering, and has been able to do this without being immediately rejected and penalised (which would have been an outcome much more easy to comprehend and explain after Finland having committed the 'sin' of breaking with the discursive rules that largely underlie the construction of 'Europe' as political space). It has been allowed to disturb the core and meddle with the key markers and constitutive issues pertaining to policy framing, and thereby drag its 'provincial' concerns far beyond the usual limits.

The term 'customising' appears to indicate that the ambitions of the initiator are quite far-reaching and that Finland has a vision and an image of what to aspire for. The policies pursued do not just pertain to something narrowly Finnish or entail Europe's northern North. Both these aspects are included, but the initiative is more ambitious. The reading could be - in reflecting upon the 'mystery' articulated by both Ojanen and Arter - that the legitimacy gained by the initiative is tantamount to the core having lost - or abdicated - some of its constitutive power. The EU has less of a monopoly of classifying, exercising agency in the defining of order and deciding upon the choice and application of basic departures in terms of the cardinal signifiers of geography, this bolstering the position of the margins and opening up for a more multiperspectival Europe.

Ojanen's key concept points to that by operating in the margins and leaning on regionality - by changing one's own as well as the EU's approach to bordering and thereby influencing what the margins are about - the horizon of what may be politically achievable alters. A different EU - one being more democratic and de-centred -

becomes imaginable, and actors located at the margins are therewith provided with the option of taking the lead. Moreover, the EU unfolds differently with the installation of a new prism, and within such a setting - concerning the future figure of Europe - Finland gains in subjectivity. The neo-North removes, as to Europe's symbolic order, Finland from being located at a fixed edge and places it, instead, at the uncertain and changing margins. With these margins not yet categorically defined, actors such as Finland are equipped with the legitimate right of influencing what their borders are about and how they function. However, it is above all the Union's tolerance towards rapid regionalization as well as its enlargement and reaching out to the applicants and some of the non-members that unsettles these borders in the first place. In impacting on the openness that is there, and utilising their own location at the margins, even small actors may gain an opportunity of influencing what the broader European constellations are about. They can turn into "Europemakers" by fusing a small amount of themselves into the Union, thereby moulding a Union more to their liking, that is 'customising' the Union in Ojanen's terminology.

This is to claim that marginality does not amount to powerlessness. It may on good grounds be theorised, as has been done by Noel Parker, as site of power.<sup>25</sup> Such a perspective offers insight into the change underway and some explanation concerning the question why it has become possible to talk about Finland 'customising' the EU in the first place. The empowering rather than disempowering of the initiator is in tune with such a theory. However, the options opening up are left without further exploration as Hanna Ojanen and David Arter both refrain from elaborating and probing into the workings of marginality, the impact and meaning of regionality or analysing the visions that Finland might be utilising in its 'customising' of the Union. What kind of Europe and EU does Finland actually aspire for? To what extent should the EU be premised on regionality? What are the alternative models and how do they play out in the context of the ND? The claim is there that Europe is changing and that even peripheral actors such as Finland may, at best, succeed in imposing their mark on the way the European configuration is unfolding (or is it actually the EU taking

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<sup>25</sup> Parker, Noel, "Integrated Europe and its 'Margins': Action and Reaction", in Parker, Noel and Armstrong, Bill (eds.), *Margins in European Integration*. (Wiltshire: Macmillan Press, 2000), pp. 3-27.

over a previously oppositional and uncontrolled North?). Stepping beyond some of the ordinary discursive rules of EU-research allows Ojanen and Arter to grasp these questions, although the more precise workings of such a 'miracle' is left largely unexplored and there is no further clarification as to the potential outcomes of the initiative.

In one of its aspects the background to such a shortcoming pertains to that also Ojanen focuses largely on outcomes and processes (she has also published a different, broader and EU-centred article on the ND).<sup>26</sup> The idea of northernness working primarily as a lens or a prism providing for different visions is exempted from her analysis. The claim that Finland gains influence above all by playing with representations that provide new visions, and uses marginality as a platform and site from which to inject these insights, is not sufficiently accounted for.

Yet 'customising' hints properly at a turning of tables. It pinpoints, as a concept, a reversion in the core-periphery relations, albeit the general departure of Ojanen's analysis does not back up the usage of this rather intriguing term that is elevating Finland more or less onto a level *or par* with the Commission as to influencing the figure of the EU. Her factual, interest-oriented, statist and somewhat static approach is not conducive to any further exploration of the break-through and its background. The analysis does not focus on the play with symbols, the re-installation of northernness as a marker of Europeanness or the role of region-building, thereby omitting an essential aspect of the initiative. In any case, it seems clear that the country is not trading a previous *Ostpolitik* for a *Westpolitik* and riding on the conclusion that it has to turn western after having been liberated by the end of the Cold War from its previous associations with easternness. The point of departure is not that of Finland's national lion waving a (western) sword while standing on a (eastern) semitar. The representational frames are not seen as fixed, frozen or given beforehand. They are not cast in a binary fashion to start with, and hence the option of inventing a third way, one based on northernness, emerges. The move is strategic in

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<sup>26</sup> Ojanen, Hanna, "Conclusions: Northern Dimension - Fuel for the EU's External Relations?", in Ojanen, Hanna (ed.), *The Northern Dimension: Fuel for the EU? Programme on the Northern Dimension of the CFSP*, No. 12. Finnish Institute for International Affairs: Helsinki, 2001, pp. 217-37.

essence as it entails an effort of influencing the constitutive rules themselves by intruding into the very order-making, and thereby also stake out a posture that is more to one's own liking. More specifically, the northern representation includes the Finnish-Russian border that has for long been an essential aspect of Finnish identity politics as outlined by Anssi Paasi.<sup>27</sup>

The Ojanen-type of analysis overlooks, it seems, that the initiative yields a different Finland, one with new interests, a new location and new relationship to the core constitutive principles of political space. In other words, 'Finland' is not a pre-set entity with a fixed location but one aspiring to do away with its outer border as an edge and to strengthen the features of being located at the margins. The upgrading of the North into a representation that pertains to the European Union has been preceded, it appears, by an acceptance of Finland's own northern credentials. Such an enrolment in northernness then furnishes Finland with the power to catapult the same marker (and a piece of itself) into the discourse on the EU's approach *vis-à-vis* its margins. This is to say that an obscure representation, one that Finland was previously not at ease with, becomes recognised and consequently instigated - in the form of advocating a broader northernness - into the contest between different departures used in positioning the EU and Europe more broadly.

The move entails a breach in the symbolic order and the representational framework underlying Europe: two representations that have stood apart for long are invited to meet, clash and intermingle. There is a reversal of trends in the sense that Europe's traditional going North is called to a halt and the North is instead pushed towards Europe. It thus turns less insulated than it used to be. The North gains in leverage in being spoken of as constitutive departure (linked to regionality) and core signifier of political space. The effort challenges the long-standing divorce between the narrow, northern 'we' and a European one, thereby devising and opening up for a different, and joint 'we'. This broader 'we' may then also include actors that have for long been outside the borders of the more narrow and well-bordered 'we' (Russia being potentially a case in

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<sup>27</sup> See Paasi, Anssi, *Territories, Boundaries and Consciousness. The Changing Geographies of the Finnish-Russian Border*. (Chichester: John Wiley, 1996).

point). The move entails a new type of Europe, EU and Finland, all with flexible - and not fixed - external borders. And consequently, images of in-between spaces that add to the "fuzziness" of current Europe.

The choice of 'speaking' North is potentially quite powerful, although not immediately measurable in terms of short-term gains, projects, financial schemes, institutions etc. A Europe co-figured by the North is different from one without such a dimension in terms of basic policy frames and symbolic departures. Finland has perhaps not encountered immediate success in the efforts of installing a new representational frame and in moulding the Union's northern borders to its liking along the lines that the frequent talk in the context of the ND about "a Europe without divisive borders" calls for.<sup>28</sup> However, already the achievements so far leave much to account for. Finland has managed to provide additional space and legitimacy for a vision of a Europe to its liking and to place the issue of representational politics on the EU's agenda. The endeavour to diversify the EU and to provide it with an additional constitutive marker has not been rejected out of hand. Quite to the contrary, the North has turned into an established and broadly agreed framework qualifying what the EU is about and where it is. The northern 'lens' is in place (although on terms very much dictated by the EU). The visions it provides are at work, although they are not immediately visible and measurable with the tools used by mainstream research.

Clearly, 'customising' has much that speaks for it, but it also has connotations of the Union being somehow tricked into something that is more or less against the interests and the 'true' nature of the EU. It is to be observed, however, that the Union has - after some deliberations - accepted and incorporated the term. To describe the process as 'customising' projects a rather passive EU. The approach downplays the question whether there could also be some profound reasons for the Union to accept the introduction of an additional ordering device and a change in its representational framework. After all, the EU is rather postmodern in essence and region-building constitutes an essential part of the spatial policies

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<sup>28</sup> See Patten, Chris, Statement on Transatlantic Relations. Speech to a Plenary Session of the European Parliament, (Strasbourg, 16 May, 2001). Available at [http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/patten/speech01\\_204.htm](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/patten/speech01_204.htm)

pursued. Yet it is purported as an entity not really in control of its representational politics and one that an equally permanent Finland then 'milks' by her assumedly skilful policies. The question is never put whether Finland has actually succeeded in proposing a change in the Union's representational framework that corresponds most profoundly to the Commission's own visions, needs and interests at this current juncture in international relations.<sup>29</sup> Does Finland aspire for an EU that is different from the current one in being increasingly premised on regionality, or is the initiative merely about giving a name to policies pursued by a union that is already there?

Notably, there is much that begs for the question of what has allowed the northern prism to gain in space in the first place. What explains the reversal underway with Europe no longer narrowing down and de-politicising the North but the North taking an opposite turn by going Europe? Why do the discursive rules underlying 'Europe' suddenly grant space for deliberations based on North-speak? A considerable change seems to have taken place as to the relative weight of the different cardinal markers of European political space, and this is hardly anything isolated but part of larger discursive whole that has to be accounted for in providing the ND with a more extensive and balanced background.

### **A State of Passage**

The initial success of the Northern Dimension seems to pertain to some broader alterations on the European scene. The initiative takes advantage, one might argue, of what Lyotard calls 'the end of the grand narratives',<sup>30</sup> Morin characterises as 'the low ideological tide'<sup>31</sup> and some poststructuralists label as 'the formative moment'. Europe's division, based on the idea of two mutually exclusive spheres, has taken a considerable blow. A rather totalising symbolic order has lost, it seems, in credibility with the end of the Cold War.

But it is not just the binary divide between the East and the West that has encountered difficulties; also the Eastern and Western

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<sup>29</sup> This view has been put forward by Catellani, *The Multilevel Implementation of the Northern Dimension*, p. 71.

<sup>30</sup> Lyotard, J-F., *La condition post-moderne*. (Paris: Minut, 1979).

<sup>31</sup> Morin, E., *Penser l'Europe*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).

markers themselves appear to be under pressure. The Eastern one is ominously absent from the current debates on Europe's future. It is there but as something pertaining to the past or a marker that has moved so far to the East that it no longer qualifies in the positioning of a number of countries hence to be regarded as being part of Central Europe. Easternness has been narrowed down outlining the position of actors such as Russia, Ukraine and Byelorussia. It increasingly signals marginality and is also inflated as it plays, far less than it used to do, the role of West's constitutive Other. The West emerged, for its part, as a 'winner' of the East/West contest, but it has nonetheless been increasingly absent - as noted by James Kurth - from the more recent discourses in international affairs.<sup>32</sup> It does not frame, motivate and legitimate political action to the same extent as before, and 'Europe' appears to gain features somewhat distinct from 'West'. The Western marker is certainly on the scene and much of its constitutive power is intact, but the marker may no longer be constructed to the same extent as previously through a binary move by playing it against some assumed East. These changes seem to imply, on a more general note, that space has opened up alongside the two representations that previously outlined and framed rather categorically what the European political order was basically about.

Europe's new situation actually resembles, one may claim, the one that prevailed in Romania in 1989. The rebels then waved a national flag with a red star, the Communist symbol, but one cut out from its centre. This cutting left a wide hole in the very middle of the flag, the empty space epitomising a brief period of openness and a wavering order.<sup>33</sup>

The current state of passage and the uncertain standing of the long-dominant symbolic order appear to strengthen the hand of the margins. Essential borderlines have become unsettled between the core and what used to be the edge, as well as between the European configuration as a whole and its nearby areas. The question emerges: where is the core, where does Europe end and what are the constitutive rules applied to the fringes? This again

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<sup>32</sup> Kurth, James, "America and the West: Global Triumph or Western Twilight?" *Orbis*. (Summer 2001), pp. 333-41.

<sup>33</sup> See *Liak, Slavoj, Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1993).



appears to call for approaches that are in some case off-centre. There is suddenly value in viewing Europe from the margins instead of dwelling exclusively on the dynamics at the core. Focusing on the margins and the demise of essential constitutive borderlines such as the one between the concepts of Europe and the North, reveals that the 'hole' in the middle is accompanied by a considerable disorder and openness at the outer spheres. Exploring what happens once a previously rather detained North, one engulfed by its particularity, is suddenly set free from a number of constraints and allowed to go Europe, acquires actuality.

A focusing on the workings of marginality complements other studies as to the configurations emerging with the breakdown of previously well-guarded mental borders. The implosion of the old order certainly impacts on the established cardinal markers of political space, including the North. The search for meaning and durable ground that has followed the demise has mandated the incorporation of a marker that has, over a long period of time, stood out as being largely void of political meaning and constituted something of a blank space. There is thus room for the northern marker to grow in pre-eminence, and to do so precisely because of being light in content (in contrast to the South, which is heavily loaded with pre-given meaning and burdened by history). It may increasingly outline a sphere of its own without just remaining a reflection of the East/West dominance, and is provided with the option, it seems, of re-entering the European political scene by competing for the position of a 'quilting point' or '*point du capiton*'. Questions emerge whether this happens through a process of normalisation (that is some parts of previous history re-emerging) or if the increasing pre-eminence of the North flows out from the particularity of the northern marker, and whether that particularity prevails. More generally, if the North is viewed as a mirror, what does it reveal and what are the messages written on its surface?

The North certainly remains engulfed with a considerable dose of scepticism as to its Europeanness, and it still lacks a naturalised position along the lines of the more permanent 'European' markers. However, these properties also render it quite conducive to a constructivist approach. The very processes of bolstering the position of the North in regard to Europe provide - due to their openness and the uncertainty of the outcome - insight not only into

the political employment of the key directional arrows of the compass but also into the more basic constitutive rules at work in the context of the unfolding of the new post-Cold War Europe.

The effort of reshaping the order amongst the dominant markers of political space obviously raises a host of questions. In the first place, is an obscure marker such as the North really able to expand and provide anchorage by knotting and subsuming the other, more established signifiers to such a degree that the North qualifies for a prominent position in the construction of a post-Cold War Europe? Is it up to the challenge as an increasingly significant representational frame?

The task is thus, in order to provide some answers, to furnish the northern marker with a background. It has to be contextualized in view of its current de-bordering and expansion. Answers are required as to the qualities and symbolic resources that may - or may not - allow northernness to link in, stretch out and regain some of its standing as a signifier that is in some sense constitutive to a political order no longer laid down and exclusively defined by the dominance of the binary East/West narrative.

A rather profound question consists of settling the basic nature of the North as a political marker. The story could basically be about the North contributing for its part, and alongside some even more central markers, to filling the 'hole' caused by the crumbling of a previous symbolic order. It would hence stand out, by providing anchorage, conducive to a restoring of the damage caused by the implosion. It could be about the return of normalcy, although the story is perhaps more about the increasing weakness of the previously dominant markers than the strength of the neo-North. In any case, the added weight of the northern marker appears to resonate with the demise of the old order. The North has been able to re-emerge, it seems, from the fringes and take advantage of being liberated from the dominance of the Eastern and the Western representational frames. Northernness has gained in subjectivity to the extent that it potentially constitutes an increasingly crucial element in remedying the European configuration.

## The Heritage of the North

In fact, two very different explanations seem to be on offer in accounting for the recent inroads of the North. For one, the story could be one of recrudescence with the North being able to take advantage of its historical record. It serves, one may claim, as a reservoir of meaning to be employed in order to arrest some of the fluidity caused by the end of the Cold War.

And, as to this line of argumentation, there might indeed be good reasons for comprehending the North as an untapped storage of meaning. It is, in principle, well furnished with the option of appearing as a contender for the position of a cardinal signifier, i.e. a standing that it already had up to the Napoleonic wars. The historical North then outlined a far broader sphere than just the northernmost North - and some of the symbols involved have survived up to this day as indicated for example by the iconography related to the Russian bear or the Russian winter.

The North reaches, as to its temporal aspects, far back in defining otherness already in the ancient Greece and Rome, and centuries after that. Northernness was created to complement the South and had the function of delineating true cultural and economic backwaters. It ordered political space in constituting the South's Other, and stood out as an ambiguous and hostile sphere inhabited by uncivilised and rough barbarians. The North was comprehended as the land of the dark and unholy forces. Over time, the peripherality of the North turned milder and more positive images surfaced. Northernness became usable as a resource in the identity-building processes of the northern realms and nations located in the area. The North got contours as something Europeanised and was later also nationalised.

It was increasingly depicted - since the mid-17th century - as a political marker and seen as an organising principle that outlined a playground of power politics. The prime actors of the game consisted of the then European major powers: Sweden, Denmark, Prussia, Poland and Russia. The (statist) usage of the North in configuring political space stood out as an integral part of the dominant discourse on international politics, one premised on a balance of power. The naming of 'the Great Northern War'

demonstrates such tendencies quite clearly. International relations were comprehended as kind of Newtonian system that seeks rather mechanically its own equilibrium. This comprehension was applied to Europe as a whole but included also a number of subsystems, among them the northern one.

The North had, in its broadest form, a considerable coverage. It spanned half of Europe and it outlined - as indicated for example by August Ludwig Schlözer's *Allgemeine Nordische Geschichte* (1771) - the position of Germany, Poland, the Low Countries, Russia as well as the Nordic and the Baltic countries.<sup>34</sup> Such a reach had ancient roots within the Greek as well as the Roman worlds. Both these configurations were divided along a North-South rather than an East-West dichotomy (Lehti, 1999). The northern qualities were used to bolster the position of kings as well as tsars in European politics. Sweden's Karl XII carried the name of "a northern hero", Russia's Catherine the Second was seen as "semiramis des Nordens", Nicolai I was interpreted as standing for "the Northern Star" and a Polish legion fighting the Napoleonic forces was known as the "Northern koloss".<sup>35</sup>

Northernness thus had a crucial role in outlining some aspects of Europe. This kind of usage of northernness as one of the master-signifiers of European political space dominated the political language of the entire 18th century, to fade out during the mid-19th century. For the contemporaries, St. Petersburg, Berlin, Copenhagen and Stockholm formed more or less one political scene. For example, when Alexander I appeared to help Europe to subdue Napoleon, he was seen as arriving from the North and not from the East.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> See Schlözer, August, Ludwig, *Allgemeine Nordische Geschichte. Aus den neuesten und besten Nordischen Schriftstellern und nach eigenen Untersuchungen beschrieben und als eine Geographische und Historische Einleitung zur richtigern Kenntniss aller Skandinavischen, Finnischen, Slavischen, Lettischen und Sibirischen Völker, besonders in alten und mittleren Zeiten.* (Halle 1771).

<sup>35</sup> Lemberg, Hans, "Zur Entstehung des Osteuropabegriffs im 19. Jahrhundert. Vom "Norden" zum "Osten" Europas". *Jahrbuch für Geschichte Osteuropas*, (Vol. 33, No. 1, 1985), pp. 48-91.

<sup>36</sup> On the Eastern marker, see Kivikoski, Mikko, "Onko Itä-Eurooppaa enää olemassa?(Is Eastern Europe Still There), in Kettunen, Pauli, Kultanen, Auli & Soikkanen, Timo (eds.), *Jäljillä. Kirjoituksia historian ongelmista.* Osa 2. (Turku: Kirja-Aurora 2000), pp. 165-6; Okey, Robin, "Central Europe/Eastern Europe: Behind the Definitions". *Past & Present* (No. 137, 1992), pp. 102-33.

A contender emerged on the scene once the position of easternness was bolstered during Enlightenment. The eastern marker was extended to blur interpretations concerning the North. Yet, the transition from the dominance of the North to the broadening of the East spanned decades. A considerable amount of people, having the choice between the North and the East, saw themselves as belonging to the North still at the beginning of 19th century. The North dominated also the writing of history that remained quite state-centric up to the early 19th century. It seems that easternness, as an attribute of Europe, entered the discourse prior to the East being perceived as constituting a prime political - and not just a cultural - scene. The East and the North were initially not exclusive poles and their boundary remained vague for some time. Larry Wolff points out that these two cardinal markers overlapped but claims that there was a rather quick retreat of the North towards the position of a northern North.<sup>37</sup> Scholars such as Robin Okey support the claim that there was a considerable period of transition.<sup>38</sup> The Crimean War spurred, it seems, the emplotment of Russia as an eastern and not a northern actor, although the process remained incomplete at least up to the First World War with Soviet Russia being excluded - and excluding itself - from the rest of Europe. The Second World War to some extent blurred the picture but the Cold War re-confirmed the easternness of the Soviet Union. The resulting primacy of the East-West divide contributed, in one of its aspects, to a further northernisation of the North in a European context while the previous North-South axis was removed from European affairs - to be later projected on global politics as a whole.

The historical record could, one may argue, lay the ground for the argument that the North is on its way back. The claim could potentially be made that the North is returning in order to re-conquer the position of a core constituent marker of Europeanness, one loaded with relevant political meaning. However, such arguments are basically missing from the discourse. The neo-North does not seem to ride on claims based on historical grandiosity and also research has by and large pushed such arguments to the sidelines. Images of the former Hanseatic League played a crucial role in the

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<sup>37</sup> See Wolff, Larry, *Inventing Eastern Europe*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

<sup>38</sup> Okey, *Central Europe/Eastern Europe: Behind Definitions*, (1992), p. 105.

debate about Baltic Sea Cupertino and stories about former Pomor trade surfaced in the context of initiating the Barents one, but the discourses on the neo-North have at least so far taken a different route as there appears no major need for transcending some previous negative emplotment of northerness.

### **A Constitutive Outside**

Actually, the historical record could speak for a rather different interpretation. During the 19th century the North was gradually pushed to the sidelines by the increased prominence of the East and the West. It declined in rank, ceased to be categorised as negative difference on a grand scale and turned, over time, into a marker of outmost peripherality. It was severed from being part of Europeanness in time (representing something left behind) and place (being a liminar to Europeanness). Whilst 'Europe' gained - with the maturing of the modern period - connotations of centrality and progress, northerness was restricted in meaning outlining a barren and hostile no-man's land. It was associated with remoteness as well as primitivity and furnished with perceptions of lagging behind. The North was seen as a void located at the fringes of what truly matters, i.e. a marker distinct because of its perceived emptiness and lack of meaning rather than being a reservoir of some particular meaning. The constitutive impact of the North declined and changed in essence as the North was primarily comprehended as a stranger to be kept within bonds, mastered and subordinated to the power of the constitutive markers of East and West. It was comprehended as an object to be consummated by the main cartographic attributes, and in general to be sorted out by conquering it to modernity. The dominance of the East and the West gave ground, for example, to the North being comprehended in Soviet eyes as 'the Red Arctic'. It was depicted as a sphere not to be let to its own devices but mastered, engineered and remade so as to be heroically readjusted to human (socialist and modernist) needs.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> The story is given by McCannon, John, *Red Arctic. Polar exploration and the Myth of the North in the Soviet Union 1932-1939*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1998).

The prevailing image has thus been, until recently, that Europe's North harbours - to the extent that these two mental constructs could be linked to each other in the first place - little subjectivity. It is not seen as being comparable with the core constituent markers of European political space. At its low the North was comprehended as something of a *terra incognita* that came to life only by being discovered, mapped, named and spoken into existence by explorers arriving from the civilised and developed areas, those that really count and are central in the process of providing meaning. It was allowed to stay on the scene but merely in the form of a supplement and by remaining external to the dominant markers of political space.

The North therewith performed, during the peak of the modern period, the role of forming what could be seen as the constitutive outside of the dominant constellation. It had the posture of a liminar marker reflecting merely local dynamics and, so to say, a rhythm distinct from the modern beat. Yet, although weak and subjugated, it could not be totally expelled. The North was, in fact, defined by a double move: It was excluded from centrality and prevented from acquiring a position *on par* with the dominant markers but at the same time it had to be included and allotted some space of its own. Basically the North was there in order to define Europe by contrast; it was the 'moon' reflecting the light of the European 'sun'. There was a process of negation at work: the North was what the South was not. The North had to be included and accounted for - despite its nothingness, undifferentiated nature and potentially subversive character - as the presence of such an obscure marker testified to the completeness of the overall configuration formed jointly by the core directions on the compass. The dichotomic relationship was one of dependency as the confirming of the notion of completeness as well as the impression of firm foundations was rather essential to the standing of the more dominant markers themselves. The North had to be there for the others to have a relative advantage. The overall constellation hence enabled the northern marker to gain some standing of its own but at the same time anything northern was pushed into an inessential and fringe position, remote both as to time and place.

The recent changes imply, if read against this background, that the North no longer remains as northernised (i.e. naturalised

and just limited to the northernmost North) and subjugated as previously. Instead, it serves as a reservoir to be employed in order to arrest some of the fluidity and turmoil caused by the end of the Cold War. Northernness may become less of a supplement; it can expand in scope and be attached to themes that do not just pertain to Europe's past but also its future. Or to be more precise, it may be cast in a futuristic light as its anchorage in history - due to a profound marginalisation - has turned quite thin.

Despite its 'nothingness', or precisely because of it, the expansion of the North has profound consequences. Signifiers such as the North do not merely describe and position subjects that are already there. They provide - as already argued - a frame of interpretation and a departure to be used in the process of positioning oneself. This is far from a technical act as it is part of a process that produces a series of symbolic deeds around which identities as well as political and social reality can be constituted. To be defined by northernness - instead of some other cardinal marker - is a process that might pertain quite profoundly to the subjectivity of the different actors and institutions on the scene. For example, the position and the pre-eminence that the 'Nordic' concept enjoyed during the peak of the modern era as a kind of developed and rational non-North might be at stake (although in every-day language the difference between the Nordic and the northern has sometimes remained diffuse). The challenge appears to be there to a certain extent enforcing for example Nordic co-operation to subjugate itself to the EU's Northern Dimension - as advocated in a recent Nordic Council report on the Northern Dimension, 2001.<sup>40</sup> The challenge seems to be there despite of that the neo-North basically builds on the postmodern logic of multiplicity. There might also be some other identities, cultures and delineations that, dependent on a strict and well-bordered northern North, suffer from the Northern marker being set free and extended beyond its previously rather unpolitical features and limits of 'a last Frontier'.

Paradoxically, also the northernmost North might come out as one of those resisting the europeanisation of northernness. Northernness has for long been furnished by connotations of being

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<sup>40</sup> See the Nordic Council report *Öppet för världens vindar. Norden*. Nordiska Ministerrådet (Copenhagen: NORD 2000:15).



"strong and free" thereby providing departures helpful in defying incursion and resisting conquest by those seen as harbouring exploitative and 'foreign' ambitions. The Union's Northern Dimension might be interpreted as yet another effort of undermining the North's capacity to stay aloof and counteract disciplining. The initiative is thus not seen as emancipatory in essence but rather interpreted as a move endeavouring at further undermining the very marker that has provided ground for the northern North's distinct and separate existence. In other words, it is not the northern North marketing its own qualities in terms of time and space to a broader audience. There are, in general, good reasons for examining closer who are the founding fathers of the neo-North, what functions of the marker occupies in various contexts, and how the discursive power embedded in the marker works in relation to established forms of temporal categories and spatialisation.

The struggles that neo-North introduce also pertain - even if tuned down in the context of pushing forward the Northern Dimension initiative - to the figure of 'Europe'. The initiative potentially invites for a Europe that revolves along new and different lines. It may thus be argued that it is not just the 'hole' in the middle of the post-Cold War Europe that is being remedied by providing northernness with an enhanced position. The northern contender is not to be compared with the effort immediately after the Cold War to re-launch the idea of a separate *Mittel-Europa*, an idea far more offensive and openly political by design. The latter coinage shattered, both intellectually and politically, the idea of Eastern Europe as well as raising troubling questions about centrality. It intruded into a variety of sensitivities related to who defines, and thereby dominates the centre. In addressing core constitutive questions in a far too direct manner, the idea of a narrow *Mittel-Europa* failed to gain ground, whereas the EU's Northern Dimension constitutes a far more subtle operation. It does not raise questions of centrality but pertains clearly to peripherality i.e. a less guarded and fixed discourse, although also the defining of marginality holds the option of having an impact on the overall European configuration.

## **A Possible Trajectory**

The neo-North embedded in the ND-initiative seems to operate in a distinctly low-key fashion, and some of its working may hence escape attention. It aspires to stay at the margins and off-centre without raising questions about the core. There are no outright revanchist themes attached to it that would spark off an immediate alarm.

Moreover, the discourse pertaining to the neo-North does not have the form of either-or. It does not claim authenticity and aspire to lay the ground for some organic and exclusive community. Consequently, the problem of explaining the Northern Dimension tends to pertain to questions like "where is the beef" and is there really anything to it, not suppositions about some heavy and disturbing content. It is merely purported as endeavouring at adding to plurality by introducing yet another trajectory to be explored in knitting together the Baltic, Barents and Arctic regional formations. The northern marker appears to re-enter the European scene as one option out of many without doing so in any categorical, explicitly political, revanchist or conflictual manner. It urges, no doubt, for subjectivity but does not aspire for such a standing by ousting some other markers. The aim is not that of swapping peripherality for centrality but rather one of proliferating peripherality through what has been aptly labelled as the "policies of emptiness" (Medvedev, 2001). Northernness flies, one may argue, in resonating with the multiplicities, fragmentations, overlappings, and contingencies of so many other contemporary claims to political subjectivity. It feeds on the image of growing in the cracks of the previous East/West order and advances gradually as a domain that remedies these cracks without causing any broader disturbances and outright instability. It operates by being exotic, idealistic and harmless rather than anything offensive, heavy in substance and thereby challenging.

There are thus reasons to argue that the overall process is not just about reshuffling the various constitutive elements within a fixed and pre-given symbolic order. The neo-North appears to be about deconstruction more than construction, and it operates in the context of globalisation, regionalisation, networking and localisation rather than any domain defined by traditional statist departures. The insertion of northernness is not, if viewed in the perspective of

change conceptualised as 'glocalisation', only about slipping out of the East/West bind and assuming the role of a third. It basically acquires a looser relationship to the very frame of space and time expressed primarily through a positioning along the lines dictated by main cartographic markers. Or stated it in relation to the flag/hole metaphor: the problem does not just pertain to a 'hole' in the middle of the 'flag' that is on the way to being remedied. What could be at stake are the core constitutive principles and departures of the whole symbolic order that is the 'flag' as a cultural construct. The nature of the overall figure is less self-evident than it used to be. And, in such an indirect manner, also the neo-North pertains and feeds on broader questions of time and space that have popped up in the post-Cold War period.

### **Exit from the Bipolar Divide**

It appears that northernness is quite slippery in content. The marker has - as observed by Sergei Medvedev - considerable features of obscurity and anonymity: "Whereas the East, West and South have more or less fixed meanings, and are interpreted as relatively populated and explored, the North appears as a mythological domain, a semiotic project, a constructed identity".<sup>41</sup> He claims that it "is more often communicated than experienced, imagined rather than embodied". The North constitutes, he argues, the furthest of all corners in the world: "It is the most elusive and the least circumscribed, an ill-defined space rather than a delineated place". It lacks, he asserts, in locality, territoriality, borders and other accoutrements characteristic of what is labelled as "our rational geometrical civilisation", and does this far more than the other master-signifiers of political space.

There are also other authors offering similar observations. For example Kenneth Coates states, in an article on the northern cultures, that the North "...is as much a creation of the imagination as it is a physical or human reality".<sup>42</sup> This is, of course, not to deny the mythological aspects - and the constructed nature - for example

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<sup>41</sup> Medvedev, Sergei, "The Blank Space: Glenn Gould, Russia, Finland and the North". *International Politics*, (Vol. 38, No. 1, March 2001), p. 92.

<sup>42</sup> See Coates, Kenneth, "The Discovery of the North: Towards a Conceptual Framework for the Study of Northern/Remote Regions". *The Northern Review*, (No. 12/13, 1993/4), p. 15,

of the West or the East. Both are rich in mythological content and have been coined mentally and intellectually before they have taken root as geographic and political departures. What singles out the North, however, appears to be the relationship to the modern project. According to Medvedev:

Both the West and the East have been explored and assimilated by modern culture. In general, the East-West binary opposition is essentially a modern project, originating in the era of geographic discoveries, legitimized in Eurocentrism and colonialism (cf. Kipling's "never the twain shall meet"), and consummated in the Cold War division. The oriental East and the political East (the Byzantine, Russian and later the Soviet Empires) have all intertwined in the western mind, playing the role of Europe's Other. East and West have been filled with political practices and therefore demystified, attributed to nations, ideologies and institutions. The intensity of the East-West dichotomy has obscured the signifiers of North and South. Whereas in the premodern times North had been marginalized by centrality of the South, in the modern era North was marginalized by centrality of the East-West narrative.<sup>43</sup>

One could claim, along similar lines, that out of the cardinal signifiers of political space, it is only the North that has been clearly allotted with the position of a constitutive outside. It stands for a sphere where the social domination over nature is less obvious. North is thus easily depicted as not only a product of history but also outside history and, therefore, also a rather spiritual sphere. Europe's South has been able to utilise memories of a glorious (Hellenic) past. It is thick in political and cultural meaning whereas the North, with its connotations of raw nature, has been unable to draw upon anything similar. The South has been so intimately linked to its former civilisational position - and still remains territorially attached to a self-understanding that builds on a formidable past - that it has been impossible to marginalise it in the same manner as the North. The South remains, as is often stated, "the cradle of civilisations" and is thereby less able to control - if not generate - meaning in the context of central constitutive processes. Meaning is given by rather fixed interpretations of history and hence less

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<sup>43</sup> Medvedev, *The Blank Space: Glenn Gould, Russia, Finland and the North*, p. 91.

permeable and manipulable. The South is, despite its rather weak social and economic position, culturally 'the source of light', an icon instead of an anti-icon.<sup>44</sup>

The pushing of the North into the position of what Medvedev characterises as "a generic outback, mother of all peripheries" has succeeded as the North is far more labelled by periods of marginality in being void of the qualities that provide meaning other than in terms of pure nature and outsidership. It harboured such a role of the land of nothingness already in relation to the ancient South. As the land of darkness and one inhabited by barbarians, the North figured as the South's constitutive outside. Undoubtedly also the South has been marginalised during the modern era. It has lost in standing compared to its 'golden days', albeit the Southern marker has been able to preserve some of its character as a source of meaning. The South thus has a position that is to some extent different from the one held by the North with the latter being imbued with connotations of an object void of generating any relevant meaning (i.e. 'a source of light') of its own.

The character of a liminal in the context of the rather rationalist modern project has made northernness rich, as argued, in myths and hidden meanings. This is one reason why it appears to fit quite well with the current conditions favouring diversity and inventiveness. More recently it seems to be on its way of transforming into a brand name: a kind of North®. It is light and less burdened by images of permanency than the more established markers of political space. The neo-North resonates with what Zaki Laïdi has characterised as "a pure play of signs".<sup>45</sup> The borderlines between meaning and non-meaning have turned thin, as have those between the sphere of politics and that of nature.

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<sup>44</sup> For a comparison between the North and the South, see Holm, Ulla and Joenniemi, Pertti, "North, South and the Figure of Europe: Changing Relationships". *COPRI Working Papers*, (No. 11, 2001).

<sup>45</sup> For a general interpretation along these lines, see Laïdi, Zaki, *A World Without Meaning. The Crisis of Meaning in International Politics*, (London: Routledge, 1998).

## A Play of Signs

Quite similar questions seem to pertain to the neo-North in the context of the EU's Northern Dimension. The coinage is important on its own terms and does not necessarily have to translate - in tolerating a considerable gap between experience and expectations - into something societally tangible in order to count.

This begs for the question whether it is the symbols used or the more concrete project-oriented results that the ND may yield that counts in passing judgement concerning whether the initiative is for real and if it can be viewed as having encountered success. Will it be able to generate meaning and serve as a frame in depicting political space in the new, post-Cold War Europe already as a set of symbols, thereby to be viewed as having resulted in a positive outcome, or does it have to amount to something 'real' and tangible in the context of the EU? Can the play with the 'nothingness' of the North serve as an ordering device and representational frame in the first place and is it at all possible to talk about success in the context of an implosion and the demise of a set of previous structuring oppositions? Is the ND not doomed to remain an exercise in naming, a PR-intensive, media-effective and low-cost move but one which in the end yields very little if anything in terms of concrete exchange and communication due to its very emptiness?

Mostly the view has been that there has to be a match between the sign and the social sphere, and this requirement of correspondence has also underpinned most of the ND-related research. The judgement passed has in general followed a distinctly modern line of interpretation. This seems to account for at least some of the pessimism, explain the a focusing on various diplomatic processes as well as the down-playing of the symbolic aspects of the move of advocating northernness. Poststructuralist approaches - along the lines opened up by Zaki Laïdi - allow for a different interpretation. The EU's Northern Dimension does not have to be underpinned by objectivist and functionalist arguments in order to be alive and it does not have to amount to an explicit project and short-term results in order to be credible. The rhetorical qualities and representational aspects - appearing for example in the weather forecasts - of the move are important as such. The initiative is not compelled to succeed in some finalistic manner or turn into a 'grand

design' for it to be interesting and worth analysis. It counts, according to the latter frame of interpretation, already as signifier, a play of signs and a frame used in various contexts.

The Northern Dimension is there above all as a joint field of communication, one furnishing a number of previously suppressed actors and perspectives with a constitutive voice and standing of their own. It figures as imagery and may serve as a frame that privileges one set of subjectivities and perspectives while downgrading other political visualisations of political space. It has value above all in offering a platform and a meeting-place that is neither premised on easternness nor westernness. In bringing about such an option that goes beyond the dominant binary divide, northernness offers the ground for a genuine dialogue. It is, no doubt, related to the region-talk that has, during the post-Cold War period, proliferated in the form of the Baltic Sea, Barents and the Arctic regions, or - for that matter - in terms of a great number of transborder and cross-border initiatives.<sup>46</sup> However, it does not boil down to any distinct regional arrangement. What it does, instead, is to influence the constitutive principles and departures at large by legitimating multiplicity in terms of the construction of in-between spaces. The Northern Dimension provides the more specific regionalist initiatives with a common frame, thereby adding to their standing. Instead of appearing as oddities and deviations, they gain the position of being legitimate constructions among others. Moreover, the ND links them further to the EU and the policies of the Union, and more broadly to the contest on the Europe to come.

The initiative allows the Union - and the various other actors within its purview - to perceive themselves from a new and different perspective. It liberates them from a number of constraints introduced by the dominance of the East-West divide, and more generally, the modern way of outlining political space. Northernness thus invokes a new point of anchorage, albeit in a rather flexible and light manner. It does not aim at creating disunion by offering a new grand way of dividing Europe along a North/South axis. It is not about the return of history or the introduction of a new binary divide. One modern configuration and way of devising political space is not

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<sup>46</sup> See Wæver, Ole, *The Baltic Sea: "Region after Post-Modernity?"* in Joenniemi, Pertti (ed.), *Neo-Nationalism or Regionality?* (NordREFO 1997:5, Stockholm, 1997), p. 293.

traded for another. Instead the move lays down a vision that contributes to an ordering of the rather uncertain and volatile post-Cold War conditions in a rather subtle and emancipatory manner by broadening the range of choices. It thereby represents a step forward rather than a return of history, and this disregarding of the final, instrumental and structural outcome. As argued by Sergei Medvedev "Narratives of "great Europe" and "great Russia" are estranged in the Northern fringes, and their opposition is made relative".

More particularly, Medvedev claims:

The North is less influenced by the "vertical" discourses and structures of subordination. It has never been strongly subjected to its disciplining projects of Catholicism, Russian imperialism, Soviet Communism, Atlanticism or Europeanism, while its Lutheran legacy has never amounted to creating a dominant type of supranationalism. Therefore, over the centuries, North has developed a sort of cultural and political permissiveness, an allergy to grand narratives and various forms of collectivism, and a healthy pragmatism on Lutheran individualism and Hanse-type of liberalism".<sup>47</sup>

The Northern Dimension represents, in this perspective, an effort to pave room for a Europe on northern terms. It indicates that the northern marker no longer subordinates itself to the new Europeanness - as it did in the context of the East/West Europe. It aspires, instead of accommodation and occupying an obscure position at the edges or outright opposition for that matter, for subjectivity on terms of its own by assuming the position of a co-determinant and a departure that brings together aspects that have remained apart from each other for quite long. The aim is one of bringing about a Europe, if seen from the northern latitudes, which is not just 'there' (Brussels or Moscow for that matter) but also 'here'. For this to come about northernness has to liberate itself from the detainment caused by the deeply entrenched and intellectually rather well rehearsed barriers that over a long period of time allotted the North with a position as an outcast.

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<sup>47</sup> Medvedev, *The Blank Space: Glenn Gould, Russia, Finland and the North*, p. 99.



The Northern Dimension goes some way in doing this, although the outcome is dependent on whether the artifice coined sinks in and is found largely acceptable. Public discourses may be as decisive as the more formal, diplomatic processes pertaining to the fate of the initiative. In any case, the launching of the initiative - and the underlying discourse - challenges the way northernness has been configured over two centuries. It is a move away from just passively inheriting and swallowing whatever is coined at the traditional core. Moreover, it seems to provide clues of self-liberation and testifies to an ability to translate one particular aspect of the postmodern play of signs, comprehended as politically usable, to be employed in the course of Europe-making.

### **Concluding Remarks: What is the Core Constitutive Principle?**

Clearly, constitutive questions about politics have escaped the previously well 'guarded' confines of Europe-talk. Such a breach requires, it seems, a response from the EU as a whole, particularly the Commission being charged with the task of framing the Union. However, the truly crucial issues do not just pertain to governance or the erection of regimes, i.e. responses that the EU has been quite familiar with. They also invite for choosing between different representational frames, each with their own delineation and identities. The Union is called - or challenged - to go beyond its ordinary reactions and it is confronted with such constitutive issues particularly in the northern part of Europe.

That the challenges arise from the northern margins comes, in a sense, as a surprise. This is so as the northernmost Europe has usually been equated with the predominance of geopolitical, statist and sovereignty-oriented understandings of political space. Sovereignty has been the unchallenged principle applied in the construction of political space. The northernmost North has been one of the quite militarised, with a high level of tension and strict lines of territorial demarcation. Much of the old has been more alive in the 'High North' than elsewhere in Europe. The construction of order and the representational frames used have led to tight measures of inclusion and exclusion and firm classifications into 'we' and 'they'. There has been little reason to ponder about change as the constitutive principles seem to have enjoyed a certain permanency. Considerable homogeneity has reigned in this regard, and overlapping configurations have been depicted as a source of confusion and strife.

Yet, during the recent decade, northern Europe has also been quite conducive to region-building. The northern part of Europe has turned, within a rather short period, rich in various regional arrangements such as the (reformed) Nordic Council, Council of Baltic Sea States, Barents Euro-Arctic Council and a broad variety of various euroregions, transborder and cross-border arrangements. Moreover, the challenge is not just that of some particular regional configurations adding plurality to the political landscape. The Union is, above all, compelled to sort out questions pertaining to the legitimacy of different constitutive principles as regionality has been applied more than in most other parts of the continent. The interpretative horizons based on impermeable boundaries have quickly declined in importance and, as a consequence, the northern part of Europe has defied and circumvented previous lines of demarcation in capitalising on the demise of the bipolar order. There has been a pooling of resources in order to improve the region's relative weight in the contest between centrality and marginality in the new integrative Europe.

Various regional entities, ranging from small and local ones to very large cross-border arrangements, have emerged leaving a considerable imprint on the political and economic landscape. Projects have been launched despite that they are not guaranteed by any secure origins or, for that matter, any known outcome. Trajectories have been explored with advantages, costs and uncertainties. There has been openness and good chances of 'speaking' various representations such as the Baltic and the Barents ones into existence in order for them to transcend the previous sovereignty-based delineations of political space and to reach beyond the Union's ordinary policies based on sectoral and functional approaches. New formations have been imagined, visions launched into the public sphere, and they turned rather quickly into political realities and concrete regionalist projects.

The appearance of the Northern Dimension seems to indicate that such policies have now been brought one step further. Thinking has been liberated - one may argue - from being tied to distinct regional configurations, and the policies pursued have turned more spatial in terms of being less bound to specific territorial constraints or bordering along strict lines. As a consequence, questions pertaining to the more general constitutive principles involved in Europe-making are rendered open.

The broader talk of the recent years does not only aim at bringing about permeable borders and install various border-crossing arrangements; it focuses above all on regionality as such with border regions and spaces in-between gaining in authority and legitimacy. In fact, there appears to be two rather different constitutive logics present in the current Europe-talk, each with an impact of its own. There are the more traditional sovereignty-related departures present, but also representational frames are used, formations advocated and performative discourses waged that do not resonate with the assumed predominance and exclusivity of sovereignty. And yet, there are few explicit signs of a confrontation to be discerned. There is no clear-cut clash to be evidenced despite the fact that sovereignty and regionality stand out as two rather diverse logics and constitutive departures.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> See Wæver, Ole, *The Baltic Sea: "Region after Post-Modernity?"* in Joenniemi, Pertti (ed.), *Neo-Nationalism or Regionality?* (NordREFO 1997:5, Stockholm, 1997), pp. 293-342; Joenniemi, Pertti, "Regionality? A Sovereign Principle in International

There are tensions, though, in the sense that with regionality as a new foundational principle, one challenges the other. As regionality does not present itself as being based on sovereignty and no longer figures as something derived, there must be a clash and confrontation evolving. Focusing on networks, de-regulation and flows, going away from security, statist concerns, divisive borders and national economies (as region-talk tends to do) is quite different from focusing on the re-constructing of nation-states or endeavouring at establishing strict and uniform criteria for citizenship.

However, this clash seems to be comparatively mild as the region-builders to the North clearly attempt to tune down any images of a dichotomic relationship. Images of a confrontation are evoked by the claim that the installing of representational frames such as the Northern Dimension is about something else. It may be argued - if the issues are pinpointed in the first place - that these representational departures operate at a different wavelength and endeavour at assisting the (sovereignty-based) states or doing things that states do not engage themselves in. Besides, there is the message that they will remain light as regards institutions and thereby insignificant as to their regulatory capacities. They *are* more than they *do*. The argument seems - in terms of endeavouring at finding a way around the discursive limits set by the predominance of sovereignty as a core constitutive principle - to be that the unfolding of regionality follows a 'post-sovereign' path. The formations that follow tend to multiply authorities and identities in modes that overflow sovereignty, and thereby contribute to multiplicity in a manner where the order of sovereignty becomes one reality among many.

As noted by Ole Wæver, this is of course against the logic of sovereignty, which claims to be the one and only.<sup>49</sup> But yet it can go on, he adds, as regional formations are marginal, off-centre and light in authority.

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Relations?" In: Patomäki, Heikki (ed.), *Peaceful Changes in World Politics*. (Research Report No. 71, 1995). Tampere Peace Research Institute, pp. 337-79; Telò, Mario, "Introduction: Globalization, New Regionalism and the Role of the European Union", in Telò, Mario (ed.), *European Union and New Regionalism. Regional Actors and Global Governance in a Post-Hegemonic Era*. (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2001), pp. 1-21.

<sup>49</sup> See Wæver, Ole, *The Baltic Sea: "Region after Post-Modernity?"*, p. 301-3.

What allows markers such as the North to grow in eminence is that they seem to be related to non-sovereignty shaped processes. They entail experimenting with new principles and departures that do not directly challenge sovereignty and the related East/West logic. They are in tune with globalisation as unfolding in the forms of the cyber-economy, in the virtual reality of (war) games, in the non-territorial politics of technological innovations and such like. The northern part of Europe appears not only to be quite receptive to these trends and such experimentation; there is sufficient actorness to translate the new developments and clear evidence of change into a constitutive debate as to the basic departures of Europe-making. There has been an upsurge of regionality-based configurations, the reason perhaps being that sovereignty is quite firmly anchored and self-evident in the region. The modern period - with sovereignty in the front seat - has unfolded in a relatively unproblematic fashion. There is, in consequence, also courage to provide space for some other principles as long as they do not directly challenge the dominance of sovereignty. Or to phrase it differently: the sovereignty-based discourse is taken to be so strong that minor deviations for example in the form of North-speak do not seem to matter.

At best sovereignty might even search for an alliance with regionality instead of just wanting to be contained and circumscribed by a competing approach. The ND could indeed be comprehended as exemplifying such an alliance and thereby leaning on a certain duality as to the underlying constitutive logics. It is not just acceptable from the point of sovereignty but also something interesting to experiment with. Applying a northern frame is viewed as a positive trajectory as long as it stays in a somewhat obscure and harmless form and remains sufficiently under the control of the respective states and ties in with their modern, sovereignty-based discourse.

The situation also looks interesting from the perspective of the European Union. The EU has often been the driving force in devising an increasingly complex landscape by its various strategies, embedded above all in the structural funds. The Union harbours a plurality in the sense that there are trends pointing to a uniform, statelike Union with relatively hard and impermeable borders akin to the modern state borders associated with a Westphalian sovereignty-based system. However, there is also a Union that draws on debates concerning the development of an Empire-like Europe of concentric circles centred on Brussels, i.e. a configuration in which power and influence decline the further one is from the centre. This configuration has a distinct core but rather obscure borders towards the edges. A third model builds upon a variegated conception of Europe and the EU in which there is not one but several centers, power is dispersed throughout interlocking and overlapping regionalist formations with rather fluid external borders. Each of these three potential configurations/metaphors is driven by a logic of its own, i.e. a modern (a concentric EU), less modern or perhaps even a premodern (an EU of concentric circles) and a postmodern (a clearly decentred EU of the Olympic rings) one.

Particularly in this latter case - within such a trilogy of heuristic models outlining potential trends within Europe - the EU would be unfolding as a supreme example of postmodern politics.<sup>50</sup> It is interesting to note, against this background, that it is particularly around the Baltic rim and in northern Europe that the Union is called to tune in to something that has been infused with features that deviate from modern clarity and endeavours of unambiguous bordering already prior to the Union establishing itself in the region. Such a situation allows the Union to build further on what is already there, and offers the perspective of bringing the non-modern aspirations further than in most other regions. The Northern Dimension could be seen as the latest step along such a road, one that also contains the idea of strengthening the position of regionality in the context of the EU and Europe-making at large.

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<sup>50</sup> For arguments along these lines, see Jachtenfuchs, Markus und Kohler-Koch, Beate, "The Transformation of Governance in the European Union. Mannheimer Zentrum für Europäische Sozialforschung". *Working Papers* (ABIII/N0. 11, 1995); Ruggie, John Gerald, "Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations". *International Organization*, (Vol. 47, No. 1, 1993), pp. 139-74; Wæver, Ole, *Territory, Authority and Identity. The Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century Emergence of*

The North, as a major marker, undoubtedly frames something. Hence the question arises what this something is and how does it tie in with the dominant discourses pertaining to the construction of political space. In the case of the EU's Northern Dimension the subsets consist, above all, of the various regionalist entities that are already there. In informing policy responses at the margins, the ND does not seem to pertain to a 'Europe of concentric circles' and a sovereignty-based logic conducive to rather hierarchic and uncentred structures. Instead, it forms co-space rather than sub-space within the broader European configuration. The initiative - although contested and open to various efforts of deflating its meaning - appears to aim at legitimising in-between type of spaces. It does not represent the voice of the core but stands out as a proactive move with the margins speaking and contributing to a visualisation of the Union that strengthens images of a 'Europe of the Olympic rings', a more variegated Europe with an increasing amount of horizontal features, cross-pillar features and policies that transcend the borders of the different directorates within the EU. The constitutive logic advocated consists above all of regionality and de-bordering.

The different configurations outlined above hinge on the question whether Europe will constitute itself as a single centre, will it develop around multiple centres as a 'Europe of regionalities', in what way will it be bordered and what representational frames are going to be utilised in outlining the overall European configuration. All the recent federalism-talk points to rather a modern ambition of aspiring for an orderly, uniform, basically vertical and rather controlled Europe. The effort is one of devising borders that provide a clear-cut division between an inside and an outside, and thereby also offer the ground for a coherent EU-identity that could prevail everywhere within the Euro-polity. Such an EU, one with a rather uniform representational frame, would provide little if any room for questioning the dominance of the core. There is, if this is the way the EU goes, little space for the unfolding of a polity premised on northernness as one of its constitutive markers. Nor would the configuration allow for debordering or engagement in a dialogue premised on equality with non-applicants such as Russia, Norway or Iceland. There would be no genuine meeting-ground, that is space furnishing those to be met with some subjectivity and voice of their own. The Northern Dimension would shrink to very little within such a context. It would basically turn into a vehicle of spreading a pre-given homogeneity both within and in the 'near abroads' of the Union, as indicated by Christopher Browning (2001) in his analysis on the way the ND has unfolded in the context of the EU. The question is thus not whether the Northern Dimension is something and whether it stands out as a success or a failure, but what are the interpretations imposed and the context in which the marker is utilised.



It might be added, however, that the dynamics of the Northern Dimension also allow for a different interpretation. The initiative may also be seen as speaking for a rather polycentric EU and seen as a move contributing to a configuration bordered in an increasingly fluid and 'fuzzy' manner. It does so above all by raising questions about representational departures in its installing of an additional frame, one premised on northernness into the discourses pertaining to the essence of the EU. The North, as marker and a principle of legitimation, is explicitly seen as strengthening the unfolding of region-building in a distinct part of Europe. It injects a departure that invites the margins to carve out space of their own. Moreover, the northern marker is not just brought in as a boundary marker; it could also be seen as contributing to the outlining of a meeting-place that mediates between the internal and external aspects of the Union. It allows, the argument often goes, the boundaries to fade in significance thereby turning them into administrative rather than tightly statist borders. As to the Union as a whole, the ND strengthens - if allowed to mature and unfold in a radical manner - a configuration that has not just one but several focal points. There is so far no major development into such a direction to be traced, but the potential of drastic restructuring is in principle there.

The common bind as to the three heuristic models outlined above consists of the EU itself, whether basically unicentric or polycentric. The Union provides the framework within which various constellations relate to each other. With respect to the territorial aspects of politics, implementing the ND-initiative would mean more emphasis on regionality-steered configurations. In such a 'Europe of regions' intermediate structures and spaces in-between would provide the crucial building blocks in terms of constitutive politics. The multiplicity of governance structures and the multiple identities of the actors - i.e. features pertaining to regionality - would become the norm in considerable parts of Europe. Overlapping membership of actors in various policy-networks would link the various parts of Europe, but neither the state nor the EU would emerge as the dominant level of governance.

Yet, region-building may have its place within all three scenarios. Regional co-operation is quite possible without regionalism, i.e. it may take place without undermining modernist notions of state sovereignty. Along these lines, regional co-operation can also take place in a unicentred EU with hard and impermeable borders, although by remaining something derived and administrative. The two other scenarios both move away from the more simplistic conception of regions as mere subsets of statist and sovereignty-governed spheres of political space, and allow for and invite a less restricted unfolding of regionalist formations.

The evolution on the continent seems to indicate that the development underway is neither based on the traditional image of modern state systems (and regions as administrative and derived entities therein), nor that the European Union is emerging into a state-like super-structure with clearly delineated borders and an internal hierarchy. And what makes northern Europe interesting to study is that it seems to allow for regions to gain considerable space alongside the more traditional configurations, and the more recent development points to even broader shifts in elevating regionality - in a broader and more principled sense - to stake out a position as an agreed constitutive principle, one with its own representational frames and markers. Regional entities do hence not just stand out as islands within political space governed by sovereignty as a core departure. They appear to be supported by regionality, i.e. a departure not fully premised on sovereignty. The Northern Dimension could be seen in this perspective as representing and riding on the bolstered position of regionality. However, success is by no means guaranteed, and it may well be that the marker is embedded with qualities implying that progress is stalled from the very start.

However, one could think that the increased eminence of regionality contributes, in the short run, to a Union of concentric circles, an Empire-like configuration with regionality providing, in particular, shape to the edges. It would do so primarily in the form of specific regionalist configurations, formations that would be there without the backing of a strong and broadly agreed policy frame premised on regionality as a constitutive principle. However, in the long run the figure could gain features of a Europe of 'the Olympic rings', a construction more easily defined in terms of flow rather than some specific place. It would then evidence the potential of the regionalist forms of differentiation in regard to other contending trends, and to do against the background of an increasingly global constellation.

The undisputed plurality of the current-day Europe has already led to an upsurge in border studies and the emergence of new conceptualisations as well as theories on political space. Many of the previous silences have vanished. It seems, however, that the question of representational frames as to the usage of major cardinal markers has thus far remained at the fringes of scholarly interest, including the one focusing on the ND. Quite clearly the task for research is to take on the challenge, to make these departures far more visible and perceive them not as given but as changing and constructed entities containing relationships of power. They too serve as sites and agents of order and disorder in an increasingly dynamic global landscape, and hence the newly-important North with its different faces and expressions may serve as an inroad to a broader and so far insufficiently explored problemacy. Some initial efforts notwithstanding, the state of the art in the field of regionality and the various Europes that representations such as the North turn visible, remains at the level of pre-theorising.