

Petroleum discourse in the European Arctic: the Norwegian case

Leif Christian Jensen

Fridtjof Nansen Institute, P.O. Box 326, NO-1326 Lysaker, Norway

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ABSTRACT. The article addresses old ‘west-east discourses’ and how they continue to develop in the high north, and, not least, in the Norwegian petroleum debate. Adopting a discourse analytical perspective the author shows how environmental safety is used as an argument in favour of Norway producing oil in the Barents Sea at the earliest possible moment. This is only feasible if a connection is made in the public mind between Russia and the environment. These views, it is argued, stem from ideas about Russia that gained currency after the demise of the Soviet Union. While they perhaps have less to do with Russia’s petroleum industry and environmental performance today, they nevertheless have a strong impact on how challenges in the high north and Arctic region are perceived. And, perhaps even more importantly, they define freedom of action and available options. In this paper all references to government departments refer to those of Norway.

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Introduction

There is considerable international interest in the Arctic and northern latitudes (Government Administration Services 2003; Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2005) and the upsurge in media coverage is just one indicator of this. Regions north of the Arctic Circle are increasingly used as a barometer of global climate change (Hassol 2004). What is being said is far from encouraging, and climate change is now one of the most burning issues on the international environment agenda (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2007). Ironically, the global energy situation is fuelling international collaboration and competition between petroleum producing countries in the very same region because of its massive potential as a future petroleum province. The Barents Sea in particular is a ‘hot’ prospect because of its promising structures and large identified deposits of hydrocarbons, especially in the Russian part (Adam 2006). The Shtokman field for instance [Shtokmanovskoye], is so far regarded as the best prospect and has been the object of considerable international attention from major oil companies and governments alike. It promises to be by far the world’s largest offshore gas field when it comes on stream some time in the future (Moore 2005; Adam 2006).

In the race for strategic resources in the high north in general, and in the Barents Sea in particular, Norway has a dual part to play. On the one hand it is one small nation-state among and between the great powers, US and Russia.

On the other, Norway is itself a major player in terms of energy. Today, there are around 50 fields in production on the Norwegian continental shelf. In 2005, these fields produced 3 million barrels of oil per day and 85 billion standard cubic metres (scm) of gas, for a total production of saleable petroleum of 257 million scm oil equivalents. Norway ranks as the world’s third largest oil exporter and the eighth largest oil producer. In 2004, Norway was the third largest gas exporter and the seventh largest gas producer in the world (Ministry of Petroleum and Energy and Norwegian Petroleum Directorate 2006: 14).

In addition to the obvious high politics and geopolitical connotations of the race for hydrocarbons in the north, the debate in Norway has, since the 1990s, been a case of ‘extraction versus protection’. The possibility of petroleum production north of 62° N first became an issue in the beginning of the 1970s, and the first well was drilled a decade later, in 1980. At this point the activity met little resistance. Throughout the 1990s however, the general and classic conflict division between economic growth on the one hand and protection and environmental interests on the other has manifested itself and has become a salient issue of Norwegian energy politics in general and, in the public sphere, concerning petroleum extraction in the Barents Sea in particular.

On 31 March 2006, the Norwegian Government launched a white paper on an integrated management plan for the Norwegian part of the Barents Sea and the sea areas off Lofoten (Ministry of the Environment 2006). The basic aim of this plan is to use ecological principles to assess various activities as oil and gas extraction, shipping and fishing, their coexistence and possible environmental impacts in the area. Coexistence between the various commercial activities is a main objective, and the plan is meant to provide overall guidelines for management of all human activities in the area in order to ensure that the eco system remains a healthy one today and for future generations. Since the plan so far only covers the Norwegian and not the Russian side of the Barents Sea,

the limitations are there for all to see. The hopes are that, perhaps sometime in the future, it would be possible to put in place a joint total and integrated management plan for the whole of the Barents Sea, and that both Norway and Russia would implement such plan.

Included in the plan or not, Russia is a key actor and plays a crucial part in the dynamics of the high north from a Norwegian point of view. This article will address how Russia was given a key role in the 'extraction versus protection' debate and functioned as a tool for both those in favour of petroleum extraction and those opposed to it. In that sense, one could say that the article indirectly addresses some of the issues concerning the public and politicians alike when it comes to relations and cooperation with Russia and to meeting the various and complex challenges in the north.

The general development in Russia's northwestern province throughout the 1990s had implications for Norway's approach to the 'high north'. Erstwhile fears of armed aggression gave way to concerns over what appeared an increasingly serious environmental threat: nuclear waste and industrial pollution on the Russian side of the border (Hønneland 2005: 23). Indeed, the Norwegian media painted an apocalyptic picture, both rhetorical and factual, of 'black tree stumps', 'death clouds', 'radioactive radiation hell' and 'ticking bombs', that is decommissioned nuclear submarines tied up in Murmansk harbour.

Hønneland (2005: 137) blames an 'environmental disaster scenario', a sensation-hungry media, and idealistic environment organisations for stimulating a disaster bandwagon. The Kola Peninsula was likened to a pock-marked alien planet. 'Black deserts' soon entered the vocabulary of both decision makers and the public. This article suggests that these ideas provided the nesting ground for an image of Russia in general as an 'environmental laggard'. This was and remains an important image for participants in the Norwegian debate on oil production in the Barents Sea.

Discourse as theory

The article is based on a discourse analysis of the Norwegian debate concerning petroleum extraction in the Barents Sea. 'Discourse' in this paper is taken to mean how an issue is understood, spoken of and positioned in the public sphere. Discourse constructs social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and ideas. In this way, discursive practice helps reproduce and change society (Fairclough 1992). Our manner of expression is not just a plain reflection of our place in the world, our identities and social relations; it is also involved in their constitution and change (Jørgensen and Phillips 1999: 9). Meaning is essential to discourses because it generates consensus about a phenomenon and orders the world through unitary and composite concepts. By participating in a discourse, we rely on a range of norms, which, in the process, we implicitly recognise or authorise. Such norms

change through discursive practice over time, given the constituting nature of discourse. For the purpose of this study the relationship between discourse and society is taken to be a dialectical one, each moulding and shaping the other (Fairclough 1992). We should also conceive of discourses as academic phenomena constructed on the basis of empirical observation, not a pre-formed entity, ready to be plucked from the air and waiting to be identified.

Methodology

The findings outlined in this article are based on a review of 1162 articles relating to the Norwegian petroleum debate in the Norwegian newspapers *Aftenposten* [*The Evening Mail*], *Dagens Næringsliv* [*Today's Business*], *Nordlys* [*Northern Light*] and *Klassekampen* [*The Class Struggle*] published between 1 December 2003 and 4 October 2005 (Jensen 2006a: 1–4, 26–28). The so-called reopening of the Barents Sea south in December 2003 is chosen as the starting point for the analysis. Around this period, the debate in Norway flared up again after some quieter years. An early, explorative search for articles seems to confirm this (Jensen 2006a: 27). The newspapers are chosen on the basis of their slightly different profiles and focus areas, which improves the quality and broadens the scope of the analysis. Although in danger of oversimplification, one could say that *Aftenposten* represents the 'national and conservative newspaper', *Dagens Næringsliv* is the 'business and financial newspaper', *Nordlys* is the 'regional, northern newspaper', and lastly, *Klassekampen*, despite its uncompromising title, may be branded the 'slightly radical and leftist newspaper'.

This is an explorative, qualitative analysis of a part of the Norwegian debate concerning petroleum extraction in the Barents Sea with particular emphasis on the role Russia was given in that debate. A significant methodological critique against discourse analysis has to do with being able to show exactly how the findings relate to data. The delimitations and constructions set out here are based on the assumption that they best represent the slices of reality to be conveyed (Hønneland 2005: 174). This assumption relies in turn on the large number of newspaper articles studied and which it is believed offer a relatively good vantage point on the most typical and relevant aspects of this subgenre of the Norwegian petroleum debate, as it manifested itself over a roughly two-year period. Neumann (2001: 50–51) claims that the acquisition of so called cultural competence through reading as much as possible from different genres on the topic in question is a crucial prerequisite for being able to perform a solid discourse analysis. More often than not, there are a relatively limited number of texts that constitute the main reference points in a given discursive field. Many of the texts will therefore merely be re-representations of different representations. One could say that the methodological critique regarding discourse analysis, and interpretative social science in general, is

very valid when convincingly demonstrating how the findings relate to the data. It is hoped that the quotations (data) chosen in this article represent the core of the debate as it unfolded in the newspapers and further, represent the rest of the text material in such a way that the main points are covered.

The two constructed discourses and their constituent parts will be presented and illustrated with examples from the debate in the printed media. By aggregating the many aspects of the debate in question into two dissimilar but also overlapping positions, it is possible to pinpoint two main, or overarching discourses, which makes it easier to separate core material from that merely peripheral. The two discourses, which are called the pro-oil production and anti-oil production discourse, are rivals for hegemony under a discourse order in which Russia and the environment are the two staples.

The pro-oil production discourse

The most conspicuous point about this discourse is its resemblance to a pro-environment discourse, but in reverse. Rather than cautioning against producing oil in the Barents Sea for the sake of the environment, it urges as rapid a start as possible to help the Russians improve their environmental performance. Russia is assumed to be going ahead, with or without Norway. Another essential assumption says that Russia's offshore petroleum industry has neither the will nor the ability to perform according to sound environmental standards. On top of this environmental argument there are several other strands of reasoning and argumentation. Besides helping Russia produce oil without damaging the environment, pro-production advocates bring geopolitics and high politics in general to bear. Industrial growth and economic revitalisation in the northernmost part of mainland Norway are also mentioned. These arguments are not pursued in isolation from the environmental argument; they strengthen calls for Norway to consolidate its focus in the north.

The basic message then concerns the critical necessity to take immediate action in the Barents Sea. It is about Norway getting there first to set an environmental example for the Russians to follow. This discourse is interesting for several reasons. First, that Norway needs to start drilling to save the environment is striking in itself, and not immediately comprehensible unless something is known about public opinion on Russia and its environmental record. Second, by using this line of reasoning, advocates successfully defuse their opponents' main argument against drilling in the Barents Sea, that is that not drilling will save the environment. Advocates attacked opponents where it hurt most, questioning and challenging their key argument and standing it on its head. In a discourse analytical perspective, it is of the essence to normalise the arguments adopted, to convince the public of the value of the political stance in question. Success here will have a crucial effect on the available range

of option manoeuvrability. Insofar as advocates wrested the environmental argument from their opponents, they also removed to all intents and purposes their principal weapon. The following quotations illustrate this position.

The leader of the Finnmark County Council warns Norway against inaction in the north while Russia steps up construction of its oil industry in the area. If Norway dithers any longer, we will lose the initiative and opportunity to set environmental standards for activity outside Lofoten and in the Barents Sea. (Leader of Finnmark County Council, Helga Pedersen, to *Nordlys* 2 December 2003.)

As the Prime Minister will know, Russian authorities are keen to get on with petroleum production in the eastern Barents Sea, on a significant scale and, not least, within a short space of time (Helga Pedersen, Leader of Finnmark County Council; Paul Dahlø, Chief Commissioner, Troms County; Geir Knutson, Chief Commissioner, Nordland County; Bjørn Johansen, Regional Secretary, LO [Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions] Finnmark; Jan Elvheim, Regional Secretary, LO Troms; Øyvind Silåmo, Regional Secretary, LO Nordland; Erling Fløtten, Regional Director, NHO [Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise] Finnmark; Arne Eidsmo, Regional Director, NHO Troms; and Kurt Jessen Johansson, Regional Director, NHO Nordland in *Nordlys* 5 December 2003).

Russian eagerness to achieve large scale production quickly is mentioned constantly in one way or the other throughout the period under analysis. However, evidence is rarely produced in support of the claim. Massive Russian activity seems to be taken for granted by all: the anti-production camp only rarely called for verification. By referring to steadily increasing oil transportation along the Norwegian coast, and increasing but unspecified levels of oil activity on the Russian side, an impression is created of continuing operations in the Barents Sea, a representation which, as we shall later see, is not unproblematic.

The following examples help illustrate the writer's initial point about locating the argument within the environmental policy field, and using environmental arguments to underpin advocacy of oil production in the area.

Leaving Russia to set the environmental standards of oil production in the northern area is to pervert our environmental policy. Norwegian politicians need to let northern Norway have its share in the oil bonanza, for the sake of the environment and economic growth! (Øyvind Korsberg, Member of Parliament for the Progress Party, writing in *Nordlys* 6 December 2003). ...not least seeing as Russia has already started the development [of oil extraction], which makes it impossible to protect the entire area, something that can be done in Lofoten. That Norway could have a say in setting high environmental standards is reason enough to get involved, rather than watching from the sidelines what we have every reason to believe will be a vast [offshore] enterprise (Journalist

Bjørgulv Braanen in *Klassekampen* 9 December 2003.

In the next extract, the writer suggests that time is running out, because Russia is looking to start up as early as 2005. The writer does not attempt to verify or quantify this assertion.

Russia has opened both its dry land and offshore areas in the north to exploration and production of oil and gas. Oil and gas have been produced on land since the 1970s, and 2005 will probably mark the opening of the first offshore field. Russia has announced it would be allocating exploration and production blocks in the Barents Sea in 2003–06. Biological resources and the environment probably face a greater risk from Russian oil activity and associated build up in sea-going transport in Russian and Norwegian territorial waters than Norwegian oil activity in northern waters. It is therefore good Norwegian environmental policy to find the best way of influencing the Russian oil industry's environmental performance, and it is good environmental policy to investigate Russian plans in this sector (Salve Dahle, Director, Akvaplan Niva, in *Nordlys* 11 December 2003).

Readers would probably think that what is being talked about here is the massive Shtokman field. Given the short time before production is supposed to start, this is probably not the field that the writer had in mind. Various timeframes have been in the picture regarding the production start in the Shtokman Field. Deputy head of the Russian gas company Gazprom, Aleksandr Medvedev, said at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2007, that the production start-up for the Shtokman project is set to be in 2012. Gazprom had earlier said that the Shtokman field will be up and running from 2010–2011. Experts believe however that also the new time schedule, 2012, will be too tight for the company (Barentsobserver 2007; Moe 2006).

It is also worth noting how increased shipping and concomitant dangers to the northern coastline is used as an argument in favour of a rapid Norwegian participation in the petroleum bonanza. As of today, oil transport by sea is far riskier in Norway's southernmost waters, where tankers plying the Baltic Sea region pass several times daily. Only a small percentage of overall oil shipments arises from northwest Russia, as indeed Øyvind Stene, director of the Norwegian Coastal Administration, has pointed out. Further, relations with Russia on shipping are described as good (Coast Guard 2005). The point is that the hazard posed by Russian oil activity and shipping is frequently framed as greater than that posed by Norwegian production and transport.

The final sentence of the last quotation underpins the main thesis of the discourse, and illustrates well how concern for the environment was used to justify involvement in the Russian sector and study of Russian plans as a shrewd policy move. What the influencing of Russia's environmental performance was supposed to mean in practice is not known, but the

statement fits in well with arguments about helping Russia produce oil in an environmentally sustainable way. When opinions like these are accompanied by relatively unflattering comments about Russia, 'cynical' and 'egoistic' are two examples, the picture becomes interesting because it appears to underline Norway's need to coordinate its actions in the north. The next extract demonstrates a relatively dominant tone in the analysis period, generally emerging from the pro-production camp.

The oil industry lacks environmental technology, systems for preventing and combating environmental damage, it lacks impartial, independent control and environmental surveillance systems, and it wastes resources . . . We need to understand that the Russians are cynical; they get involved only if they see something in it for themselves. Conclusion: Norway's best environment policy *vis-à-vis* Russia is to support the involvement of the Norwegian oil industry and subcontractors in the development of Russian oil resources. Environmental standards need to be set. For the same reason, Norway should work to harmonise environmental and oil activity surveillance methods (Salve Dahle, Director, Akvaplan Niva, writing in *Nordlys* 11 December 2003).

If statements like this are taken by the public as a reasonable account of the problems, Norwegian involvement would seem virtually to be a case of win-win. 'By commencing oil production in the Barents Sea, we are helping Russia and the environment, and earning good money to boot.' Environmental arguments for moving quickly to establish an oil presence in the Barents Sea seem to have gained considerable headway among implicated parties.

The anti-oil production discourse

The anti-oil production discourse is not a new discourse. It is, rather, a variant of the wider environmental discourse which itself is a genre of the petroleum debate as such. Its main thesis is that Norway should desist from extracting oil in the Barents Sea because the environment is too sensitive, and the impact of going ahead too uncertain. The thesis is not affected by any Russian decision to commence oil production. What distinguishes it from a wider discourse on the environment is that arguments relating to Russia make up a key component of efforts to dismantle claims that the Norwegian oil activity in the Barents Sea is essentially only a good thing. Environmental arguments are, of course, in a class of their own, but in this view, Norway, rather than drilling alongside the Russians, should stand back, 'lead by example' and show what good environmental management looks like in practice. Continuing in the same mode, the discourse contends that pressure to move forward on oil production in the Barents Sea is coming from Norway, not Russia, as the pro-drilling lobby would have us believe.

The next quotation is interesting as it differentiates between a serious commitment in the Barents Sea and starting oil production as fast as possible to save the environment.

Without Norway making a substantial commitment, our hope of seeing a clean and abundant Barents Sea could soon become an illusion. Large-scale oil and gas production and transport will soon be the dominant political factor in the Barents region . . . As a first step Norway should increase civil society support in Russia. Lack of interest and debate, not to mention transparency and access to information, is a serious impediment to current relations on environmental and security issues. Only special interest groups and public opinion can give politics credibility and confidence. Without a well-informed, engaged civil society in Russia, the environment will never rise to the top of the agenda. So one long-term objective is changing this state of affairs. Norway should also show in practice what we mean by good environmental stewardship. Claiming that environmental challenges in the region would be overcome if only the Norwegian private sector were involved in the Russian oil bonanza is a myth (Rasmus Hansson, Secretary General of WWF, and Samantha Smith, head of WWF's Arctic Office in Oslo, in *Nordlys* 9 November 2004).

Much of the discursive effort of the anti-production lobby was aimed at dismantling the environmental arguments of the pro-production lobby. Nevertheless, it is striking how seldom these counter-arguments made their way to the different newspapers. The essence of the anti-lobby discourse suggests that instead of helping the Russians with what is called environmentally friendly oil production, Norway should strengthen civil society in Russia and push environmental issues onto the agenda. Norway should also demonstrate what good environmental stewardship means in practice. Also here there was concern about the transport of oil and gas, presented as an immediate threat to Norwegian coastal areas. While advocates believe that increased traffic should result in increased Norwegian activity in the area, and therefore greater environmental security along the coast, their opponents reach the opposite conclusion.

We see then that the advocates are not the only ones concerned to give Russia a helping hand. Norway is obviously not meant to help with 'drilling for a healthier environment', but with empowering civil society. Were this to succeed, the Russian public would be better informed and engaged, and would do what it could to help the environment, if we are to believe the arguments. What does seem interesting is how the anti-production lobby uses a familiar tack: that Norway has so much expertise 'we should share with the Russians'. On this issue, there is little to distinguish the two lobbies: both camps readily disburse rhetoric about transferring competence, which, briefly stated, encourages Norway to lead with a good example, taking responsibility for stewardship of the Barents Sea instead of just being passive spectators to

the Russians getting on with their business. One of the best approaches by Norway is to 'lead by example, not hide behind questionable arguments that Russia will start producing anyhow, so we should get a move on to make sure everything proceeds in a proper fashion.'

Although opponents see the international competitive climate as evidence of the naivety of the pro-production lobby's argumentation, their main message is unmistakable. It is that the Barents Sea is too fragile. Oil and gas production, whether it be done by Norwegians, Russians or any other nationalities, will put it under unsustainable pressure.

Oil production is certainly probable in the Russian zone. Some people are therefore claiming that Russians need Norwegian expertise to achieve proper safety standards in their part of the Barents Sea. They mean that unless Norwegians are involved, the development of safety and environmentally friendly technologies will be neglected. This is what the oil industry, politicians and commentators are saying to [get us to] open our part of the Barents Sea. This, in the opinion of the Norwegian Society for the Conservation of Nature [Naturvernforbundet], is naive. Does the corporate oil sector really think Russians are likely to choose Norwegian technology and companies without international competition? We don't need Norwegian enterprise – or foreign for that matter – spilling oil into the Barents Sea to find out whether the technology can tackle oil pollution in these conditions (Odd Aasheim, Troms County branch head, and Tore Killingland, Secretary General, Norwegian Society for the Conservation of Nature [Naturvernforbundet] in *Nordlys* 17 December 2003).

The impression is of an anti-production camp that, in addition to having a narrower range of arguments at its disposal, was caught on the wrong foot, having to defend its position and regain territory lost to the other side. Forced to counter the idea of starting oil exploration and production to save the environment, they were unable, it seems, to frame the debate in terms of their own agenda.

Despite the lower ratio of contributions such as the one below from the anti-production camp, their visibility over time in all of the four newspapers, are nevertheless sufficient to constitute under the period as a whole a real counter-representation and important element of the resistance discourse.

Russian oil drilling plans are frequently cited as a reason Norway should do the same. But neither scientists nor diplomats believe it is that simple. A group of scientists discussed likely scenarios in 'The Russian Barents Sea towards 2015', which came out this autumn. Of three possible Russian scenarios, this oil bonanza is only one. The same uncertainty is noted in the Government's White Paper [on Opportunities and Challenges in the North]: 'There remains a degree of uncertainty as to Russian priorities regarding oil and gas fields in the north.' But the oil-hungry 'trend setters' in [the newspaper] *Nordlys*, and Labour, Progress

and Government parties pretend they know better. They 'know' Russia is planning massive offshore investments, and that Norway will have to pull its socks up if it is to prevent loss of sovereignty and influence. If this lack of information becomes official policy, Norway could be guilty of pushing Russia into an oil bonanza which benefits no one. Russia has, as it happens, its own sovereignty to protect and increased Norwegian intensity could trigger a dangerous race. The only winners of which would be the corporate oil sector and the US. If Norway keeps on pushing, it could result in massive levels of oil-related activity in the region, endangering maritime resources and global climate (Journalist Terje Morken in *Nordlys* 3 May 2005).

This discourse attempted to disarm seemingly valid ideas about the necessity of getting a head start with oil production in the Barents Sea. That the Russians had already started offshore activities is of course a gross misrepresentation of the facts. There is also reason to doubt whether the Shtokman Field is likely to come on stream in the near future, after plans for an international LNG (liquefied natural gas) consortium were abandoned in October 2006, even though Gazprom maintains that it will develop the field on its own, with foreign companies in supporting roles (Moe 2006; Hønneland and others 2007). The Prirazlomnoye oilfield, in the eastern Pechora Sea, is likely, on the other hand, to be phased in earlier, although economic and other uncertainties make a first quarter 2008 start seem very optimistic (Brunstad and others 2004).

For the period as a whole, the pro-production side's environmental argument proved highly successful in shifting the focus of debate many degrees. In the above extract, we see the reverse logic at work, with Norway putting pressure on Russia, rather than the other way round, as the advocates would have it. They used the technique themselves as we recall, reversing the views of the other side to promote their own. Nevertheless, this argument about Norway exerting pressure on the Russians, the opposite of Norway as a 'pawn in an international power game' or being 'out of its depth', never really took hold or affected the debate in any decisive way. 'Perhaps the Russians are not surging ahead after all, and perhaps the Norwegians do not need to become involved before it is too late.'

Discussion

In this article we have seen how a discourse in which oil production was said to benefit both the environment and Russia virtually outclassed opponents of production by taking their environmental argument and turning it into a mainstay of their own campaign. By drawing on environmental discourses, creative discourse actors managed to defuse the leading argument of their opponents. Using environmental considerations to speed up the start of oil production in the Barents Sea is only possible if Russia is seen as an environmental laggard. It is interesting to note

how this view seems to rely more on images of the recent nuclear clean up in the Kola Peninsula, of 'death clouds' and 'black tree stumps' than on information concerning Russia's offshore technology. In fact, Russian technology was hardly ever mentioned in the Norwegian debate, while connections were drawn readily and creatively between nuclear clean ups and oil production, of which the excerpt below is an illustration.

We have the experience and we have advanced, environmentally friendly oil technology that could be useful when Russia starts tapping the huge energy resources in its part of the Barents Sea. We have the knowhow and available capacity to develop resources and transportation in the Barents region. As a neighbour of Russia, it is crucial that Norway and Russia work together to address environmental hazards in northwestern Russia. . . We need to make it understood that environmental problems are global, and can only be solved by a joint international effort. This is particularly urgent in light of the many nuclear installations on the Kola Peninsula. The Government is therefore announcing in the White Paper on policy in the high north its intention to strengthen relations with Russia in the area of nuclear safety (The then Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik, cited by journalist Geir Seljeseth in *Nordlys* 1 June 2005).

Descriptions of Russia as an environmental laggard seemed to be taken at face value in the Norwegian petroleum debate. In the same debate, the environment played a key role in positioning Norway as a leader in environmental protection, and Russia as a country besieged by environmental problems and inadequate technology. And there seemed to be a relatively wide consensus on the veracity of this image, among both opponents and advocates of producing oil in the Barents Sea. So at the moment, the pro-production camp seems to have the upper hand in the discursive struggle to define reality, insofar as both discourses seem to have allocated more or less similar roles to Norway, Russia and the environment on which to base their philosophies. Russia, then, is central to the Norwegian petroleum debate, but mainly when it is partnered with the environmental argument. The combination of Russia and the environment also seems to have facilitated a widely accepted logic according to which Norway should produce oil in the Barents Sea. Insofar as the drilling for the environment rhetoric made an impact on public opinion, the environment in terms of legitimacy and conceptual framework will doubtless acquire a very different significance from its traditional environment conservation sense.

What impact could these findings have on the current debate in Norway on oil production in the Barents Sea? As far as can be derived from the anti-production discourse as set out in this article, the prospects for the anti-production lobby do not seem particularly bright, given the successful appropriation by the advocacy camp of the environmental argument, and wide consensus that the environment would benefit if Norway started production as soon as possible.

In relation to the wider discussion on Norway's relations with Russia, the author's data suggest continuity, in that the way we characterise Russia will depend largely on the context. But the Norwegian positioning of 'ourselves' and the Russians does not appear to have shifted much despite Russia having something Norway would like to have, massive hydrocarbon deposits in the Barents Sea. Following this line of thought, certain actors, particularly corporate actors in northern Norway and the petroleum industry generally, are beginning to use terms like 'energy partner', 'oil nation like us' in reference to Russia, instead of depicting it as a country in need of Norwegian environmental help to run an offshore oil venture. At the moment, it remains a modest change, and has yet to affect the Norwegian image of Russia and the part it plays in the Norwegian petroleum debate. Nevertheless, the dynamic potential of this recent re-appraisal should not be dismissed, despite Gazprom's decision to run Shtokman without western partners. Nor is the discourse order a closed book; there is a constant discursive struggle to 'own' the environmental argument relating to Russia's role in the petroleum debate.

To sum up, we can see the contours of yet another discursive shift in that genre of the Norwegian petroleum debate studied in this article. That is, the geopolitical or strategic dimension which received attention during parts of the analytical period, but which did not mature into what we today would recognise as a discourse in its own right.

From a strategic point of view, Norway is a small nation, squeezed between a nuclear power to the east and significant deposits of the world's most important strategic resource on our continental shelf to the west. Norway has special security needs, and is in a particularly strategic position compared to most of its allies. It should be sufficient to look to the middle east to realise the significance oil has today and to an increasing extent will have in the future in international politics (Øystein Steiro, Security advisor at Europaprogrammet in *Aftenposten* 11 October 2004).

It is not at all unthinkable that petroleum as a globally scarce and strategic resource could gain momentum and foster further justification for petroleum activity in the Barents Sea. Gazprom, for instance, has already indicated that rather than delivering Shtokman gas to the US market as LNG, it could supply the European market by pipeline. Russia seems intent to use its energy resources to consolidate and strengthen its position as an energy super power. It will be interesting to observe international politics in the Arctic regions led by US, EU and Russia and whether rhetoric and *realpolitik* might not facilitate the emergence of a new strategy discourse in the Norwegian petroleum debate as well. Were this to occur, industry and environment discourses could be sidelined anyway and made virtually irrelevant. When vital national interests are perceived to be at stake, all other considerations fade into the background.

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