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REVIEW ARTICLES AND REPORTS

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FRAMING ISSUES AND FORMING OPINIONS: THE BALTIC SEA PIPELINE IN THE SWEDISH MEDIA

1. INTRODUCTION

In November 2006, the Nord Stream project was announced to concerned states around the Baltic Sea, as the building consortium Nord Stream AG requested permission to lay a 1,200-km-long seabed pipeline on the Baltic Sea floor to transport natural gas from Russia to Germany. It was proposed that the pipeline would cross the economic zones of Finland, Sweden and Denmark. Its parallel pipelines would provide a transport capacity of 55 billion cubic metres per year, equivalent to 25% of the estimated increase in European gas demand by 2025. The pipeline is included in the Trans-European Energy Network Guidelines (TEN-E) and will make an important contribution to Europe's energy supply (EC, 2006). The company describes the pipeline in these terms:

> Nord Stream is more than just a pipeline. It is a new channel for Russian natural gas exports, and a major infrastructure project that sets a new benchmark in EU–Russia cooperation (Nord Stream, 2010).

Three years after the announcement of the project, in November 2009, when Sweden was chairing the European Union (EU), the Swedish government approved Nord Stream's gas pipeline route, extending 480 kilometres along the seabed of the Swedish economic zone in the Baltic Sea. The Swedish Minister of

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the Environment, Andreas Carlgren, summarised the government's arguments in favour of the project:

> Now the government's conclusion is clear: no serious government can refuse an application for a pipeline, when the environmental provisions have been satisfied (Carlgren, 2009).

Construction of the first pipeline started in April 2010, and by October, pipeline laying was underway in the waters of all five countries through which it will pass; the first pipeline is scheduled to be in operation in 2011, followed by a second in 2012.

A Baltic Sea pipeline raises many questions. It will constitute an immensely extended infrastructure for natural gas, helping satisfy West European energy demand but prolonging European use of and dependence on fossil fuels. The gas will originate from Siberia, making Russia an interdependent trading partner and empowered actor on the European political scene. The political and economic impacts of the project are huge. Poland and the Baltic states largely rely on Russia for their gas supplies. Russia has earlier declared that it sees the transit countries – the Baltic states and other former soviet bloc countries – as barriers to reliable gas deliveries to Western Europe. The pipeline will make Russia more autonomous of these countries, raising the risk that they will experiences problems meeting their own gas needs (Kern, 2008). Nord Stream is a new source of geopolitical tension in the region (Bouzarovski and Konieczny, 2010); Polish politicians have even called Nord Stream a 'geopolitical disaster' and a 'Russian-German conspiracy' (Sikorski, Olex-Szczytowski and Rostowski, 2007).

Although gas is cleaner than coal or oil, it is still a non-renewable fossil fuel and contributor to global warming. The submarine pipeline route is shorter than the land-based alternatives, although a submarine pipe still needs to be anchored to, maintained on, and later removed from the seabed. The pipeline, especially during its construction, poses substantial risks to marine life in the Baltic Sea. The project means many things, offering opportunities and potentially causing damage.

This paper analyses Swedish media reporting on the planned Baltic Sea pipeline, focussing on how the environmental, economic, and national security aspects of the project have been presented and discussed. To what extent has environmental information been included in the reporting on the pipeline? In the coverage, how have environmental concerns been related to economic and national security concerns?

The media are vital players in democracies by virtue of their role in keeping citizens informed of important issues. The media do not, however, function as a neutral mechanism for transferring knowledge and presenting views and standpoints to readers. On the contrary, they are active producers of meaning and play a crucial role in framing issues and forming opinions by selecting, amplifying, and configuring news production (Dahlgren, 1995; Thompson,

1995). Domestic media are also embedded in national contexts that influence how issues are framed to catch reader attention (Billig, 1995; Höijer, Lidskog and Thornberg, 2006).

Aside from this introduction, the paper comprises four sections. The next section describes the pipeline and its regulatory context. The third section presents theoretical and methodological considerations, highlighting the role of the media in society and presenting the selected empirical material: all articles published in the biggest Swedish daily newspaper, *Dagens Nyheter*, from when the pipeline was first mentioned in the newspaper to some months after Nord Stream submitted their original application to the Swedish government. The results are reported in the fourth section, followed by the conclusions, in which the questions raised are addressed with a particular emphasis on why environmental concerns have been so downplayed in media reporting on the pipeline.

2. SWEDEN AND THE BALTIC SEA PIPELINE

The Baltic Sea is among the most heavily regulated sea areas in the world as regards protection of the marine environment (Governmental Commission Report, 2008; SEPA, 2005). Despite this, its environmental situation is precarious. In the early 1970s, the Baltic Sea was considered one of the most polluted seas in the world (Räsänen and Laakkonen, 2008). Warnings of algal blooms and oxygen-deficient seabeds are still issued almost every summer (Piechura, Pempkowiak, Radziejewska and Uścinowicz, 2006), and the status of fish stocks is worse than ever. The volume of shipping is accompanied by a considerable risk of shipping accidents with extensive oil discharges as a result. Approximately 10% of the world's sea transport, calculated in number of vessels, occurs in the Baltic Sea. Approximately 2,000 large vessels (not counting fishing vessels) operate in the Baltic every day, and 300–500 of these are tankers (Governmental Commission Report, 2008; Hassler, 2010). In 2005, the UN International Maritime Organisation (IMO) designated the Baltic Sea a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA), creating possibilities for extended environmental protection, putting the Baltic among the top ten most threatened waters in the world (Uggla, 2007).

The Swedish Governmental Commission on Marine Environment states that there is an urgent need for

> […] a holistic approach and full integration of environmental issues into all policy areas, stronger political leadership and, to a much greater extent, an international focus […]. All relevant policy areas must be incorporated into a common strategy for the marine environment (Government Commission Report, 2008, p. 59).

The Baltic Sea is environmentally damaged, and concerted political action is needed if it is to recover.

According to international legislation, a state has the right to lay submarine pipelines or cables on the continental shelf of another coastal state (UNCLOS, 1982, article 79). The affected coastal state, however, can influence and even prevent this on environmental grounds. Under the Espoo Convention (adopted in 1991), an environmental impact assessment (EIA) must be prepared by the state or enterprise that intends to lay a pipeline or cable on the shelf. Environmental considerations (associated with their construction or regular use) represent the only legal way that affected coastal states can influence or impede the laying of such pipelines or cables.

Nord Stream AG (formerly known as the North European Gas Pipeline Company) was established in December 2005. This joint venture today comprises five main parties: the Russian gas company OAO Gazprom (major shareholder, 51% stake), the German companies BASF/Wintershall Holding GmbH and E-ON Ruhrgas AG, the Dutch company NV Nederlandse Gasunie, and the French company GDF SUEZ SA. In December 2007, Nord Stream applied to the Swedish government for permission to lay pipelines on the continental shelf and to erect a service platform in the Swedish economic zone. The application was found to be incomplete by the government, and the company was forced to produce an EIA for the full length of the pipeline through the territorial waters and economic zones of all the countries concerned. The Swedish government also demanded a report on the trans-boundary consultations required under the Espoo Convention. After Nord Stream had completed the application no fewer than four times, the Swedish government finally decided to grant permission on 5 November 2009. The decision unconditionally refers to the EIA process in stating that there is no legal reason to reject the Nord Stream proposal to lay the pipeline according to its plans, thus offering access to 480 kilometers of Sweden's economic zone in the Baltic Sea.

The decision prompted reactions from political parties at the national level and from local politicians from the island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea and municipalities near the east coast of Sweden (Ministry of Environment, 2009; *Svenska Dagbladet*, 2009, November 5; SVT, 2009). Questions were raised concerning the strength of the environmental argument vs other important arguments in national and European politics. Notably, four central governmental agencies argued against laying the pipeline on the Swedish part of the Baltic seabed: the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (Naturvårdsverket), the Swedish Transport Agency (Transportstyrelsen), the Swedish Maritime Administration (Sjöfartsverket) and the Swedish Armed Forces (Försvarsmakten). They based their opposition on different, but complementary, arguments, mainly regarding environment protection and/or national security. They also wanted the decision to be based on a broader consideration of the alternatives, including

a serious investigation of a land-based alternative route on the eastern side of the Baltic Sea (Ministry of Environment, 2009).

The coalition government (i.e. the Conservative, Liberal, Centre, and Christian Democratic parties) decision was heavily criticised, not only by political parties outside the government (i.e. the Social Democratic, Left, and Green parties), which stated that the government was selling out Swedish environmental interests to the benefit of Russian gas interest, but also by members of coalition parties. One Member of Parliament, also a member of the Liberal Party steering board, said: 'the government decision to approve of the Russian-German pipeline is deeply unfortunate. It runs contrary to Sweden's long-term interests in energy and security policy' (Carl B. Hamilton, as quoted in *Svenska Dagbladet*, 2009, November 5). Notably, the approval decision was not made inside a restricted group comprising just the applicants, the Swedish government, and some national agencies. Several initiatives were taken to frame the issue in a way that facilitated permission being granted for the pipeline; in this framing, the media played a pivotal role.

3. THE MEDIA STUDY

Studies demonstrate that people use three main information sources when considering matters of public interest: media discourse and coverage, personal experience, and popular beliefs (Gamson, 1996). The influence of media discourse on people's attitudes varies, but is strongest in international affairs and other areas in which people normally have little or no direct personal experience (Gamson, 1996; Höijer, Lidskog and Thornberg, 2006; Johnson-Cartee, 2005). The media play a key role in framing and forming public opinion on issues such as that of the pipeline. How, then, did the media cover this issue?

3.1. Media Power: Agenda Setting, Priming and Framing

Despite developments in information technology and the social media, newspapers still constitute an important arena for public debate, as they generally enjoy the leading agenda-setting power in the media family. An 'elite' group of newspapers can be distinguished, the agenda-setting powers of which are so profound that they even set the agenda for the rest of the media (Strömbäck, 2000, p. 154 *et al.*). The 'independently liberal' Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* (*DN*) was established in 1864 and is recognised as an elite newspaper in the Swedish media. Its circulation encompasses the entire country and the paper is read daily by 10% (almost 900,000 people) of the Swedish population. Having

the most comprehensive geographical circulation and being the most read daily does not necessarily make *DN* reporting representative of the Swedish media in general. It does, however, make it an influential – perhaps the most influential – political voice in Swedish public debate.

Our analysis is based on articles collected from the newspaper's website (www.dn.se), where the electronic news articles largely correspond to their print-edition counterparts. The Swedish compound word for 'gas pipeline' (*gasledning*) was used in searching for relevant articles in the *DN* web archive. Our study examines all articles on the Baltic gas pipeline appearing in the Swedish newspaper *DN* from March 2002 to May 2008. The mere presence of a category of information in an article, whether the article spans three columns or two pages, qualifies as one occurrence. In total, 100 articles were found.

Our analysis makes particular use of three analytical concepts: agenda setting, priming, and framing. Agenda setting is the power or capacity to qualify certain issues for discussion by putting them on the agenda (McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Shah, Mcleaod, Gotlieb, Lee, 2009). Its power is not primarily one of determining what to think about a matter of concern, but of determining what should be seen as a matter of concern. Gate keeping concerns the capacity to keep issues off the agenda (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009; White, 1950). The media exercise both powers as they report abundantly on certain public affairs while keeping fairly quiet about others.

Having been presented with particular issues by the media, readers then decide which of the presented events and actors to pay attention to, i.e. the readers have been affected by media priming (Roskos-Ewoldson, Klinger, Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2006, 2009). The media have not told us what to believe, but have given us a cognitive yardstick of 'important questions' to use when forming opinions on events of public concern. The media thereby influence our preferences. Theories of framing refer to the media's power to choose what available attributes will be used in describing issues, i.e. the media hold a priority right of interpretation (Nilsson, 2004). Complex realities are often simplified to fit an agenda (Höijer, Lidskog and Thornberg, 2006, p. 279). Empirical studies have demonstrated that the way the media interpret issues and events becomes the way we will interpret them (Strömbäck, 2000, p. 217 *et al*.). The media have, for example, taught us to think 'climate' as soon as we hear about greenhouse gases, 'terrorist' at any reporting on the Taliban, and perhaps 'cod death' or 'algal bloom' when the Baltic Sea is mentioned. With what, however, do the media associate the pipeline under the Baltic Sea?

The information on the pipeline provided by *DN* was analysed in terms of three identified public interest categories: the economy, national security, and the environment. The study did not distinguish between factual coverage, editorial or opinion pieces, and interview quotations; any statement about the pipeline was considered 'information' on the pipeline. One simple question was

used in categorising the information in the articles: 'What has this article taught the reader about the pipeline?' If we learned anything about the pipeline's economic features, such as related business activities, timetables, pipeline-linked stockholdings, or gas-related economic factors, the article was considered economic information. If we learned anything about the international aspects of the project, such as military exercises, bi- or multilateral negotiations, and national security politics, the article was categorised as foreign affairs information. If we learned anything about the marine biology or ecological conditions in the Baltic Sea, as related to the pipeline or the implications of natural gas, the article was categorised as environmental information. One article could convey more than one category of information, in which case the article was placed in more than one category. The three information categories seem nearly exhaustive, as only three of the 100 articles fit none of them.

Statements too brief or insignificant to qualify as 'information' were considered passing mentions. This indicates that the information category was touched on in discussing the pipeline (and contributed to the priming), but without any indication of how or why it refers to the pipeline. Crucial to the analysis is assessing to what extent an information category receives undivided attention in an article. Such attention is a crucial indication that a theme is associated with enough information content to qualify as a substantial message about the pipeline. Undivided attention to one information category is in a sense the mark of media framing, as it indicates what the pipeline, discursively, is indeed about.

4. ANALYSIS: ECONOMICS AND SECURITY PRECEDING THE ENVIRONMENT

4.1. Amount of Coverage: Economics and Security at the Expense of Environment

Passing mention analysis determines the most and least thoroughly reported information categories in terms of word count. The analysis counts the number of articles in which an information category is mentioned in one or a few words with no follow-up information. Whereas passing mention occurs every sixteenth time international security and every thirty-sixth time economic aspects are discussed, it occurs every third time the environment is mentioned. Thus, in contrast to economic and security aspects, the environment is often mentioned without giving any substantial information. The following quotation exemplifies the environment being mentioned in passing in an article otherwise about the Russian presidential election:

[Larsson] believes a lot is at stake. Nord Stream is a pilot case – if the EU does not stand up for its principles now, Russia will know that it is possible to force energy projects through against European objections.

But is the pipeline really something to worry about, apart from the environmental consequences? 'Yes' is Larsson's answer, and his arguments are as persuasive as they are frightening.

The entire power balance of the region will be affected, as Russia's means to exert pressure will increase at the same time as the EU could encounter more difficulties speaking with a single voice (*DN*, 2008, February 28).

The hint that the environmental consequences are worrisome makes the above passing mention even more intriguing. Nowhere in the article is anything said about *how* environmental consequences actually constitute a problem. These consequences are either treated as self-evident or simply cited as a dramatic enhancer of no specific interest to the reader.

Counting the articles indicates that the economy is the information category covered most frequently in the material, as it figures in 71 of the 100 articles. Information linked to national security is the second most frequent category, appearing in 62 of the articles, while environmental information appears in 39 of the articles. Excluding passing mentions, 68 of 100 articles provide substantial information on economic aspects, 59 on national security, and 25 on the environment.

That the economy and security are emphasised at the expense of the environment is even more obvious when looking at articles that pay attention to only one of the three categories: 20 articles exclusively discuss the economy, 18 national security, and only one the environment. The article on the environment is a report on Gotland where – aside from the Prime Minister's view of the pipeline – full information is provided on the planned pipeline route along with possible seabed complications arising from the project. However, it makes no comment on whether gas use should be seen as good or bad, though the article mainly concerns a future wind power station on Gotland (*DN*, 2006, August 17).

4.2. Content: Top Stories and Themes

That a theme is identified in an article does not necessarily mean that the article deals only with that theme, but that the article provides substantial treatment of it and uses it as the context for reporting on the pipeline. Figure 1 briefly describes the content of the most common top stories.

Security: Fear of Russia. The national security theme 'fear of Russia' was by far the dominant story in pipeline coverage. While Russian presence in the Baltic Sea (37 articles) is a classic fear treated in the Swedish media, discussion of Russia as a politically empowered gas provider (i.e. gas as a political weapon, 26 articles) is a new fear, mainly affecting countries dependent on Russian gas

deliveries. Together, these security themes form the most common pipeline reporting context – fear of Russia (49 articles) – leaving little space for terrorism (2 articles) or scandalous bilateral contracts (4 articles).

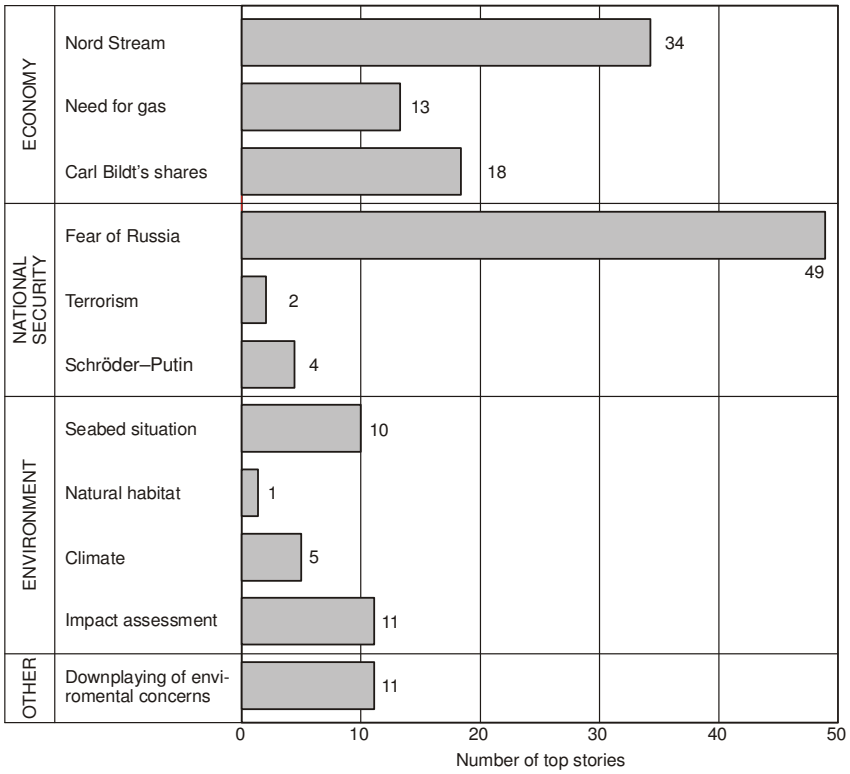

Fig. 1. Number of top stories in each information category; to the far right is the number of articles downplaying environmental concerns

The Economy: Nord Stream in Business. Information on the pipeline company and the project's business aspects was found throughout the six studied years. Information about the building consortium and its endeavours is to be expected in reporting on any project, but, starting from mid 2007, stories on Nord Stream's daily operations seem more like press releases than critical journalism, for example:

> Nord Stream, the company that will be building the pipeline through the Baltic Sea from Russia to Germany, will soon be ordering the pipes for the line (*DN*, 2007, September 25).

Thus, despite the fact that formal permission for the project had yet to be granted, the journalist seems convinced that the pipeline will be built. Another

characteristic of the coverage is that the Nord Stream spokesperson is often effectively given the sole right to interpret, one-sidedly and without critical comment from the journalist, the Baltic Sea situation and domestic public debate:

> 'A second reason [for the delay] is that there is a large amount of dumped ammunition in the sea north-east of Bornholm, something that complicates the project on a purely technical basis', says Matthias Warnig [Nord Stream CEO] (DN, 2007, July 12).

> According to the company, much of the criticism is due to 'ignorance' and the fact that the Swedish people are unfamiliar with natural gas pipelines. 'We haven't heard the type of noise from Denmark as [we have] from Sweden', says Matthias Warnig (DN, 2007, May 8).

The theme 'Carl Bildt's shares' (18 articles) concerns the fact that the new Swedish foreign minister Carl Bildt was found to be holding shares and stock options of Vostok Nafta, an investment company linked to Gazprom. 'The need for gas' (13 articles) concerns the projected energy deficit in the European Union and the need to develop the pipeline.

The Environment: The Seabed and EIA. The top environmental story concerning the pipeline, figuring in 10 of the 100 articles, concerns the disturbing of the seabed by construction, which could stir up the phosphates and toxins accumulated in sediments, jeopardizing Baltic Sea health and worsening algal bloom, and dislodge naval mines from the Second World War. The upcoming environmental impact assessment figures in 11 articles, though often only in passing. Several articles mention the gas carried by the pipeline in terms of either contributing to or alleviating climate change (5 articles). 'Natural habitat', referring to a protected bird habitat along the pipeline route, is mentioned in one article.

4.3. Downplaying Environmental Concerns

As the analysis above demonstrates, the environment was not paid as much attention as were issues of the economy and national security. However, environmental aspects were not simply ignored; many articles (11 articles) in fact explicitly downplayed environmental concerns, stating that other aspects were more important than environmental ones:

> We already know a good deal about pollution and the environmental risks inevitably posed by a seabed pipeline. Their seriousness, however, is a matter of opinion. Most of us are not environmental fundamentalists, but ready to accept certain environmental risks if the benefits to society are great enough (*DN*, 2008, February 12).

> A first step that must be taken is to look at energy not only as a matter of the environment and the economy but also as a matter of national security (*DN*, 2006, January 6).

> The environmental threat [posed by the pipeline] has received considerable and deserved attention, whereas another at least equally important factor has been ignored. The pipeline has an undeniable military and national security aspect (*DN*, 2006, November 14).

The above examples from 2006 imply that there had been considerable, or even enough, discussion of the pipeline in environmental terms, implying that it was now time to talk about other aspects. Our empirical study, however, demonstrates that there had not been that much talk about the pipeline's environmental aspects. On the contrary, there had been as little talk about the environment as about anything else concerning the pipeline and, as of November 2006, only 6 of 28 articles had raised environmental issues.

To sum up, the coverage of the proposed Baltic Sea pipeline in the studied articles clearly frames the project so as to downplay the environmental theme; instead, the lion's share of the coverage deals with the national security or economic aspects of the project. Although the environment is regularly mentioned in the reporting, little light is actually shed on the specific environmental conditions of the Baltic Sea or on the environmental implications of the pipeline. On the contrary, the environment is simply invoked in passing to pay lip service to the issue, but not to serve the public's need to be informed about the project. The word 'environment' is used as an enhancer, to 'dress up' another pipeline storyline concerning national security and the economy.

Comments such as 'It's time we talked about something else' (e.g. *DN*, 2007, December 18) refer to a debate elsewhere, indicating that media 'gate keeping' has excluded the environmental theme from the pipeline story. This exercise of media power gives the false impression that the environmental theme has already been assiduously treated. As the tone shifts to one of scorn, the reporting frames the pipeline story in a way that downplays environmental concerns. The message to the reader suggests: 'If you are well informed, you will not think of environment whenever the pipeline is mentioned'.

Although the pipeline has environmental consequences – both direct and indirect – the planned construction is not referred to as primarily an environmental issue, and never as a solely environmental issue, as indicated by the almost total lack of articles paying undivided attention to this theme – in sharp contrast to articles that focus solely on the economy or security. In addition, the coverage tends to let Nord Stream and other corporate spokespeople interpret the pipeline construction and the Baltic Sea environment in their own terms, despite the fact that the future of the pipeline is a legal and political matter. Whether or not such press release- or advertisement-like reporting is due to journalist idleness, economic reasons, or inappropriate goodwill to the company, by neglecting alternative interpretations, it tells a story perfectly in line with company interests. Instead of framing the planned project in environmental terms, the main story conveyed in the reporting concerns Russian presence in the

Baltic, and the potential effects of the project from a European point of view. The tendency to make this association explicit is illustrated by a signed editorial entitled: 'Prioritize right: Put security before the environment in the Nord Stream case' (*DN*, 2008, November 19). Briefly stated, the message conveyed by the newspaper is that the pipeline concerns national security, and has little or trivial impact on the Baltic Sea environment – a message likely to affect the Swedish public's conception of the project.

5. CONCLUSION

Although our study of one single newspaper, albeit a major one, is too narrow in scope to allow far-reaching generalisation, the story told by the 100 analysed articles tells us something about the framing of the pipeline issue. Briefly stated, the coverage of the Baltic Sea gas pipeline tells us that national security and the economy are more important considerations than the environment, despite the documented environmental risks of such projects as well as criticisms from environmental organisations and from representatives of political parties, national public agencies, and municipalities on the east coast of Sweden. In addition, doubts about the environmental soundness of the pipeline were raised not only in Sweden, but also in other states on the Baltic Sea, namely, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland (Karn, 2008).

Despite years of reports on the critical Baltic Sea environment, ambitious European targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and Swedish efforts to curb fossil fuel dependency (Commission on Oil Independence, 2006), media reporting on the pipeline evidenced a poor memory of prior debates. From reports on saving a particularly sensitive sea to updates on the dredging, blasting, and filling of its seabed, or from reports on how to cope with global warming to newscasts on Europe's need for cheap natural gas – the pipeline project marked a turn in public debate (Lidskog and Elander 2011). Instead of fierce environmental debate on the pipeline, environmental coverage fell short of previous media and other coverage of acute conditions in the Baltic Sea.

This analysis also reveals that the media can run concurrent discourses that do not relate or refer to each other. At the same time as the Baltic Sea pipeline was mainly framed as a non-environmental issue by *DN*, there was ongoing discussion of the precarious ecological situation of the Baltic Sea, including the considerable oil leakage from a ship collision in the Baltic Sea in 2003, the political struggle (2001–2005) to designate the Baltic Sea a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (including the frustration that Russia did not support this effort), and HELCOM's 2007 adoption of a Baltic Sea Action Plan, according to which

all Environmental Ministers around the Baltic Sea decided that the sea should attain good ecological status by 2021. These and other events were reported in the media and publicly discussed, but in the studied media coverage of the Baltic Sea, no connections were made between the environmental aspects of the pipeline and efforts to protect the Baltic Sea from environmental degradation. Instead, the environmental aspects of the Baltic seabed pipeline were largely de-emphasised in favour of national security, the domestic economy, and energy security for parts of the European Union.

The relationship between issue framing and public opinion formation, however, is complex. A dominant media message can be interpreted differently by different audience segments, and many studies demonstrate that the public can be critical of media reporting on risks (Hall, 1996; Reilly, 1999; Wilson, 2000). However, in cases in which citizens have no or very limited opportunities to gain personal experience of an issue, media coverage plays an important role in shaping citizen comprehension. It is therefore reasonable that how the media portray the pipeline project should frame the debate and have a crucial impact on public understanding. Arguably, the media framing of the pipeline project also facilitated the Swedish government decision of November 2009. By de-emphasising the environmental aspect, the media made it easier for the government to approve the pipeline route along the Swedish economic zone. Once having been defined as a 'common sea' facing environmental threats, the Baltic Sea was suddenly challenged by another storyline stressing the importance of Russian and Western European (primarily German) economic and national interests.

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