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Eager, Pragmatic or Reluctant:
Can Common Finno-Ugric Ethnic
and Linguistic Links Substantiate
Intra-EU CFSP Co-operation?

Umut Korkut

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CASE-Center for Social and Economic Research on behalf of CASE Network
12 Sienkiewicza, 00-010 Warsaw, Poland
tel.: (48 22) 622 66 27, 828 61 33, fax: (48 22) 828 60 69
e-mail: case@case-research.eu
<http://www.case-research.eu>

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Author

Umut Korkut is a Research Fellow at University College Dublin School of Politics and International Relations. His most recent publications include 'Reversing the Wave: The Mis-Europeanisation in Human Rights Norms in Poland' forthcoming in *Europe-Asia Studies*, 'Micro and Macro Development in Hungary under the Glance of the EU Cohesion Funds', *East European Quarterly*, December 2008, 'The 2006 Hungarian Election: Economic Competitiveness versus Hungarian Solidarity', *Parliamentary Studies*, September 2007, 'Die Konsolidierung des Kapitalismus und die Neue Armut in Ungarn' in Buzogány Áron and Frankenberger, Rolf (eds.), *Weltregionen im Wandel. Mittel- und Osteuropa*, Baden-Baden: Nomos 2007.

Abstract

The paper discusses the salience of the Finno-Ugric links in substantiating intra-EU co-operation among Finland, Estonia and Hungary. The focus is on investigating evidence of such co-operation in the EU's human rights and minority rights related policies towards the Russian Federation and other eastern neighbourhood states. The paper gives an account of institutionalised forms of cultural and political co-operation among the three countries under study. It discusses whether small EU states can coalesce under constructive policy alliances or not. The paper presents the current foreign policy narratives in Finland, Hungary and Estonia and locates the Finno-Ugric narrative in this general framework.

1. Introduction

Does cultural emphasis on kinship turn into policy co-operation among states? What is the impact of historical narratives on foreign policy making? Does the long-acclaimed linguistic and ethnic bond among Finland, Estonia and Hungary – along their Finno-Ugric kinship – substantiate common foreign policy interests in their neighbouring geographies? Investigating the Finnish, Hungarian, and Estonian positions towards minority and human rights issues in Russia, this paper studies the impact of imagined common cultural, linguistic and historical links among countries on foreign policy formation towards geographies where their interests may converge.

Finland, Estonia and Hungary form a particular cluster of states which are at the margins of Europe not only regarding their geographic location, but also their languages and the ethnicity of their people. These states followed a historically convergent path of modernisation and affiliation with the West, while they also have had manifest linguistic and cultural links with the peoples in their Eastern neighbourhood. Since their accession to the European Union (EU), they have acquired a new leverage in effect to their relations with their Eastern neighbours of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). As the Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves expressed at the 5th World Congress of Finno-Ugric Peoples in Khanty-Mansisk in the Russian Federation on 29 June 2008, ‘Hungarians, Finns, and Estonians have chosen so-called European values, which today manifest themselves in the use of liberal democracy to order society ... European values are also useful in the east of the Urals’¹.

All in the EU since 2004, the Finno-Ugric countries have particular forms of relations with Russia, which range from antagonism to pragmatism, but also concern the maintenance and well-being of their ethnic kin spread around the Russian Federation. There are various issues which are central to the three countries’ relations with Russia ranging from timber tax duties and transportation to geo-strategic interests in the Russian ‘near-abroad’ such as the Caucasus and Ukraine. At times, common cultural and ethnic Finno-Ugric links and related political links, institutionalised in various forms, also become essential to their relations with Russia. The 5th World Congress of the Finno-Ugric Peoples, following the EU-Russia Summit in June 2008, is noteworthy in this regard. At the congress, both the Estonian and Hungarian Presidents expressed the importance of their EU memberships to guarantee the minority and collective rights of their ethnic kin in Russia. They have also put an emphasis on the EU Commission’s decision in 2008 to grant 2.5 million Euros to support minority languages in the Russian Federation with a special emphasis on Finno-Ugric languages².

While the Commission’s decision is a specific and limited form of support, it is an illustration of the EU’s position towards Finno-Ugric minorities in the Russian Federation and language rights issues in Russia in general. It is also the first time the EU will provide funds to support minority languages in Russia. It also has a particular value as it is a step beyond what the countries under study – as small EU member states – would be able to push on their own. Hence, the Commission’s recent position inevitably brings to mind a question whether intra-EU alliances among small member states are likely in spheres where there are some similar quasi-foreign policy issues. To this extent, one can ask further question such as how states transfer co-operation in quasi-foreign policy issues into more extensive foreign policy co-operation? And finally, what is the impact of imagined or acclaimed ethnic and cultural links among states on their foreign policy co-operation?

This paper will offer answers to these questions through a study of structured political relations among Finland, Hungary and Estonia under the Finno-Ugric link and their positions vis-à-vis Russia. While it is difficult to present institutionalised multi-lateral relations among these states, institutionalised co-operation towards and during the regular Finno-Ugric World Congresses is still noteworthy³. The EU narrative, forthcoming in these meetings, is crucial. In this respect, the first section will present foreign policy narratives of Estonia, Finland and Hungary and how their self-acclaimed identities shape these narratives. Rather than following an argument that considerations of *real politik* determine the foreign policy alliances among these states, this study derives its pre-

¹ <http://president.ee/en/duties/speeches.php>.

² The Speech of the President of the Republic of Hungary at the 5th World Congress of Finno-Ugric Nations, available in Hungarian at, http://www.keh.hu/keh/beszedekek/20080628finnugor_vilagkongresszus.html. Also see the speech of the Estonian President at the same event.

³ Interviews at the Foreign Ministries.

liminary idea from Tonra's (2006) argument that small states can increase their visibility if they involve into long-term foreign policy co-operation. At present, the study can show a limited content of selected aspects of co-operation among Finland, Hungary and Estonia. Yet, examining the rhetorical and actual aspects as well as channels of political co-operation among the Finno-Ugric nations, this study presents a discussion on how political co-operation can substantiate a more comprehensive foreign policy participation, at least in the making of EU's CFSP decisions towards Russia in the context of human rights.

The second section will present the historical background factors, such as acclaimed linguistic and ethnical links among Estonia, Finland and Hungary, and how they affect the current forms of co-operation among the states under study. I will point at how, on the one hand, the EU narrative vis-à-vis Russia is becoming evident in Finno-Ugric meetings. I will also demonstrate that there are also parallel efforts to incorporate Russia into the Finno-Ugric co-operation. The final part will answer the question whether small-state considerations and co-operation experiences among Finland, Estonia and Hungary can mitigate a foreign policy co-operation at the higher, i.e., the EU level. In this respect, I will give an account of the activities of the Finno-Ugric states in EU's Eastern neighbourhood, where the three countries under study have similar or at least related interests. The results of and reflections from diplomatic as well as expert interviews, held in May and June 2008 in Helsinki, Tallinn and Budapest will be presented in this section. I have also held a round of phone interviews with diplomats posted at the Finnish and Estonian Permanent Representations at the EU in Brussels. The diplomatic interviewees are not listed by name due to the considerations of unanimity.

The common interests of the states under study, primarily, relate to the promotion of the rights of the Finno-Ugric minorities in Russia. As narrow as it may sound, there are various reasons to track the substance of such co-operation. The promotion of the rights of Finno-Ugric minorities is the first instance of co-operation among the three states under study since Hungary and Estonia recently acquired EU membership. Democracy and minority rights promotion roles of these states receive substance from their EU membership. Their institutionalised Finno-Ugric links to Russia and strategic effort, especially in the case of Finland and Hungary, to bring Russia into Finno-Ugric co-operation provide them with a wider margin than the rest of the EU members states in the Eastern neighbourhood of the EU, and hence they can manifest themselves as regional actors. While other new EU member states may also have ethnic and historical links with Russia, no other member state or groups of member states have established institutionalised co-operation among themselves, let alone involving Russia in any form of co-operation, on the basis of acclaimed ethnic and linguistic links. Hence, while other EU states may also make use of their ethnic peers in Russia in order to have leverage on EU-Russia relations, the Finno-Ugric link offers the only institutionalised co-operation triggered by common linguistic and ethnic roots. That is how the Finno-Ugric states differentiate from the other new EU member states with ethnic and historical links with Russia.

Moreover, a close inspection demonstrate that the Finno-Ugric states, especially Estonia and Finland, employ a similar human rights promotion narrative both in effect to their rather self-acclaimed roles to promote the rights of the Finno-Ugric peoples in Russia, their general criticisms of human rights abuses in Russia as well as their new roles as reform facilitators elsewhere in CIS, mainly in the Caucasus, Ukraine and Moldova. Hence, while it is not the main aim of this paper, at the end, the paper indicates that the self-tailored democracy, minority rights and economic reform facilitator and promoter roles of Finland, Hungary and Estonia in the former Soviet Union states receive an inspiration from a similar 'bridge capacity' these states arguably possess in their geographies.

The words of the Finnish President Tarja Halonen on the occasion of the official visit of the President of Azerbaijan to Finland in 2008, indicates that even Finland finds itself in a unique position in the region in the aftermath of its EU membership. Halonen expresses that in common with the ex-Soviet Republics, Finland belonged to the same Empire at different stages of its history, and now as independent nations these states and Finland belong to the same international organisations. Their cultures have received influences from both the East and the West⁴. Finland, Estonia, and Hungary, thereby, possess an asset which the other EU members lack, i.e., cultural and lin-

⁴ <http://www.presidentti.fi/netcomm/news/showarticle.asp?intNWSAID=69757&intSubArtID=27753>.

guistic links with the East alongside being historical subjects of the Russian or Soviet Empires⁵. That is why it is plausible to argue that Finno-Ugric connections and narrative facilitate the infiltration of Hungary, Estonia and Finland to a wider geography in the ex-Soviet Union states than their EU partners can. However, a thorough empirical discussion of this supposition requires further research on the subject. The conclusions of this paper, instead, indicates that the more Finno-Ugric member states of the EU can interlink the Finno-Ugric and EU narratives, i.e. their belonging to East and West, the more they can gauge a particular space of influence in the ex-Soviet geography.

By its methodology, this research triggers a novel approach to the study of EU's eastern policy – in particular to the role of human rights and democratisation issues – in the making of European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and relations with Russia. Original in its scope, it inquires whether there are or there can be intra-EU alliances on the basis of common ethnic, linguistic and historical links among the states in spheres where there are some quasi-foreign policy issues in common. It sheds light on whether common background factors can substantiate common interest. While there is ample research on how countries individually establish relations in EU's neighbourhood using their ethnic, historical and cultural links (Weber, Smith and Baun eds. 2008), the paper searches for a novel methodology to study ENP and EU-Russia relations through concentrating on clusters of state alliances within the EU to pursue common policies towards the EU's Eastern neighbourhood.

2. Identities and foreign policy narratives

Various narratives are central to Finnish, Estonian and Hungarian foreign policies. I will briefly mention these narratives in order to establish the theoretical background over which I will present my empirical findings in the next sections. The reason why this paper appropriates a due importance to narratives in foreign policy derives from Goldstein and Keohane (1993). They consider that institutionalised ideas can play a role in generalising rules and linking issue areas. Along with the ideas of foreign policy makers, the position of the state towards its externalities is connected with the location of the country. The state's position is created through its connections to the (official or unofficial) hierarchy of other countries, and this is also largely produced and maintained on a discursive level. In connection with the position of the state, foreign policy can be seen as a corresponding external behaviour with the aim of defining what is 'us' and 'others' (Kaasik-Krogerus 2007: 77). Basic common denominators such as language, myths, a common fate, territory and historical consciousness are time-related elements (Miklóssy 2007: 51). The concept of past and its impact on the construction of national identity are also central aspects of foreign policy narratives. Since the end of the Cold War, especially along with their EU accession, the Finnish, Hungarian and Estonian foreign policy received impacts from various narratives.

2.1. Foreign policy narratives of Finland, Hungary, and Estonia as small-states

The EU accession processes of Finland, Hungary, and Estonia witnessed history, culture and geography of these states channelled to prove their belonging to Europe. The Europeanisation narrative, effective in substantiating the EU accession of Finland, Estonia and Hungary, gave multiple references to the fact that these states have had connections with Europe for centuries and their cultures are similar to European (vs. Eastern) culture (Fowler 2004, Kaasik-Krogerus 2007). Specifically, in the Finnish case, the considerations of welfare society and the ideology of equality (between men and women, rich and poor, etc.) were also central to the Europeanisation narrative (Kaasik-Krogerus 2007). In Hungary, the political elite used Western Christian affiliation of the country as the main justification of Hungary's EU accession (Rajacic 2007: 644). This is still evident in the political rhetoric of especially the right-wing politicians in Hungary.

[...] although we came from the East and we were the bearers of certain Eastern features, since Szent Stephen in the cultural, social, and historical fields, we only belong to the West. Hungary has always been a Western-oriented state since it became Christian and remained in modern times as well; if politics was the case, the cultivated Hungarian nation always looked towards London; if sci-

⁵ Interview with M.E.P. Katrin Saks, Member of the Subcommittee on Human Rights, Strasbourg, 08.07.2008.

ence was the case, always looked towards Berlin; if art was the case, always looked towards Paris⁶.

In the case of Estonia, the Europeanisation narrative went hand-in-hand with the construction of the Estonian national identity once Estonia re-acquired its independence. The Estonian political elite emphasised not only that Estonia was a European country, but also that it belonged to Northern Europe due to its historical, religious and cultural affinity with its Nordic neighbours. In line with the presumption that European is good, they stressed that 'we are European people, and have been able to maintain our identity as such over the years by belonging irrevocably to Europe' (Tarand 1996 quoted in Noreen and Sjöstedt 2004: 745). The position of Estonia, as a European state, vis-à-vis its East put an emphasis on Estonian modernity. Estonia is characterised as a modern and progressive state, both in comparison with the West European states, and with the East in particular. Hence, 'Estonia is industrious and active, tolerant, and flexible, something that will benefit organisations like the EU and NATO, since Estonia can make a contribution based upon our experiences with carrying out extensive reforms. This is a resource, which so-called old democracies lack' (Ojuland 2002b quoted in Noreen and Sjöstedt 2004: 745). The political elite somehow also appended the uniqueness of Estonian identity to their juggling of different identity affiliations. Hence, a further narrative emerged that although Estonia desires to belong to the European family, it is still very conscious of its own national identity (Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2002b in Noreen and Sjöstedt 2004: 746).

The small-state narrative has been another aspect of how Finland, Estonia and Hungary positioned themselves geo-politically. While the emphasis on the Europeanisation narrative took various forms in the countries under study, the recognition of small state narrative was a common aspect for all three nations in support of their EU accession⁷. It is highly plausible to consider that small states would benefit from alliances and look for partners to thrust issues of common concern in international organisations which they belong to. Given the examples of Benelux or Nordic co-operation regarding various EU external and internal policies (Fayot 2003, Raunio and Tiilikainen 2003), it is empirically justified to raise a question whether common background factors among Finland, Hungary and Estonia – given their Finno-Ugric links – also provide conditions for foreign policy co-operation.

Yet, a general question is what sorts of intra-EU alliances do small states aspire for? Or else, are small states capable of coalescing under constructive policy alliances? There is an extensive literature on foreign policy choices of small states. Elman (1995) argues that anarchy in international relations is a concern more important for the small states than the big ones. That is why the small states cannot afford to deal with the vagaries of domestic politics when it comes to making their foreign policies. Arter (2000: 683 quoted in Tiilikainen 2006: 81) maintains that small states are better positioned than larger states to push particular issues onto the EU's agenda, especially when the initiative is presented as being in the interests of the Union as a whole. Small states may also be better placed to build compromises between competing sides, acting as neutral brokers between larger countries.

Mouritzen (1991 quoted in Browning 2006) argues that small states bandwagon their foreign policies to either big powers or international organisations. Browning (2006: 682) demonstrates, through a case study of Finland, that smallness can be told in different ways, with this impacting on the horizon of actions that become conceivable for the state. Hence, he shows that capacity of small states in foreign policy-making is a derivative of available resources. Small states can make use of their particular culture or history as well as concepts of self and others available for them. Therefore, the anarchy of international relations, membership in the same international organisations, and available resources can explain foreign policy co-operation among small states. Yet, what is the impact of collective identity formations in effect to small states co-operation?

Browning (2006: 672) illustrates how an understanding of an identity of Finland as a small state was variously constructed throughout the Cold War, and the implications that particular understandings had for the Finnish foreign policy. Browning (2006) argues that a small-state identity is not somehow 'natural' for Finland. For example, throughout the inter-war period, an expansionist discourse promoting the creation of Greater Finland was important in nationalist ideas. The Finns

⁶ Az új Nyugat-nemzedék [The leader of main opposition Fidesz Viktor Orbán's speech at the 19th birthday of Fidesz], available at, http://orbanviktork.hu/beszedekek_list.php?item=12.

⁷ Interviews held at the Estonian, Finnish, and Hungarian Ministries of Foreign Affairs, May-June 2008.

were seen to possess a civilising mission to liberate their oppressed national kin beyond Finland's borders in Russian Karelia, and Estonia. During the Continuation War (1941-1944) with the Soviet Union, these ideas received practical expression as the Finns initially pushed the Soviet army back and set about a systematic programme of establishing Greater Finland in Karelia.

However, during the Cold War, the conceptualisation of Finland's small state identity differed from the period before. Instead of emphasising an expansionist ideology and inter-war nationalist ideas that the national mission required standing as the 'outpost of the West' against evil communist Russia, Finland began constructing Finnish national identity and foreign policy by emphasising Finland as a small state located next to a great power (Browning 2006). Being small, being located between East and West, was seen to entail particular resources and advantages, and (with their Nordic brothers) the Finns tried to claim the moral high ground, to act as international bridge-builders and to present themselves as a model of an alternative international order that rejected the brute pursuit of power in favour of a morally superior agenda built around ideas of international solidarity, and a modern and economically dynamic welfare state (Browning 2006: 678). There was also a Finno-Ugric touch to this narrative – especially given the way Finland and Hungary established extensive bilateral relations under the conditions of the Cold War.

2.2. The Finno-Ugric narrative

Vares (2006) presents how Finland and Hungary referred to the Finno-Ugric narrative to substantiate their policy co-operation during the Cold War. Both countries could succinctly utilise their Finno-Ugric connection, their heritage of old cultural relations, feelings of kinship in order to formulate common goals and policies. This connection between Finland and Hungary had an impact on their policy co-operation in international organisations, such as the Helsinki Process, beyond providing substance to their bilateral links. Hence, being small and kin-related states in the world of Cold War politics was the unifying aspect of relations between Hungary and Finland. During the bilateral – including top level – visits, the importance of kinship on the formulation of co-operation between the two countries received a major emphasis (Vares 2006:206, 211). As such, the kinship basis created the starting-point and the Hungarian-Finnish relations during the Cold War period which saw the spill-over from romantic relationship to actual bilateral co-operation (Vares 2006). The relations acquired 'impulses from traditional kinship relations, and they can be pursued in the prevailing international conditions in a manner which is useful to both countries' (János Péter's speech quoted by Vares 2006: 219). Vares (2006: 224) writes that

[i]t can be speculated that the more Hungary 'westernised' its political image and the more Finland paid attention to Eastern policy, the easier it was for the countries to adapt to each other and align with each other's political line. Kádár had paid respect to the past while talking about the present-day challenges, that is, the relatives and friends were developing tradition-bound relations in a modern context. However, Kekkonen talked about kinship and tradition more than Kádár had done and expected that even more could be built on the traditional foundation. The tradition thus surpassed the ideological differences – the Finns wanted to be bridge-builders to countries which represented another social system.

In comparison with the other neutral and small states, such as Austria, the Hungarian narrative was that relations with Finland relied more on kinship. In his comparison of the relations with Finland to the ones with Austria, the Hungarian foreign minister Frigyes Puja stated that traditional friendship and contemporary scientific and economic goals suited both cases. In the Finnish case, however, Puja stated that the idea of tradition meant kinship, in the Austrian case the friendship was based on sports and culture and on being neighbours (Vares 2006: 225). Therefore, the Cold War period left a certain legacy for policy co-operation on the basis of kinship as well as a parallel stance in international organisations for Hungary and Finland. As such, the Finno-Ugric identity and narrative became part of the process of foreign policy making and co-operation in these states.

My interviews, held at the Finnish Foreign Ministry and at the Finland's Permanent Representation to the EU, demonstrated that in the aftermath of the Cold War Finno-Ugrism did not remain an active part of the Finnish foreign policy. The Hungarian interviewees, in contrast, put more emphasis on their collaboration with Finland on the basis of similar opinions regarding the EU-Russia relations while did not specify any forms of institutionalised bilateral links⁸. While the Estonian for-

⁸ Interviews held at the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Budapest, 11.06.2008.

eign policy makers paid the highest respect to the Finno-Ugric links, they also raised the issue that they do not permanently receive support from their Finno-Ugric partners whereas issue-based co-operation is not unlikely⁹. As the role of Finno-Ugrism in Estonian foreign policy, Andres Kasekamp from the Estonian Institute of Foreign Affairs stated that

We have been intent to become good Europeans in 2003, 2004, 2005 and the whole policy towards Russia was to keep low profile. We [had to] avoid becoming a one-issue state. We should not reply to every single Russian insult. And perhaps, the Finno-Ugric issue was a victim. We did not to be provocative¹⁰.

However, all interviewees mentioned the importance of institutionalised co-operation among the Finno-Ugric states through various multi-lateral forums regarding issues imminently related to the social and cultural maintenance of their kin in Russia. In the next section, I will present the forms of co-operation among the Finno-Ugric states and raise a question whether the EU narrative, essential to the foreign policies of Hungary and Estonia during the recent years, is likely to create a spill-over from political and cultural co-operation to more policy-oriented co-operation in the EU.

3. Historical background factors and the current institutions of co-operation

Since the EU enlargement to the North and East, the close social, ethnic and cultural ties of some member states with the peoples of the former Soviet Union come out as a tangible factor in effect to EU's policies towards its Eastern neighbourhood (Weber, Smith and Baun, 2007). This paper locates the impacts of Finno-Ugric links in effect to the composition of such policies. As expressed by the Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves at the Finno-Ugric World Congress in June 2008, it is noteworthy that 'there is a big idea in common Finno-Ugric effort and alongside the Finno-Ugric people, as an example, the Indo-Europeans, Turkish-Tatar and other linguistic groups do not hold any language-centred world congresses¹¹.

Table 1. List of Finno-Ugric Nations, Estimated Population Figures and Countries Inhabited

	Population	Countries inhabited
Hungarians	15 000 000	Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Austria etc
Finns	5 000 000	Finland, Sweden, Russia, Estonia
Estonians	1 000 000	Estonia
Mordvinians (Erzyas and Mokshas)	843 400	Russia
Udmurts	636 900	Russia
Maris	604 300	Russia
Zyryan Komis	293 400	Russia
Permian Komis	125 200	Russia
Karelians	93 300	Russia
Saamis	55 000 – 100 000	Norway, Sweden, Finland, Russia
Nenetses	41 300	Russia (Siberia)
Khantys	28 700	Russia (Siberia)
Csángos	20 000	Romania
Mansis	11 400	Russia (Siberia)
Kvens	10 000	Norway
Vepsians	8 200	Russia
Selkups	4 200	Russia (Siberia)
Setos	3 200	Russia, Estonia
Besermans	3 000	Russia
Nganasans	800	Russia (Siberia)
Ingrians (Izhorians)	700	Russia
Enetses	300	Russia (Siberia)
Livonians	250	Latvia
Votians	100	Russia

Source: Information Centre of Finno-Ugric Peoples, available at, www.suri.ee.

⁹ Interviews held at the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tallinn, 26.05.2008.

¹⁰ Interview in Tallinn, 26.05.2008.

¹¹ <http://president.ee/en/duties/speeches.php>.

The encyclopaedic information on Finno-Ugric people states that almost 25 million people speak languages that belong to this language family and these people have lived in Europe for about ten millennia. While Finland, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine, Serbia and Estonia host a major bulk of Finno-Ugric speakers, 17 out of 24 different Finno-Ugric groups live in Russia. Table 1 presents the list of Finno-Ugric peoples, their population figures and their countries of residence.

As expressed by the Presidents of Hungary and Estonia the World Congress had a scope beyond the pursuance of folkloristic interest with respect to the Finno-Ugric people. The EU aspect is crucial to this extent. In the next section, I will demonstrate how historical and cultural foreign policy narratives may pave the way for intra-EU co-operation.

3.1. The impact of cultural and historical narratives on intra-EU co-operation

Looking at the forms of Finno-Ugric political and cultural co-operation practices, one can inquire whether common practices as such improve collective identity. Neumann (2007: 22-23) writes that collective identity is furthered by the existing of common practices, but these practices are common in the sense that they are thought to be the same, not that they are the same. Collective identity is imagined, but it is not less real for that (Neumann 2007: 22-23). Images create identities and identities direct action (Lagerspetz 2003: 56). Identities also result from common experiences and common action. The example of Nordic co-operation shows that a non-institutional commitment of the five political systems¹² to a common model of society based on a universal model of social politics can bring forward policy co-operation (Esping-Andersen 1990 quoted in Lagerspetz 2003: 55).

Hence, common identity formations play an important role to provide substance for Nordic co-operation. The present common identity of people in the Nordic countries is based not only on an awareness of cultural and historical commonalities, but also on several concrete characteristics of their present day societies that are distinctive to the region in international comparison. In this respect, one should also pay a due attention to the importance of discourses used in the formation of national identities and the 'mutually constitutive' relationship between national identities and foreign policies. Tonra (2006) shows that national identity becomes a reality as it is instantiated through the discourses of political leaders, journalists, community leaders, writers, educators, artists, religious leaders, intellectuals, citizens and is disseminated through the means of public and private communication. The resulting identity is not strong, fixed and immutable but rather dynamic, moving and sometimes contradictory.

The theoretical framework of this paper justifies an effort to study the collective identity formation of Finno-Ugric peoples and structured political co-operation among these states since the end of the Cold War in effect to policy co-operation. Collective identity formation among the Finno-Ugric nations dates all the way back to the end of the 19th Century. In the interwar period there were efforts to establish a political community of Finno-Ugric states. These efforts started first between Estonia and Hungary in 1937 and then extended to Finland (Vares 2006)¹³. The current main forum of the Finno-Ugrians is the World Congress of Finno-Ugric Peoples, which has taken place every four years since 1992. Beyond the World Congresses, there are also meetings of Consultative Committee of Finno-Ugric nations, Youth Association of Finno-Ugric Peoples. The permanent body of the Congress, the Consultative Committee of Finno-Ugric Peoples, is represented in the work groups of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. A further platform of co-operation is among the culture and education ministers of Finland, Estonia, and Hungary to preserve the cultural identity of Finno-Ugric people in the Russian Federation. The Finno-Ugric relations are run through the Ministries of Culture and Education in the countries under study. Nevertheless, given the semi-presidential system in Finland, the participation of the Finnish President in

¹² Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland are members of the Nordic Council, which was established in 1952.

¹³ Interview with M.E.P. Katrin Saks, Member of the Subcommittee on Human Rights, Strasbourg, 08.07.2008.

Finno-Ugric events shows the importance of the issue for Finnish foreign policy¹⁴. High level participation to Finno-Ugric events is also the case for Estonia and Hungary.

There are also informal meetings of the Heads of State of Finno-Ugric nations between the World Congresses. The latest effort is to organise international festivals of Finno-Ugric Peoples, which also provides the opportunities to bring together the four heads of states or governments, including the Russian President. The International Festival in 2007 took place in the Mordvinian Republic of Russian Federation and saw the participation of the ex-Russian President Putin as well as the Hungarian Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány and the Finnish President Tarja Hallonen. The President of Estonia did not attend the meeting due to the removal of 'Bronze Soldier Statue' and the following crisis between Russia and Estonia.

While the meetings concentrate on cultural issues, beyond paying reassurances to the importance of folkloristic and linguistic co-operation during the 2008 World Congress, the Hungarian and the Estonian Presidents also stated the importance of structural political as well as socially encompassing co-operation among themselves¹⁵. In a way, this is keeping up with the legacy of the Cold War period and the special relations between Finland and Hungary during this period using the Finno-Ugric narrative. Both Kekkonen and Kádár, in reference to the special relations between Finland and Hungary, had stated that the tradition was not only a story, it was a genuine reality and it had created the basis for modern friendship (Vares 2006: 239). There was also a parallel trend to modernise the concept of kinship in order to strengthen its value. The concept of kinship was in time succeeded by the concept of friendship in the political argument. Friendship was contextualised to politics, not only to tradition, language and culture. As such, during the Cold War, the CSCE (Commission for Security and Co-operation in Europe) became the platform of co-operation between the two independent Finno-Ugric states in the international arena (Vares 2006: 251).

Similar to earlier co-operation in CSCE, since the membership of Hungary and Estonia in the EU, references to the role of the EU in the protection of Finno-Ugric people come into view this time in the official discourse of Hungary and Estonia¹⁶. The linguistic or education rights of Finno-Ugric people in Russia have been on the agenda in the EU-Russia Summits since the northern and eastern EU enlargements. Hence, the Hungarian and Estonian EU membership enhanced the means of co-operation among the Finno-Ugric states and made Finno-Ugric issues more visible at the EU level. This is not all unexpected. The 2005 Finnish Ministry of Education Report on Kindred Peoples Programme in Russia illustrated the Finnish expectation of co-operation with Estonia and Hungary just after their EU accession. The Report noted that 'projects aiming at the support of the Finno-Ugric peoples of Russia can also be devised within the framework of the European Union, in co-operation with Estonia and Hungary' (Grünthal 2005).

There are two arguments in relation to the presence of kindred peoples in the Russian Federation and whether it is a source of contention or not. While the Finnish and Hungarian sides approach the Finno-Ugric link more in the format of a bridge between the EU and Russia, the Estonian side sees it as a possible tool for raising human rights problems in Russia. However, the employment of this tool comes with the realisation that vigilant interference does not necessarily enhance the position of minorities in Russia¹⁷.

The Hungarian interviewees placed an emphasis on the involvement of Russia in the Finno-Ugric conferences stating that 'the world congress is a good chance to bring Russia and EU closer. This is an opportunity to promote co-operation. It is a small aspect but we can use it'¹⁸. An Estonian diplomat also referred to the importance of the 'policy of small steps' between Estonia and Russia in order to improve the bilateral relations¹⁹. The Russian Federation also showed its willingness for further involvement with the Finno-Ugric co-operation through its proposal to become the host of the 'Consultative Committee of Finno-Ugric Nations' at the summit on 29 June 2008. Therefore, the presence of Finno-Ugric peoples in Russia has an impact on the bilateral relations between Russia

¹⁴ Interview at the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 21 May 2008, Helsinki.

¹⁵ The Speech of the President of the Republic of Hungary at the 5th World Congress of Finno-Ugric Nations, available in Hungarian at, http://www.keh.hu/keh/beszede/20080628finnugor_vilagkongresszus.html. Also see *ibid.* for the speech of the Estonian President at the same event.

¹⁶ The latest expression was in the Presidential Speeches at the World Congress in June 2008.

¹⁷ Interview with M.E.P. Katrin Saks, Member of the Subcommittee on Human Rights, Strasbourg, 08.07.2008; interviews at the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tallinn, 26.05.2007.

¹⁸ Interview at the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Budapest, 10.06.2008.

¹⁹ Interview at the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tallinn, 26.05.2008.

and the three countries, and at times creates a positive Russian stance towards Finland and Hungary²⁰. This is the reason why this paper indicates that the Finno-Ugric states can become important policy actors in the EU-Russia relations and ENP if they manage to incorporate Russia in human rights and democracy promotion efforts of the EU through establishing an institutionalised co-operation with Russia around the Finno-Ugric narrative.

However, another aspect of the Russian interest in Finno-Ugric co-operation can be related to the Russian interest in gaining an insider position in order to trail the EU demands over the treatment of minorities more closely²¹. It is almost certain that an increasing emphasis on human and minority rights of the Finno-Ugric people in Russia will not be all-positively received in Russia. That is why the presence of the Finno-Ugric people in Russia can at times also become a source of contention between the EU and Russia.

According to the leaflet produced by the Estonian Foreign Ministry for the 2008 World Congress, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has repeatedly raised the precarious situation of the Finno-Ugric peoples in Russia after the reports prepared by the current M.E.P. Katrin Saks. The EU has also brought this topic to the attention of the Russian authorities in the course of the EU-Russia human rights dialogue. In 2007, the European Parliament adopted a declaration concerning various human rights breaches in the Republic of Mari El of the Russian Federation²². Hence, there have been instances of manifestation of support for the rights of the Finno-Ugric peoples in the international arena and the EU is increasingly becoming a platform for this. The 2008 decision of the Commission to grant support to the maintenance of the Finno-Ugric languages in the EU is crucial to this extent. Though incremental, this is a sign of intra-EU alliance of Finno-Ugric states since the grant proposal was introduced into the EU budget thanks to the endeavours of the Finno-Ugric informal group of MEPs at the European Parliament²³. Having this item inserted into the EU budget is the Commission's acknowledgement that the EU has a role to play in the maintenance of Finno-Ugric peoples in Russia. An interviewee at the Estonian Permanent Delegation to the EU stated that while the EU so far opted to delegate the issue to the Council of Europe, given that the latter is wider platform where Russia meets the West, this specific support will be the first instance to insert the EU into the minority issues in Russia – let alone showing a face of the Union in support of the Finno-Ugric peoples. The decision created the condition for co-operation among the cultural attachés of the Finno-Ugric states in order to tailor common projects for the most efficient uses of the finances and saw co-operation among the Permanent Delegations of the Finno-Ugric states in the background²⁴.

The Estonian President Ilves was the most straightforward among the Finno-Ugric presidents in the 2008 World Congress with respect to the emphasis he placed on the EU as a guarantor of the futures of the Finno-Ugric nations. Ilves expressed that 'the utility of global balance is well-understood in the EU. If the Finno-Ugric question has taken on a powerful international dimension anywhere, it is there. The Finno-Ugric issue has become an inexorable issue on the agenda of partnership talks between the EU and Russia²⁵.' Ilves also stated that the European Union and the European values would provide the best security for linguistic minorities. The Hungarian President, László Sólyom, in his turn, expressed that it was reassuring that the monitoring of Finno-Ugric people's situation in Russia became a part of the EU-Russia dialogue. The Finnish, Hungarian and Estonian Embassies in Moscow, in this respect, are in elbow touch. They organise visits to some Finno-Ugric Republics in the Russian Federation annually and prepare reports on issues of common concern²⁶.

The relative silence of the President of Finland in comparison to the Hungarian and Estonian presidents over the Finno-Ugric issues can be related to the implicit unease with which Finland has to deal with its Russian minority. The Article 10 of the 'Basic Treaty' between Finland and Russia,

²⁰ Interview at the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Budapest, 10.06.2008. The Estonian interviewees did not agree with this suggestion.

²¹ This was the line more clearly stated by the Estonian interviewees.

²² European Parliament, Session Document, B6-0081/2007.

²³ Interview with M.E.P. Katrin Saks, Member of the Subcommittee on Human Rights, European Parliament, Strasbourg, 08.07.2008.

²⁴ Interview at the Estonian Permanent Delegation to the EU, Brussels, 24.8.2008.

²⁵ <http://president.ee/en/duties/speeches.php>.

²⁶ Interview at the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tallinn, 26.05.2008; Krisztina Török, Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Budapest, 10.06.2008.

signed in 1992, deals with the Finnish and Finno-Ugric minorities and Russian speaking immigrants in Finland reciprocally. While this is comprehensive, it is not all symmetrical as the Finnish and Finno-Ugric minorities demonstrate the case of a historical minority whereas the Russian speaking immigrants to Finland are recent settlers. Thereby, there is a legal and political problem. However, this treaty was signed in the era of 'New Europe' whereby the parties committed themselves to support the preservation of ethnicity of Finnish and Finnish speaking peoples and nationalities in Russia and correspondingly the ethnic specificity of people originating from Russia, who are residing in Finland. They protect each others' languages and cultural monuments. The Russian minority in Finland is very heterogeneous and for example comprises the Finnish speaking people from Russia who had a right to return to Finland²⁷.

The Finnish politicians are aware that if Finland is to demand an extension of the rights of the Finno-Ugric people, then through the bilateral treaty the Russians might as well raise similar demands²⁸. Besides, the historical and political position of the Swedish minority in Finland makes extending respective minority rights to other communities significantly controversial. So far, the Russian side has kept silent on the position of the Russian minority in Finland. The Finnish pragmatism and conciliatory efforts toward Russia, however, receives unofficial criticisms from Estonia. The master narrative of 'no problems with Russia' despite problems is a way to escape from problems. Hiski Haukkala of the Finnish Institute of International Affairs qualifies the Finnish tactic as exaggerating the positive in order to be constructive²⁹.

Moreover, the stipulations of the Article 10 go beyond the protection of Finnish minorities in Russia and appropriates an upper hand to Finland in the protection of the Finno-Ugric peoples in Russia vis-à-vis the other Finno-Ugric states. Given the rather conciliatory and pragmatic role of Finland towards Russia, in stark contrast to Estonia in particular, assigning a rather patronising position of Finland as such may seem more acceptable for Russia. And this treaty may indicate a basis of Finnish efforts to entangle Russia into the Finno-Ugric affairs.

While cultural co-operation is the most evident among Finland, Hungary and Estonia, the Presidents expressed during the 2008 World Congress that linguistic and folkloristic co-operation also requires institutionalised and structured collaboration in order to maintain the subsistence of the Finno-Ugric people. This emphasis on structured co-operation is timely. The next sections will show that the Finno-Ugric narrative provides a crucial asset for Finland, Hungary and Estonia to contribute to EU policies in its Eastern neighbourhood. The established regular meetings among the Heads of States of Finno-Ugric countries present the potential for political co-operation. Yet, it is more interesting to assess whether expressive co-operation in the cultural and political arena can turn into policy co-operation towards the Eastern neighbourhood of the EU. As expressed by an interviewee at the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the political co-operation among these nations depends on the extent to which they are ready to politicise the cultural and historical dimensions of their relations. Hence, what is needed to substantiate policy co-operation? And what is the likelihood of political co-operation, substantiated by ethnic and linguistic links, to affect foreign policy co-operation in other spheres? I will discuss these issues with the help of material collected during interviews in the next section.

4. The Activities of the Finno-Ugric states in EU's eastern neighbourhood

The incongruence between the bilateral external relations of the EU states and the CFSP of the EU is extensively studied. In a recent study, Puetter and Wiener (2007: 1077, 1080) show that the current dilemma characterising EU foreign policy co-ordination is not so much the result of fundamental differences as regards the set of core norms and principles to which the 'family' of European nations subscribes. On the contrary, co-ordination failure emerges because the common set of principles and norms becomes subject to contestation and (re-) interpretation when operationalised during individual instances of policy-making in each country.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Interview with Markku Kangaspuro, Aleksanteri Institute of the University of Helsinki, Helsinki, 23.05.2008.

²⁹ Interview with Hiski Haukkala, Finnish Institute for International Affairs, Helsinki, 21.05.2008.

With respect to the Finnish-Russian relations, Markku Kangaspuro of Aleksanteri Institute stated that 'every realistic analyser would see that the EU does not have a CFSP. Finland needs its national approach to Russia because everyone else has one. If you are very loud, perhaps it does not help things. It is better to improve things diplomatically through grass root level³⁰. Nonetheless, the interviewees at the foreign ministries also raised the concern of their states with respect to Russia's making bilateral deals with the bigger states of the EU behind their backs. Hence, a common desire in the small EU member states is stronger CFSP co-operation within the EU while also recognising the limited nature of such co-operation. Yet, this paper shows that while the small EU member states are able to create conditions of policy co-operation and at times reflect their policy concerns in actions, still it is difficult to state that they are capable of coalescing under constructive policy alliances towards Russia regularly. In this respect, the 2008 decision of the Commission to grant aid for the protection of the Finno-Ugric minorities is an important step, but still an incremental one.

The salience of bilateral policy considerations and, hence, the impact of *real politik* can be one explanation for this result. Yet, this paper shows that the importance of human rights issues in foreign policies of Hungary, Finland and Estonia is mentioned without exception at the foreign ministry interviews. Another issue, which is mentioned unequivocally, is the role of national media in Finland as well as in Estonia and Hungary in triggering a reaction from the diplomatic circles to respond to human rights abuses in Russia. Thus, where does Finno-Ugrism lie in the human rights promotion of the states under study?

It seems as if the Finno-Ugric identity is the most unaccommodating for Finland. Hanna Ojanen of the Finnish Institute of International Affairs put this in a way that 'ethnic questions are very much related to minority issues, which are politically very sensitive. If you ask people if there is any co-operation between Finland and Estonia in the EU, people will say yes. Yet, if you introduce the ethnic background factor as a condition of co-operation, then people get uneasy.' Ojanen continues:

The Finno-Ugric identity does not fit well into the nicely tailored European/Nordic identity [of Finland]. The EU membership brought forward an identity formation. Finnish belongingness to the West has been proven with the EU membership, but Estonia and Hungary were not there. That was why Finland did not invest in association with these states. Suddenly, Estonia and Hungary are in the EU and Finland cannot build any links with them despite the abundance of co-operation fields. Identification of and finding the right reference groups are important to foreign policy making. We are constantly looking for the right group of countries to be seen to be associated with. It just happens that the linguistically related countries are for other reasons the furthest from us³¹.

Part of this unease can be explained by the differing position of Finland and Estonia towards Russia in the EU. Another explanation is the fact that unlike Finland, Estonia related itself to NATO as a part of its defence strategy and followed a neo-liberal capitalist economic policy in contrast to the more social welfare oriented, egalitarian economic policies of the Nordic states³². These factors affect the pace of spill-over from political co-operation on cultural matters to policy co-operation between Estonia and Finland.

Yet, the Finno-Ugric issues very much relate to discussions in the public domain in Finland, beyond the foreign policy domain³³. The interviewees in Estonia also expressed the important role the Finnish media plays in terms of raising human rights issues in Russia – especially if these issues are related to the Finno-Ugric people. The human rights abuses in the Republic of Mari El and the way it was reported in the Finnish media triggered the Finnish authorities' action in 2007. At the end, the European Parliament also intervened with its declaration mentioned above. According to Kasekamp, this also triggered more vigilance from Estonia regarding the rights of the Finno-Ugric people in Russia³⁴.

While Ojanen was sceptical of the Finnish role in pursuing human rights abuses in Russia, the interviewees from the Finnish diplomatic circles both in Helsinki and Brussels expressed that pro-

³⁰ Interview with Markku Kangaspuro, Aleksanteri Institute of University of Helsinki, 23.05.2008.

³¹ Interview with Hanna Ojanen, Finnish Institute for International Affairs, 21.05.2008.

³² Interviews held at the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Helsinki; Finnish Permanent Representation in Brussels and Finnish Embassy, Dublin.

³³ Interview with Markku Kangaspuro, Aleksanteri Institute, Helsinki, 21.05.2008.

³⁴ Interview, Tallinn, 27.05.2008.

moting human rights is a tangible element of the Finnish foreign policy. This goes beyond the Finno-Ugric people and applies to all abuses in Russia. In this respect, I state the argument that the states under study situate their claims for the Finno-Ugric people's rights in the EU easier to an extent that they can bind them with the human rights abuses in the Russian Federation in general. The self-tailored role to promote democratic and economic reform in the post-Soviet geography and, hence, acting as a bridge between the Eastern neighbourhood of the EU and the West is not disturbing for either of the country cases under study.

This paper shows that all Finland, Estonia and Hungary are ready to offer their eastern connections as added-values to the EU. There is a bulk of evidence regarding both the actual and rhetorical co-operation between Finland, Estonia and Hungary and the rest of the former Soviet Union states³⁵. Hungary supports institutional change in the Caucasus and in Ukraine and Moldova. Finland is ready to offer its administrative experience from Åland islands to solve the complex conflicts in the former Soviet sphere such as Nagorno-Karabag. Estonia takes the upper hand in this bridge role especially in terms of its support for institutional change in Georgia³⁶. Kuusik (2006) notes that good governance, human rights, environment and indigenous populations, democracy and the rule of law have become important sectors for Estonia's development co-operation. Support for democracy in the EU eastern borders is a political and a strategic objective, and an important measure for strengthening the Estonian position in the EU. Kasekamp explains the Estonian interest in the EU's eastern neighbourhood that as long as states such as Georgia, Moldova or Ukraine are independent, Estonia feels that its independence is more secure³⁷.

One thing that all these states converge in their messages to the EU's eastern neighbours, however, is that they possess cultural and historical similarities with them and they are ready to offer their experiences with reform. Other states, such as Poland and Lithuania, among the new EU member states may also have a similar position. However, what sets the Finno-Ugric nations apart is the political co-operation among them pre-existing even their EU membership. While the actual results of these promises are still not ripe, this paper considers that – though at times underemphasised – the Finno-Ugric link brings the countries under study closer to the EU's Eastern neighbourhood. To the extent that they can involve Russia into their existing co-operation not only that they would avoid putting the welfare of their ethnic kin in peril in Russia, but also play an important card in the EU. The question why these three states, already in the EU, need the Eastern connection is best responded by Andres Heinapu from the Finno-Ugria Foundation in Estonia.

Why is it important we need the eastern impact for our Estonian and Finnish culture? Why? Our culture is based on the German culture and the Finnish is modelled on the Swedish. Now, to preserve our culture and make the distinction, we need contacts with the Eastern Finno-Ugrians. The Protestant culture has destroyed not the same elements of culture as the Orthodox religion. The Eastern Finno-Ugrians are strong in tradition, because the Orthodox as well as the Catholic Church allowed preserving more of their own traditions. We need the Eastern link in order to maintain our distinction in the EU.

On the basis of this discussion and empirical evidence, I believe that the Finno-Ugric link offers a unique capital for co-operation among Finland, Estonia and Hungary in terms of substantiating EU's policies in its Eastern neighbourhood. The utility of this capital will depend on abilities of the respective states under study to amalgamate the Eastern and Western influences in the composition of their polities and societies. To an extent that these countries can succeed to relate themselves to their East and exert policy influence in the states of the Eastern neighbourhood of the EU, they will have an added value in the EU.

³⁵ Among many see the statements of the Under secretary of the Ministry of Defence regarding defence co-operation and support for institutional change during her visit to Armenia and Georgia in April 2008, available at, http://www.hm.gov.hu/hirek/kulfoldi_hirek/vadai_agnes_gruziaban_es_ormenyorszagban http://www.hm.gov.hu/hirek/kulfoldi_hirek/vadai_agnes_gruziaban_es_ormenyorszagban2. See the statements of the Finnish President Tarja Halonen at the state visits of the Presidents of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan to Finland, available at, <http://www.presidentti.fi/netcomm/news/allnews.asp>.

³⁶ Interview at the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tallinn, 26.05.2008.

³⁷ Interview, Tallinn, 27.05.2008.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the paper offers an observation that Finland, Hungary and Estonia have a specific form of co-operation based to some extent on some linguistic links. The special relations among these three states have a long and remarkable history given the different political experiences of the states under study in the 20th century. The paper tracks the Finno-Ugric narrative in the foreign policies of Finland, Estonia and Hungary and deals with the question whether the Finno-Ugric background can be a basis for intra-EU alliance building. The paper focuses, in this regard, on EU's relations with Russia, which is natural given that one practical aspect of Finno-Ugric cooperation is support for Finno-Ugric minorities in Russia. The paper describes this co-operation in supporting Finno-Ugric cultures and languages in Russia placing this in a wider context of human rights promotion in Russia. There is common agreement among the three states on the use of their EU membership in support of the well-being of Finno-Ugric minorities in Russia. However, the states differ on how pushing they intend to be regarding the pressure they can exert on Russia. The paper also portrays the mechanisms of political co-operation among Finland, Estonia and Hungary, substantiated by their acclaimed Finno-Ugric links. However, currently the political co-operation does not pave the way for extensive policy co-operation. Still, as expressed by some interviewees, the recent decision of the Commission to fund the maintenance of Finno-Ugric languages in Russia may stimulate intra-EU co-operation for common projects. It may also trigger further co-operation. Hence, the paper claims that using the Finno-Ugric links could be useful for the three countries in the future and that this could translate into co-operation on further foreign policy issues not only to the benefit of Hungary, Estonia and Finland, but also the EU as a whole.

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