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The Swedish Sámi Parliament: A Challenged Recognition?

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Stockholm University

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ROBERT SCHUMAN CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES**

The Swedish Sámi Parliament: A Challenged Recognition?

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Practices of Tolerance Addressing Cultural Diversity
in Political Life**

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ACCEPT PLURALISM is a Research Project, funded by the European Commission under the Seventh Framework Program. The project investigates whether European societies have become more or less tolerant during the past 20 years. In particular, the project aims to clarify: (a) how is tolerance defined conceptually, (b) how it is codified in norms, institutional arrangements, public policies and social practices, (c) how tolerance can be measured (whose tolerance, who is tolerated, and what if degrees of tolerance vary with reference to different minority groups). The ACCEPT PLURALISM consortium conducts original empirical research on key issues in school life and in politics that thematise different understandings and practices of tolerance. Bringing together empirical and theoretical findings, ACCEPT PLURALISM generates a State of the Art Report on Tolerance and Cultural Diversity in Europe, a Handbook on Ideas of Tolerance and Cultural Diversity in Europe, a Tolerance Indicators' Toolkit where qualitative and quantitative indicators may be used to score each country's performance on tolerating cultural diversity, and several academic publications (books, journal articles) on Tolerance, Pluralism and Cultural Diversity in Europe. The ACCEPT PLURALISM consortium is formed by 18 partner institutions covering 15 EU countries. The project is hosted by the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies and co-ordinated by Prof. Anna Triandafyllidou.

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Executive Summary

When the new Instrument of Government was adopted by the Swedish Parliament in 2010, the special status of the Swedish Sámi people was recognised constitutionally for the first time. Already in 1993, however, the popularly elected Swedish Sámi Parliament (Sametinget) was established in order to grant the Sámi people cultural autonomy and today the parliament is considered to be the main body to ensure Sámi self-determination. In many ways, the situation and status of the Sámi people can be said to be highly acknowledged and recognized in Sweden, where the political representation of the Sámi is institutionalised in and through the Sámi Parliament. This recognition of the Sámi people appears, however, to be challenged or undermined by different forms of discrimination and intolerance. There have, for instance, been several conflicts during the last few years on the right to use land and water for the maintenance of Sámi reindeer on private property, and there have been severe conflicts on the construction of wind power parks in traditional reindeer grazing areas. In its observations concerning how Sweden fulfils the conventions concerning the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination, the UN is regularly voicing concerns over these kind of issues, for instance, regarding the fact that the issue of ownership of land and water still has not been investigated, and over the Swedish Government's passivity in regards to clarifying the borders for the reindeer grazing area. Moreover, according to a report from the Swedish Ombudsman against Ethnic Discrimination, the Sámi testifies to harassment in their day-to-day lives connected to their ethnic background. In spite of the demonstration of acceptance on a national and constitutional level, an intolerant and stereotypical understanding of the Sámi people thus seem to prevail.

In this case study we investigate this potential coexistence of recognition and intolerance in the Swedish society. Our focus is on the Swedish Sámi Parliament, as it represents the most radical institutionalized form of recognition of the Sámi people (and of any national minority in Sweden). The status of the parliament is as an administrative authority under the Swedish Government. However, it is a popularly elected administrative authority and the parliament is assigned two different functions: as an administrative authority whose tasks are strictly regulated by law and as a popularly elected parliament representing the Sámi people. With the status as an administrative authority, the parliament is not granted any actual political power, such as a right of participation in decision-making, veto-rights concerning administrative decisions or independent sources of income (like taxation rights). In 2010 the Sámi Parliament was allocated a total amount of 185 146 000 SEK (around 19 405 000 EUR), where all grants were directed towards its role as an administrative authority.

By looking at the media coverage of the Swedish Sámi Parliament since its inauguration in 1993, we analyse how the parliament is conceptualised within the media discourse. We analysed the media coverage of the Sámi Parliament in eight national and local daily newspapers during the years 2005, 2009-2011, there are no local or regional newspapers in Sámi in Sweden. We also analysed articles from the election years 1993, 1997, and 2001 (two elections) ten days before and ten days after the elections, and we started out by an analysis of the headlines of all the articles published in three non-election years (1994, 2000, and 2011). A total number of 1251 articles were analysed. Is the Sámi right to self-determination widely accepted in the Swedish society as portrayed by the media? Or is this institutional accommodation of the Sámi people challenged by a widespread intolerance? If so, what might the consequences of this intolerance be for the political representation of the Sámi?

Our headline analysis clearly showed that the media discourse on the Sámi Parliament is characterized by a very limited set of topics out of which the political instability and the administrative performance of the parliament were most prominent. This is not too surprising as these topics obviously spring out of the dual role of the parliament as both representative body of the Sámi people and as an administrative authority under the Swedish government. More interesting, however, is that these topics tend to be conceptualised as major problems and represented in a negatively biased way, as is often the case in news reporting on ethnic minorities. Headlines that refer to what can be considered as the

normal activity of the parliament, like “the Sámi Parliament adopted the budget proposal”, are rather uncommon; instead, most of the examined headlines tend to focus on negative attributes such as, “‘pure Balkan war in the Sámi Parliament’—a negotiator sort out the chaos”.

When we turned our attention to the more comprehensive analysis of the Swedish press and its coverage of the Sámi Parliament, our focus was on how the problem of the parliament’s political instability and weak administrative performance was explained in and by the media. What kind of problem was the parliament represented to be? What news representations were produced and reproduced within the media discourse? What was taken for granted and thus not critically examined?

The political instability of the parliament was basically explained in two different ways within discourse. In the first, the problem is considered to be external to the Sámi Parliament, as it is the institutional design of the parliament that hampers its political stability and constrains the political parties and the MPs. In the second way to explain the political instability, the problem is considered to be internal to the parliament. In this view the problem is typically represented to be a result of a persistent and unsolvable conflict between the political parties, a firm unwillingness to compromise or a personal antagonism between the MPs. The first way to explain the political instability of the Sámi Parliament is, however, marginal within the media discourse. It is the internal explanation that dominates, and it is important to point out that the order of discourse remains more or less unchanged during the period of our study. Our ambition is not to discuss or evaluate the accuracy of the different ways of explaining the problem. However, the implications of the different explanations are extremely severe. If the problem is external, the blame for the defects of the parliament is basically to be put on the Swedish state; it is primarily the design of the parliament that ought to be in focus of the discussion and, in a wider perspective, Swedish Sámi policy at large. But if the problem is considered to be internal—a conception of the parliament that dominates the media discourse—the blame is to be put on the Sámi themselves. In this perspective, the discussions tend to focus on the political parties and the individual MPs as elected representatives rather than the institutional prerequisites for their actual work.

As in the case of the depiction of the political instability of the Sámi Parliament, the explanation of the weak administrative performance of the Sámi Parliament, we discerned two general explanations regarding the causes of this problem. Within the terms of the dominant discourse, the weak performance was assumed to result from individual incompetence of the MPs or the functionaries, immature behaviour or a not fully developed organisation and a further explanation could be strong and deeply engrained internal divisions between the subgroups of the Sámi population. The weak performance is thus explained by internal flaws. The alternative explanation to this problem is once again explained in terms of the institutional design of the parliament, i.e. external factors. The conclusion is thus similar to the analysis of the other problematic topic within the media discourse: if the problem is formulated as an internal problem, the Sámi officials are the ones to blame for the defects of the parliament.

If we return to our research questions it appears as if the recognition of the Sámi as an indigenous people is widely accepted in the news representations of the Sámi Parliament. The parliament in itself and the Sámi right to self-determination are not explicitly challenged. In the media discourse, however, a consensus can be found on the limited capacity of the Sámi Parliament to function as a representative body of the Sámi people and on its weak administrative performance, which—if true—must be considered to be serious problems. On the one hand, the massive critique formulated in the media discourse could be seen as legitimate and a fulfilment of one of the major tasks of the media: to critically scrutinise political and administrative power. From this point of view a malfunctioning Sámi Parliament ought rightfully to be criticised, just like any other publicly elected body in Sweden (or elsewhere), and the elected MPs have to take their responsibility. Furthermore, the media discourse might be interpreted as mainly, or at least partly, reflecting an internal Sámi debate, not the attitudes of the dominant Swedish society, as the articles often refer to or quote Sámi MPs and civil servants. However, the internal Sámi debate is much more complex than what is usually represented in the

media. Earlier research also confirms that the Sámi MPs are worried about how the parliament works in both its roles, but a fundamental problem according to them is the unsolved question of how the Sámi right to self-determination ought to be interpreted and what it would mean in the day-to-day life of the Sámi Parliament. This perspective is completely absent in the media discourse.

On the other hand, this one-sided news representation is problematic, and has consequences for the political representation of the Sámi, especially in a context where the right to self-determination—what it means and ought to mean—is negotiated and re-negotiated in political practice. The media discourse has both direct and indirect consequences for the political representation of the Sámi, delimiting their recognised right to self-determination. Directly, it affects the construction of a Sámi public sphere, indispensable for the parliament to function in its role as a representative body. The news reporting is limited in scope as it privileges reporting on internal conflicts and individual behaviour, and tend to neglect or ignore fundamental political problems of the Sámi people, thus it contributes to a de-politicisation of Sámi politics. Furthermore, it contributes to a conception of the parliament as problematic and dysfunctional, thereby undermining the potential level of trust of its constituency. Indirectly, the emphasis on the democratic and administrative immaturity of the Sámi parliament reproduces stereotypical images of the Sámi as unable to handle their own affairs, thus framing the problem in a specific way. And if we believe that the way a problem is framed affect the way that this issue is dealt with politically, then the range of possible political options is seriously limited by the way the Sámi Parliament is conceptualised in media discourse. If it is the Sámi Parliament (and the Sámi politicians) in itself that is the problem, and not the Swedish Sámi policy or the relation between the dominant majority society and the Sámi minority, political proposals trying to increase Sámi self-determination will easily be rejected within discourse.

Our analysis indicates that the recognition of the Sámi people on an institutional level—the right to self-determination as institutionalised in and through the Sámi Parliament—is hampered by the way the media represents the Sámi Parliament. The practice of toleration in the media discourse seems to reach a limit when the Sámi claims equal public and political status in capacity of being an indigenous people. By neglecting the relation between the Sámi people and the dominant Swedish society in news representations, i.e. the right to self-determination, it is obvious that the Swedish State still is considered to be the sole legitimate authority with exclusive “discretion over the values that justify and limit toleration”. The practice of toleration as it is expressed in the media is thus based on domination and disrespect, not on recognition and respect. In that way, the media discourse could be characterised in terms of a limited or very limited tolerance.

Keywords

Indigenous rights, political representation, Swedish Sámi Parliament, discourse analysis, news representation, media

1. Introduction¹

When the new Instrument of Government was adopted by the Swedish Parliament in 2010 (SFS 2010:1408),² the special status of the Swedish Sámi people was recognised constitutionally for the first time. In the introductory chapter it was stated that the “opportunities of the Sámi people and ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities to preserve and develop a cultural and social life of their own shall be promoted” (SFS 1974:152, Ch. 1, Art. 2). Already in 1993, however, the popularly elected Swedish Sámi Parliament (Sametinget) was established in order to grant the Sámi people cultural autonomy, and today the parliament is considered to be the main body to ensure Sámi self-determination (UN 2011: Art. 76). In many ways, the situation and status of the Sámi people can be said to be highly acknowledged and recognized in Sweden, where the political representation of the Sámi is institutionalised in and through the Sámi Parliament. The Sámi people have also been granted special language and educational rights through Sweden’s ratification of the European framework conventions concerning the rights of national minorities (SFS 2009:724). Members of the Sámi people are, for example, granted the right to communicate in their own language with courts and other important state authorities in the northern parts of Sweden where the bulk of the Sámi population are living. Furthermore, in 1998 the Swedish Government formulated a public apology for the historical injustices the Sámi people had experienced through the internal colonisation to exploit the natural resources in the north of Sweden.

This recognition of the Sámi people appears, however, to be challenged or undermined by different forms of discrimination and intolerance. There have, for instance, been several conflicts during the last few years on the right to use land and water for the maintenance of Sámi reindeer on private property, where the Swedish Supreme Court in 2011 ruled in favour of the Sámi for the first time in the case of Nordmaling (HD 2011), and there have been severe conflicts on the construction of wind power parks in traditional reindeer grazing areas. In its observations concerning how Sweden fulfils the conventions concerning the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination, the UN is regularly voicing concerns over these kind of issues, for instance, regarding the fact that the issue of ownership of land and water still has not been investigated, and over the Swedish Government’s passivity in regards to clarifying the borders for the reindeer grazing area (UN 2004, Art. 12-14; UN 2008, Art. 19-22). Moreover, according to a report from the Swedish Ombudsman against Ethnic Discrimination, the Sámi testifies to ”harassment connected to their ethnic background” in almost all spheres of society as “part of their day-to-day life” (DO 2008, p. 24). In schools, these harassments are “manifested through taunts and other terms of abuse. One example of this is a Sámi woman who related how her son had been physically assaulted in school by three other boys screaming ‘Lapp bastard!’ and ‘Kill the Lapp bastard!’” (DO 2008, p. 24).³

It thus seems as if we, on the one hand, have institutional guarantees to protect the Sámi people and their culture in form of an institutionalised political representation, on the other we may find a lack of “virtuous citizens who are open-minded, free of prejudices and want to embrace difference”

¹ We would like to express our gratitude to professor Jörgen Hermansson and the participants at the work shop in Arbrå (2-3 February 2012), to professor Anna Triandafyllidou and the participants at the fourth meeting of the ACCEPT PLURALISM project in Budapest (8-9 March 2012), to research professor Jo Saglie and the participants at the research seminar at the Institute for Social Research in Oslo (20 April 2012), and to Maria Wendt for their comments on earlier versions of this text. The research was made possible by funding from the ACCEPT PLURALISM project and Riksbankens Jubileumsfond.

² SFS is an abbreviation of Svensk författningssamling, the Swedish Code of Statutes.

³ The Sámi were until the 1960’s officially referred to as Lapps, an originally Finnish term that the Sámi perceive as derogatory.

(Triandafyllidou 2011, p. 68). In this case study our aim is to investigate this coexistence of recognition and intolerance in the Swedish society. It is, however, important—as Rainer Forst (2004, p. 315) argues—“to distinguish between *toleration* as a practice (of a state, for example), and as an attitude or even a virtue, which we can call *tolerance*. The former can be present in a society without the latter.” The object of toleration in our analysis is the recognised right of the Sámi people to self-determination in capacity of being an indigenous people. Our focus will be on the Swedish Sámi Parliament as it represents the most radical institutionalized form of recognition of the Sámi people, and the right to self-determination. By looking at the media debate in Sweden since the inauguration of the Swedish Sámi Parliament in 1993, we will analyse how the parliament is conceptualised within the media discourse. Is the Sámi right to self-determination widely accepted in the Swedish society? Or is this institutional accommodation of the Sámi people challenged by a widespread intolerance? If so, what might the consequences be for the political representation of the Sámi?

1.1. Theoretical debate

The contemporary debate on indigenous rights in international law and political theory serves both as the theoretical starting-point and the political setting of our analysis. In the legal debate, the focus was for a long time the status of and development in international law in itself (Anaya 2004; Castellino & Walsh 2005; Kingsbury 1998; Thornberry 2002): what conventions or treaties were applicable to indigenous peoples? With the adoption of the UN *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* in 2007 these questions got an unequivocal answer: indigenous rights are human rights and indigenous peoples are equal to other peoples within international law (Allen & Xanthaki 2011; Henriksen, Sheinin & Åhrén 2007). Accordingly, the UN Declaration states, among many other things, that “[i]ndigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development” (Art. 3). Despite this international recognition of indigenous rights, however, the question of what these rights actually mean in political practice on a nation-state level still remains contested. Indigenous self-determination seems, for instance, to be “notoriously difficult to pin down” in international law, and “there is little if any guidance as to what [...] means in actual practice” (Quane 2011: 269).

In the contemporary debate in political theory, the practical implications of the right to self-determination seems to be just as vague, although there exists a normative consensus on the idea that indigenous peoples’ right to self-determination implies some kind of political power, like intra-state autonomy or other forms of self-governance within an already existing state, and not a right to secession (Buchanan 2004; Kymlicka 1995; Young 2005). This conclusion is primarily a practical one due to the actual situation of indigenous peoples (Levy 2003; Moore 2003), and it is often supported by references to the will and claims of the indigenous peoples’ themselves (Kingsbury 2001; Robbins 2011; Stavenhagen 2011). Moreover, this conclusion is well in accordance with the UN Declaration in which it is explicitly stated that “[n]othing in this Declaration may be interpreted as [...] authorizing or encouraging any action which would dismember or impair, totally, or in part, the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent States” (Art. 46), an interpretation of the right to self-determination decisive in the process of ratification (Anaya 2009; Wiessner 2008). In this perspective, the right to self-determination ought to be given its substance by the fourth article in the Declaration, which states that “[i]ndigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs [...]” (Art. 4).

With this lack of a common understanding of self-determination—what it ought to mean in political practice and through what particular political institutions this right can be exercised—it comes as no surprise that different nation-states have interpreted the right to self-determination in different ways and with many different institutional constructions. There are, for instance, only 22 countries that have ratified the 1989 ILO Convention No. 169 *Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries* (ILOLEX 2012), Sweden is not among them. One explanation for this forbearance has been that it—from the perspective of the Swedish state—has been unclear what ratification could imply in

practical political terms. In more general terms one could, however, say that if Sweden should ratify this convention, the state would be forced to delineate the territory that the Sámi people has traditionally used and could claim ownership of (Norberg 2007; Chesters 2009). Furthermore, in countries where the right to self-determination is recognised, there are different ways of interpreting on what societal spheres this right ought to be applied—the political, economical, cultural, or social—and there are great differences in the institutional designs in how to accommodate indigenous peoples' right to self-determination. In some cases, separate institutions have been created to ensure political representation (like the Sámi Parliament); in other, indigenous peoples have reserved seats in the national parliament, or self-governance within a well defined territory, i.e. intra-state autonomy (Alfredson 2003; Kontos 2004; Minnerup & Solberg 2011; Nettheim et al. 2002; Robbins 2010). The Swedish Sámi Parliament is thus one of many ways to institutionalise a right to self-determination, and in a more general perspective our case evolves around the questions if it can safeguard the recognised indigenous rights of the Swedish Sámi people and how it functions as a representative body. Has the Sámi Parliament developed into a "vehicle for a form of self-determination" and has it become "an important symbol of Indigenous status as a 'nation within'" (Robbins 2011, p. 47)?

Within the ACCEPT framework the theoretical debate on indigenous rights brings another important question to the fore: is this right to self-determination and political representation an exclusive right of indigenous peoples, or it is just as justifiable for national minorities? If we for a moment return to the contemporary debate in political theory it is worth noticing that none of the dominant justificatory arguments in favour of indigenous rights provide us with a clear normative distinction between the rights claims of indigenous peoples and the claims made by national minorities. Will Kymlicka (2001, pp. 128-130, 2011, pp. 199-208), for instance, explicitly rejects such a distinction on a normative level. In his theory of liberal multiculturalism culture is of major importance and group-specific rights (including indigenous rights) are justified by referring to culture as a context of choice promoting individual freedom and autonomy (Kymlicka 1995). This focus on culture has, however, been severely criticised for its neglect of what is specific to indigenous peoples; that they have been deprived of their land and natural resources, and involuntary incorporated under an external power. This perspective is the starting-point for most arguments in favour of indigenous self-determination based on rectificatory justice. Margaret Moore (2003, p. 90), for instance, describes indigenous peoples' self-determination to be legitimate due to the historical "pattern of dispossession, conquest and marginalization". It seems, however, obvious that indigenous rights "are not just [a remedy] to correct historical wrongs, but also to protect against current and potential future wrongs in light of the particular set of vulnerabilities that characterize indigenous peoples" (Anaya 2004, p. 125, n. 83-84). Contemporary injustices are the starting-point in the third normative argument—freedom as non-domination—in which indigenous rights are justified as a way to remedy injustices due to asymmetric relations of power within a society (Young 2005). Indigenous self-determination is a way to resist and combat the on-going exclusion, subjugation and domination of indigenous peoples.

Although we will not discuss the question if indigenous rights could be justified in a different way than the rights of national minorities in our case study, it is obvious that national minorities—just like indigenous peoples—have (or have had) their own societal culture, that some national minorities have been subject to historical injustices, that some are victims of on-going human rights violations, and that national minorities most often are in a non-dominant position in the societies in which they live.

1.2. A brief history of recognition: the formation of the Swedish Sámi Parliament

The Sámi are an indigenous people living in north-western Europe, divided in the course of history by four nation states: Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden (see Figure 1. below). Despite this fact, "the Saami constitute one people" and the "national borders shall not infringe on our national unity", as it was declared by the 19th Saami Conference in Rovaniemi in 2008. The *Rovaniemi Declaration* further emphasises, among other things, "that the Saami people has inhabited its traditional homeland—Sápmi—since time immemorial and long before national borders were drawn [... and] as a people the

Saami have the right to self-determination” (Saami Conference 2008). The estimates of the number of Sámi differ depending on the sources used but the figures most often seen varies between 80-100 000, of which more than half resides in Norway, around 20 000 in Sweden, 8 000 in Finland and 2 000 in Russia. It is quite common to distinguish Sámi ethnicity by, for instance, attachment to language (there are three languages with several dialects), their traditional livelihoods differing according to their place of residence (foremost reindeer herding and fishing), a common historical memory of their ancestral homeland and the traditional Sámi religion. As citizens in four different countries, the Sámi are facing different sets of legislation, and as a people they have both similar and different experiences of the dominant society’s homogenising and assimilationist thrust, as well as of segregation policies striving to separate them from other members of society. A new collective Sámi identity has been more firmly articulated the last decades across the borders of the four countries partitioning the Sámi (Eriksson 1997, pp. 132-133), including the “symbolic construction of a Sami nation, Sám̄i, with its own flag, National Day, and national anthem” (Pietikäinen 2003, p. 582).⁴

Figure 1. *Sám̄i*



Map from the Museum of Västerbotten (Västerbottens museum 2012).

The Sámi people have been an object in Swedish politics for centuries. Contemporary Sámi policy has its origins in the politics formulated during the end of the 1800’s around an image of the Sámi as reindeer herders, and a belief that they were physically adapted to this industry and unable to support themselves through any other profession. Humanitarian, economic and ethnographic motives could be discerned behind this policy, but its’ basic foundation was ideas about cultural hierarchies, where the Sámi and Sámi culture were considered inferior to the more developed Swedish culture (Mörkenstam 2005, pp. 437-442). In the changing political climate in the aftermath of World War II, however, it was no longer possible to openly uphold policies based on ideas about cultural hierarchies; rather, the Sámi were to be assimilated into and integrated in the full-blown Swedish welfare state (Lantto & Mörkenstam 2008, pp. 34-35). Moreover, by the formation in 1950 of the first national Sámi

⁴ In this context it is worth noticing that there exist different and partially overlapping names for this northern region; the North Calotte, the Barents Region, and Sám̄i (Lantto 2010).

organization, the National Union of the Swedish Sámi (*Svenska Samernas Riksförbund, SSR*)—after half a century of political mobilization—the Sámi movement was strengthened. SSR challenged the Swedish policy in their claims that the Sámi had older usage of the land than the Swedish state, and that Sámi reindeer herding was based on Sámi rights to land and water. During the 1960's SSR started to justify Sámi rights in their capacity of being an indigenous people (Lantto 2000, pp. 91-95).

The political mobilisation of the Sámi was no doubt decisive for a transformation of the Swedish Sámi policy, and made the formal recognition of the Sámi as an indigenous people inevitable. In 1977 the Sámi people were recognised as an indigenous people and a minority in their own country by a Swedish government for the first time (Prop. 1976/77:80, p. 107).⁵ The recognition of the Sámi as an indigenous people put the right to self-determination on the political agenda, and the first article in the 1966 UN *International Convention on Civil and Political Rights* concerning the principle of “all peoples” right to self-determination was held to be an obvious starting-point in assessing Sámi rights claims (Johansson 2008, pp. 147-182; Mörkenstam 1999, pp. 191-224).⁶ In accordance with the international debate of the time, the right to self-determination was interpreted as a right of peoples subject to “classical colonialism”, according to the dominant “blue water thesis” (Anaya 2004, p. 54), and thus not applicable to peoples that had been subject to internal colonisation. It could be stated that there is a bias in international politics in formulating the right to self-determination for national groups in terms of territorial concentration, and thus excluding peoples or groups that are dispersed or nomadic. Theories of property has generally (since the days of John Locke) focused upon agricultural rights and not nomadic “property rights”, as the customary land use was not considered “a legitimate type of property” (Tully 1993, p. 139). Moreover, the rights of property have mainly focused upon individuals and so-called material values (Freeman 2011; Roth 2005). Article 27 of the same UN Convention was, however, found to apply to the Sámi. It enacts that in “those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language”. Although this UN article was primarily formulated in individual terms (“persons belonging to such minorities...”), in Swedish politics it was interpreted as a justification of collective rights: the Sámi had both a right “to reign over their cultural issues without involvement of the State (passive rights)”, and a right “to State support in order to maintain their cultural activities (active rights)” (SOU 1986:36, p. 131).⁷

This interpretation of international law justified the establishment of a Sámi Parliament in 1993. The newly formed parliament was given the status as an administrative authority under the Swedish Government.⁸ The idea behind this construction was to guarantee the Sámi people cultural autonomy, while making it absolutely clear that the parliament was not “a body of self-government” (Prop. 1992/93:32, p. 35). However, it is a popularly elected administrative authority and the parliament is assigned two different functions, both as an administrative authority whose tasks are strictly regulated by law and as a popularly elected parliament representing the Sámi people.⁹ This dual character of the

⁵ Prop. is an abbreviation of Proposition, Government Bill.

⁶ The first article of the 1966 UN International Convention on Civil and Political Rights states that: “All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.”

⁷ SOU is an abbreviation of Statens offentliga utredningar, Swedish Government Official Reports.

⁸ In comparison to the Sámi Parliaments in Finland and Norway, it appears as if the Swedish Sámi Parliament has a weaker position, although the organization of the parliaments is roughly the same (Josefsen 2007; Josefsen & Saglie 2011).

⁹ The general task of the Sámi Parliament is to act for a living Sámi culture. Substantially, it shall, among other things, allocate funding to cultural activities and Sámi organisations, appoint the Board of Directors for the Sámi School, guide and direct the work on the Sámi languages, and look after matters of special importance to the Sámi people (SFS 1992:1433: Ch. 2, Art. 1). Moreover, the Sámi Parliament shall keep track of, evaluate and keep the government informed on the development of the politics on national minorities and minority languages

Sámi Parliament and its close link to the Swedish state follow a well known pattern in Swedish politics, which traditionally has been imbued by “corporativism” in the sense that the Swedish state has been eager to define the conditions for the encounters with various interest and identity groups in a rather similar negotiation fashion (Rothstein 1992). This institutional design obviously has an inherent potential to create a clash of interest between these two different roles: as an administrative authority the Sámi Parliament ought to implement the policy of the Swedish government, and as a parliament elected by the Sámi people it ought to represent the will of its constituency (Lawrence & Mörkenstam 2012, pp. 43-45). In addition, with the status as an administrative authority, the parliament is not granted any actual political power, such as a right of participation in decision-making, veto-rights concerning administrative decisions, or independent sources of income (like taxation rights). The parliament’s opportunity to act on their own initiative is thus limited by the grants from the Swedish state, and as an administrative authority it ought to “observe objectivity” (SOU 1989:41, pp. 151-159, 305-311; Prop. 1992/93:32, p. 35). In 2010 the Sámi Parliament was allocated a total amount of 185 146 000 SEK, around 19 405 000 EUR (Prop. 2009/10:1), where all grants were directed towards its role as an administrative authority.

1.3. The political challenge

The Swedish Sámi Parliament represents the most radical institutionalized form of recognition of any minority group in Sweden. The parliament has, however, been severely criticised since its inauguration in 1993 both by the Sámi and the Swedish state. In the critique formulated by the Sámi organisations and the Sámi Parliament itself, the institutional design of the parliament and its incapacity to safeguard the Sámi people’s right to self-determination has been in focus (Sametinget 2004; Sametinget 2005; SSR 2011). As a consequence of the parliament’s limited mandate and its status as an administrative authority under the Swedish government, many of the members of parliament worry about the long-term legitimacy of the parliament within the Sámi constituency (Lawrence & Mörkenstam 2012, p. 45). Different polls conducted seem to support the anxieties of the MP’s. In a poll in 2008, for instance, only 24 percent of the electorate expressed a high or very high confidence in the Sámi Parliament, and 37 percent of the electorate had a low or very low confidence (Sametinget 2008). The critique from the Swedish state has mainly been directed towards the Sámi Parliament as an administrative authority in their exercise of public policy. The parliament has been criticised for wanting follow-up of its activities, for a lack of systematic planning of its activities, for unclear internal hierarchies, and for breaching its budget on several occasions (Statskontoret 2010:15, pp. 43-45). In addition, the parliament’s knowledge on different issues has been challenged, as well as their impartiality and objectivity as an administrative authority (Prop. 2005/06:86, pp. 36, 54; Wasara-Hammare 2002, pp. 159-160).

Bearing this critical stances in mind, our study contributes to new knowledge on the discourse surrounding the Sámi Parliament with its focus on the question if the Swedish recognition of the Sámi people is more limited then you might expect from a mere look at the institutional level. In a wider national context, our study contributes to the understanding of in what ways, if any, this sort of institutional arrangement challenge the tolerance in the (perceived) multicultural Swedish society. We will thereby discuss the boundaries of Swedish tolerance, and look closer into the coexistence of a range of public reforms of recognition on the one hand, and a discourse of intolerance, or a very limited tolerance, on the other. We believe that the case study of the Swedish Sámi Parliament is especially well chosen from this perspective. Firstly, and as mentioned before, it is the most radical form of recognition of any minority group in Sweden. Secondly, we believe that our case could be seen as a “most likely case” in terms of the chances of acceptance of specific institutional

(Contd.) _____

concerning the Sámi people and languages (SFS 2009:1395, Art. 2). The parliament is also responsible for a number of administrative tasks regarding the reindeer industry regulated in the Reindeer Grazing Act (SFS 1971:437).

arrangements for the representation of minority groups in Sweden in comparison to the other national minorities recognised in Sweden (Swedish Finns, Meänkielis, Romas, and Jews). Our reason for this presumption is that the Sámi people have been recognised as a specific group in Sweden for centuries, they have been an object in Swedish politics for more than a century, they are well integrated in the historical narrative of Sweden (although often founded on exoticism and stereotypical images) and they are recognised as an indigenous people.

In a European perspective our case is unique as well, as the Sámi is the only people living within European borders that are recognised as an indigenous people in accordance with international law, although there are specific institutional arrangements in Denmark for the Inuit's of Greenland as well (where Greenland, as a self-governing unit within the Danish realm, elects two members to the Danish Parliament). In addition, the institutionalisation of a popularly elected Sámi Parliament is also a quite radical reform in terms of recognition of a minority group in a wider European and international perspective. In a UN-report, for instance, the Sámi Parliaments in the Nordic countries were presented as important models “for indigenous self-governance and participation in decision-making that could inspire the development of similar institutions elsewhere in the world” (UN 2011, Art. 37).

2. Methodology

The news representation of the Sámi Parliament is in this article analysed in terms of the order of discourse—in the words of Michel Foucault (1972, p. 57)—as the “various rhetorical schemata according to which groups of statements may be combined (how descriptions, deductions, definitions, whose succession characterizes the architecture of a text, are linked together)”. These rhetorical schemata make the political discussion meaningful, since they compose a common understanding among the participants involved in debate. Hence, to become a serious participant in a specific discourse, it is necessary to share the common language in which reality is depicted and problems formulated. In this way the societal conceptions restrict (as well as enable) the policy conductible in a specific context. The dominating conceptions provide a logical field of possible political options—they prescribe how to act, think and express oneself—and thereby set normative limits for legitimate action. Moreover, the participant has to share the rules of evidence and prediction, i.e. to claims of truth. “Truth” is here “to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements” (Foucault 1989, p. 133). The knowledge produced and ordered in discourse authorise (political) action by defining what is to be considered as *valid* knowledge. Certain political measures and statements can thereby be either affirmed or rejected as being within discourse, whilst others are excluded beforehand.

As it follows from this more general approach, it makes no sense to consider the “objects” of a policy proposal or a public debate “as existing independently of the way they are spoken about or represented”; rather, we should focus on the “competing constructions of issues” that are involved in such a debate and “the ways in which these constructions leave other issues untouched” (Bacchi 1999, pp. 1-4). The purpose of this methodological approach is to reveal the assumptions that lie behind a certain representation of a problem as well as the effects that such a representation might produce. In this sense, our analysis can be seen as a form of social critique aiming for what Richard Rorty (2006, p. 61) has referred to as “the recognition of contingency,” i.e. to become aware of the essentially constructed and homogenizing character of the ideas and norms on which the social order is based. According to this view, once we realize that the predominant way of “conceptualizing the real” (Owen 2002, p. 216) is just one among many possible perspectives on the world, then it becomes possible to evaluate this conceptualization and to compare it with other points of view.

To be sure, we investigate only that part of the political debate which is reported in the daily press. It is thus difficult to determine whether the debate over the Sámi Parliament, as it is conducted in the public sphere dominated by the mass media, actually reflects ideas and beliefs of the wider community. Nevertheless it seems reasonable to assume that “collective actors operating outside the

political system or outside large organisations normally have fewer opportunities to influence the content and views presented in the media” (Habermas 1996, p. 377). Furthermore, irrespective of how the public sphere and the political system are related to each other, the way in which a controversial political issue is represented in news coverage will affect the way that this issue is dealt with at the level of political decision making (Hall 1997). Newsmakers and media are deeply involved in the process whereby some social practices are represented as part of the natural order while other such practices are constituted as problems: “In the view generally accepted by students of discourse and of political language, [news accounts] construct the social reality to which people respond and help construct the subjectivity of actors and spectators as well; in the process, they reinforce established power structures and value hierarchies” (Edelman 1988, p. 34).

While the media discourse in general can be seen as the most influential form of public discourse, this is particularly true for its role in the debate relating to ethnic affairs. As Teun van Dijk (2002, p. 152) argues, knowledge about ethnic minorities is largely based on information derived from the mass media: “Speakers routinely refer to television or newspapers as their source (and authority) of knowledge or opinions about ethnic minorities”, and the news in general and the press in particular “is at the basis of most beliefs about minorities”. Given the importance of the news media in shaping the opinion on ethnic minorities, one way to answer the first question posed in this study—if the Sámi right to self-determination is widely accepted in the Swedish society—is to focus on the media coverage of the Sámi Parliament. To explore and answer this we applied the following set of sub-questions to our material. Is the Sámi Parliament conceived of as a problem and if so: What is the problem represented to be? What is perceived to be the causes of this problem? And what are the consequences for the political representation of the Sámi?

2.1. The empirical analysis

In the present study, we have analyzed the media coverage of the Sámi Parliament in eight national and local daily newspapers during the years 2005, 2009-2011.¹⁰ We examined all the articles containing the term “Sameting/et” (Sámi Parliament), a number of 772 articles. The national papers, *Dagens Nyheter* (DN, liberal) and *Svenska Dagbladet* (SvD, conservative), are two of the most influential dailies in Sweden. The local newspapers were selected primarily to represent three counties in northern Sweden, Norrbotten, Västerbotten och Jämtland, traditionally inhabited by the Sámi people. The journals chosen, *Norrländska Socialdemokraten* (NSD, social democratic), *Norrbottens-Kuriren* (NK, conservative), *Norran* (N, liberal), *Västerbottens Folkblad* (VF, social democratic), *Västerbottens-Kuriren* (VK, liberal), and *Östersunds-Posten* (ÖP, center-right) are the most prominent local newspapers in these counties. In this context it is worth noticing that there are no local or regional daily newspapers in Sámi in Sweden.¹¹

Although our initial ambition was to cover all articles written on the Sámi Parliament in these eight dailies since its inauguration in 1993, we had to reduce our ambition somewhat due to the fact that only a few of the newspapers in question are digitalised and searchable for the entire period. Instead of covering all the years, and the whole year, we have chosen to analyse articles from the election years 1993, 1997, and 2001 (two elections) ten days before and ten days after the elections (in addition to the analysis of all articles in our eight dailies during the election years 2005 and 2009, and the non-

¹⁰ One newspaper, Västerbottens Folkblad (VF), was only analysed the years 2009-2011.

¹¹ The situation in Finland is the same, while there are two Sámi newspapers in Norway (Josefsen & Skogerbø 2011; Pietikäinen 2008), although only one of them is in Sámi. Research on the Sámi public sphere in conjunction with the election to the Sámi Parliament in Norway 2009, shows however that the regional and local newspapers (in Norwegian) was considerably more important as sources of information for the Sámi electorate during the election campaign than Sámi newspapers (Karlsen 2011).

election years 2010 and 2011),¹² a number of 479 articles. For the first three election years we have used the *Sámi Press Archive* (SPA, which contains clippings from 1966 to 2002) in order to get a more comprehensive picture, thus using all articles published in any Swedish journal during the period of our study.¹³ Altogether we analysed a total number of 1251 articles.

Furthermore, we started out by making an analysis of the headlines of all the articles published in three non-election years (1994, 2000, and 2011), where we used the SPA for the first two years and our eight dailies for the last.

3. The Sámi Parliament in Swedish press

A first indication of how the Sámi Parliament is depicted in the media can be obtained by looking at the range of topics covered in the newspaper articles. As stated by van Dijk (2000, p. 38), “since topics express the most important information of a text [...] they are also best understood and memorized by the readers”. The major theme of an article is typically expressed in the title, as “[h]eadlines summarize the most important information of a news report, and hence also express its main topic” (van Dijk 2002, p. 152). Earlier research show that news reports about ethnic minorities may be biased in the sense that they rely on negative stereotypes. In other words, minorities are often portrayed in terms of a very limited set of topics (van Dijk 2002, p. 152). To get an impression of what kind of topics the Sámi Parliament was associated with in the media we examined a total of 217 articles that mentioned the word “Sameting/et” in the headline in three different non-election years. The number of articles was quite stable over the years, just like the number of topics (some of the headlines gave expression to more than one topic): in 1994 there were 77 articles that contained “Sameting/et” in the headline and 97 topics, in 2000 there were 62 articles and 90 topics, and in 2011 we found 78 articles and 108 topics.

When we sorted the headlines we found two dominant topics (see Table 1.). The first concerned the performance of the parliament as an administrative authority; the second described the political (in)stability of the parliament and thus evolved around its role as a representative body of the Sámi people. The other topics we found, although rarely, concerned the cultural identity of the Sámi people, the construction of a new building for the Sámi Parliament and public grants.

Table 1. *Topics in the 1994, 2000 and 2011 Swedish newspaper coverage of the Sámi Parliament (percentage in brackets).*

Topics	1994	2000	2011
Administrative performance	26 (26,8%)	31 (34,4%)	50 (46,3%)
Political stability	56 (57,7%)	33 (36,7%)	50 (46,3%)
Cultural identity	4 (4,1%)	8 (8,9%)	1 (0,9%)
Parliament building	2 (2,1%)	4 (4,4%)	5 (4,6%)
Public grants	5 (5,2%)	4 (4,4%)	0
Other topics	4 (4,1%)	10 (11,1%)	2 (1,9%)
Total:	97 (100%)	90 (100%)	108 (100%)

The conclusions that can be drawn from this examination of newspaper headlines are of course rather limited. However, it is obvious that the media discourse on the Sámi Parliament is characterized by a very limited set of topics out of which the political instability and the administrative performance of

¹² Two of the newspapers, Dagens Nyheter (DN) and Västerbottens-Kuriren (VK), has been analysed the whole year, all the election years since 1993, one newspaper, Svenska Dagbladet (SvD), since 1997 and Östersundsposten (ÖP) since 2001.

¹³ We analysed a total amount of 301 articles from the Sámi Press Archive (SPA), in addition to 178 articles from DN, VK, SvD and ÖP.

the parliament are most prominent. This is not too surprising as these topics obviously spring out of the dual role of the parliament as both representative body of the Sámi people and as an administrative authority under the Swedish government. More interesting, however, is that these topics tend to be conceptualised as major problems and represented in a negatively biased way, as is often the case in news reporting on ethnic minorities, where minorities most often are problematised and associated with negatively valued phenomena, such as welfare dependence, unemployment and crime (Brune 2004; Pietikäinen 2003; van Dijk 1993). As for the political stability of the parliament, for instance, headlines that refer to what can be considered as the normal activity of the parliament—“The Sámi Parliament adopted the budget proposal” (N, 110225), “Unanimous no to the EU at the Sámi Parliament” (TT, 941025), or “The Sámi Parliament sent a statement by fax to the Swedish Riksdag [the national assembly]” (TT, 940316)—are rather uncommon.¹⁴ Instead, most of the examined headlines tend to focus on negative attributes such as: “‘Pure Balkan war in the Sámi Parliament’—a negotiator sorts out the chaos” (NV, 000112), “Devastating critique of the Chairman of the Sámi Parliament” (NSD, 940119), and “Severe divisiveness within the Board of the Sámi Parliament” (VK, 110202).

A similar news reporting is apparent in the case of the administrative performance of the parliament. Neutral or positive headlines such as: “New Chief Secretary of the Sámi Parliament appointed temporarily” (NSD, 111117), or “Larger secretariat will make the Sámi Parliament even stronger” (ÖP, 940318) are rather infrequent, while negative headlines such as “Bad handling of matters by the Sámi Parliament” (NK, 110715), or “Several of the County’s Sámi villages gives the Sámi Parliament a reprimand on the delimitations” (VK, 110323) are far more common. In a wider Swedish media discourse, this is a common way to represent northern Sweden, where “the focus on negative news is symptomatic [...] Rather than focusing the attention on underlying historical and structural factors that contribute to some of the problems faced by the region, the problems are often understood in terms of cultural and lifestyle differences between the north and the south of Sweden” (Eriksson 2008, p. 379).¹⁵

If we wish to understand how the Sámi Parliament is depicted in the media discourse, however, our headline analysis will only give us part of the answer. In order to provide a more thorough analysis and in order to deal adequately with our three sub-questions we have to examine the press coverage of the Sámi Parliament in more detail. In the following we will thus primarily focus on “the ways in which ‘social problems’ are represented and what follows from these representations” (Bacchi 1999, p. 6). And in doing so we will use our headline analysis—and the two dominant topics we found—as a methodological tool in our categorisation of the articles. What news representations are produced and reproduced within the media discourse? What is taken for granted and thus not critically examined?

3.1. Conceptions of the Sámi Parliament: the problems and their causes

When we now turn our attention to the more comprehensive analysis of the Swedish press and its coverage of the Sámi Parliament, it is clear that the “Sameting” is conceptualised as a problem mainly in terms of its political instability or its weak administrative performance. It is, however, important to note that the parliament is not always represented as a problem, after all a substantial part of the news reports about the parliament deals with issues such as resolutions and election results without referring to or evaluating its performance or capacity. Nevertheless, a high proportion of the media coverage portrays the parliament as a problem. In the years we have analysed, between 25 to 50 percent of the articles that contained the word “sameting/et” portrayed the parliament as problematic (see Table 2.), either in terms of its political instability or in terms of its administrative performance. But what kind of problem is the parliament represented to be?

¹⁴ All quotations are translated by the authors.

¹⁵ In Finland the North is represented in a similar fashion (Pietikäinen & Hujanen 2003).

Table 2. Articles representing the Sámi Parliament (SP) as problematic or neutral in years with more than 100 articles analysed, 2001, 2005, 2009, 2010 and 2011 (total number of articles in brackets).

Year	2001	2005	2009	2010	2011
Total no. of topics	126 (114)	156 (141)	300 (279)	192 (181)	179 (171)
SP as a problem	50,8%	30,8%	26,3%	30,7%	42,5%
Neutral	49,2%	69,2%	73,7%	69,3%	57,5%

3.1.1. The Sámi Parliament as a representative body of the Sámi people

The first issue around which the Swedish Sámi Parliament is portrayed as a problem in the media has to do with its function as a representative body of the Sámi people. This critique evolves around the political instability of the parliament. For instance, the last election to the Sámi Parliament took place in May 2009, and in the outcome of the election the 31 parliamentary seats were distributed among 8 different political parties, leaving the parliament with an unstable majority. As a consequence of this parliamentary situation, the parliament has been characterised by political turbulence and changed president four times in a little more than two years, something that has been widely covered by the media. There are in the news coverage four different ways of explaining this instability of the parliament.

In the first, the political instability is explained as a consequence of the institutional design of the parliament related to its dual roles, its weak political power and the lack of an election threshold. According to a political scientist who is quoted in *Östersunds-Posten*, for instance, the political instability has to do with the structural design of the parliament as "both an administrative authority and a representative assembly, a combination actually impossible in Swedish legislation or in the Swedish political system". As she continues to argue, the role of the Sámi Parliament has to be strengthened, because "if one had anything to decide upon, then one would not have the time to quarrel about how decisions are to be made or about rules of procedures here and there; rather, one should probably spend time to actually make the decisions" (ÖP, 110525). This conceptualisation of the political instability as related to the institutional design of the parliament is to be found in a few news reports every year covered by our analysis. Back in 2001, for instance, *Dagens Nyheter* published an editorial in which it was argued that: "The Sámi Parliament that was inaugurated by Unckel [Per Unckel, former Minister with responsibilities for Sámi issues, 1991-1994] is an impossible construction both for administration and conflict solution [...] Not a single one of the prerequisites needed for a political assembly to function were at hand for the Sámi Parliament" (DN, 010107). The institutional design was also criticised in the Umeå-based paper *Västerbottens-Kuriren* the day before the first election in 1993: "No electoral threshold like the one to get into the Riksdag exists [...] The Sámi Parliament thus runs the risk of being divided into many separate camps" (VK, 930517). Reports in which the Sámi Parliament is represented mainly as a problem caused by its institutional design are, however, marginal within the media discourse. As a matter of fact, we have found only 34 articles (or 3,3 percent of the total number of articles) containing a similar approach during the whole period of analysis. In 2011 only about 2 percent of the articles portrayed the parliament in such a way.¹⁶

Secondly, and more commonly, the political instability of the parliament is described as a consequence of persistent and unsolvable political cleavages between the Sámi political parties. This explanation was particularly evident in the media coverage of the elections in 1993, i.e. prior to the inauguration of the parliament. The most influential Swedish news agency, *TT*, made a notice of the first Sámi election

¹⁶ In addition to the article referred to above, see NSD, 110114, 110525 and VK, 110521.

in the following way: "On Sunday the Swedish Sámi will for the first time vote to elect their own Sámi Parliament. The election campaign gives witness to divisiveness among the Sámi." (TT, 930513). In a report published in *Norrländska Socialdemokraten* a few days before the election it was stated that "in the around 15 issues that will be discussed in the Sámi Parliament the disagreement is complete" (NSD, 930511). The number of political parties in the election was commented on by many observers. A civil servant working for the municipality of Kiruna, where the parliament is situated, was for instance quoted arguing that: "I reckon that there are good reasons for the Sámi to consider what they are doing. Thirteen parties indicate divisiveness instead of the unity needed" (NSD, 930513). Furthermore, one day prior to the election, the same newspaper published a similar statement by the Swedish Prime Minister [Carl Bildt]: "But it worries me that there are as many as 13 parties. I do hope that you can stand united, he said" (NSD, 930516).¹⁷ But, as is was claimed in another article, "the Sámi will not admit that the many parties running for election are a sign of division" (VF, 930514).

This way of explaining the political instability as a consequence of fierce conflicts between the political parties has dominated the media coverage of the Sámi Parliament ever since its inauguration. In a typical presentation of the political debate which preceded the 1997 election *Svenska Dagbladet* reports: "For an untrained ear it sounds as if the parties support the same things: to strengthen the Sámi culture, to raise the knowledge of their own language, to represent the interests of the hunting, fishing and reindeer industry and to increase the unity among the Sámi of today. However, it does not take long for Börje Allas [representative of the party *Samisk solidaritet*] [...] to criticise the other parties for representing special interests" (SVD, 970413). Similarly, in *Norrländska Socialdemokraten*'s coverage of a debate among the party leaders before the elections in May 2001: "The heat is up before the election to the Sámi Parliament. Tuesday evening there was a final debate between the party leaders. The reindeer industry was in focus. [...] The debate was good as the concepts of 'sandpit' and 'throwing pies' [Swedish expressions for real low forms of argumentation], well-known to the Sámi MPs, was kept out of the door of the Community Centre" (NK, 010517).

In addition to this focus on the seemingly irreconcilable division between the Sámi political parties, the third way the media reports explain the political instability is by stressing the stubborn unwillingness among the parliamentarians to agree upon compromises. This has frequently been the case the last few years. Regarding the development following the election in 2009 for instance, the Luleå-based newspaper *Norbottens-Kuriren* described the parliamentary situation in terms of a severe crisis: "The crisis in the Sámi Parliament is fundamental. The opposition parties now demand that a new Board is elected at the next plenary session". The same article continued by reporting that "the opposition" declared that "they will not attend the discussions on matters concerning the organisation of the Sámi Parliament, the management of the secretariat or on politically sensitive matters. With this, the Board will not be able to make decisions since it is not numerous enough to make decisions according to the Sámi Parliament Act" (NK, 110405). A similar depiction was to be found in several reports, for instance, in *Norrländska Socialdemokraten*: "The work of the Sámi Parliament has got completely wrecked. The result of the conflicts is that almost no decisions are made this year. [...] At the Board meeting March 21 we had 40 matters, but one of the members refused to sign. Now in April we had 85 matters, says Ingrid Inga [President of the Sámi Parliament]. 'It is completely unacceptable that some members do not participate in meetings or refuse to discuss certain matters'" (NSD, 110507).¹⁸ Why this crisis appears, was in one of the articles above explained by quoting an MP, claiming that the Sámi were not "ready to submit to the democratic system" (NK, 110405).

¹⁷ See also NK, 930507, 930512, 930515; NSD, 930507, 930512; SVD, 930514; TT, 930513, 930525, 930526; ÖP, 930526.

¹⁸ For similar reports, see for instance NK, 110202, 110506; NSD, 110202, 110208, 110420, 110524; VK, 110202, 110219, 110325, 110331, 110506; and N, 110506, 110901.

To be sure, while such news reports has been particularly frequent during the last few years, the depiction of the political instability as a consequence of an absence of political will to compromise has been a recurring theme in the media coverage. "If it is anything the election to the Sámi Parliament on Sunday ought to result in, more than a democratic distribution of votes between parties, it is more cooperation and less conflict" (NSD, 970520), reported one newspaper in conjunction to the 1997 election. In a report from a plenary session the same year this unwillingness to compromise was once more in focus: "The Sámi Parliament in Malå was disrupted Friday when several matters were still at the agenda. Now it is a huge quarrel about the proceedings. It is very unfortunate that the Sámi Parliament is paralysed by conflicts on regulations and procedural issues" (VK, 971118).

The political instability of the parliament is, finally, often described as a result of a personal antagonism between the Sámi MPs. In fact, media reporting of the parliament often focuses on this kind of quarrel between individual politicians. In an article describing a political debate before the election in 1993 between candidates from different political parties, *Norrländska Socialdemokraten* wrote: "What instigated the irritation in Kiruna was that Nils-Gustav Labba had accepted to lead the debate, in spite of being on the list of *Samernas riksförbund*. Nisse Sarri and Lars-Wilhelm Svonni were two of the persons protesting. [...] *Renägareförbundets* Nils Valkeanpää and *Jakt- och fiskesamernas* Håkan Jonsson were quarrelling with each other in a discussion on reindeer" (NSD, 930507).¹⁹ This description sometimes involves officials employed by the Sámi Parliament as well. For instance, *Östersunds-Posten* reports that: "Nils-Gustav Labba, Head of the Sámi Information Centre, has been fired. [...] He himself claims that the dismissal was an act of revenge and describes it as a personal vendetta" (ÖP, 110916).²⁰ Confirming this depiction of the parliament, towards the end of 2011, some of the analyzed newspapers referred to a poll which indicated that many of the publicly elected politicians had experienced personal threats during the plenary sessions: "One third of the members of the Sámi Parliament feel threatened during the sessions" (NK, 111219).²¹

There are thus two different ways to explain this problem (and its sources) within the news discourse. In the first, the problem is considered to be external to the Sámi Parliament, as it is the institutional design of the parliament that hampers its representative capacity and constrains the political parties and the MPs. In the second way to explain the limited representative capacity, the problem is considered to be internal to the parliament. In this view the problem is typically represented to be a result of a persistent and unsolvable conflict between the political parties, a firm unwillingness to compromise or a personal antagonism between the MPs. As we have seen, the first way to explain the limited representative capacity of the Sámi Parliament is marginal within the media discourse. It is the internal explanation that dominates, and it is important to point out that the order of discourse remains more or less unchanged during the period of our study. National and local news coverage through the monitored period is deeply characterized by such reports.

These different ways to explain the problems have, however, further implications, as they—implicitly or explicitly—define who to blame and, by default, indicate how the identified problems are to be solved. If, for instance, the problem is considered to be external, the blame for the defects of the parliament is basically to be put on the Swedish state and it is primarily the design of the parliament that ought to be in focus of the discussion and, in a wider perspective, Swedish Sámi policy at large. But if the problem is considered to be internal, the blame is to be put on the Sámi. In this perspective, the discussions tend to focus on the political parties and the individual MPs as elected representatives rather than the institutional prerequisites for their actual work.

¹⁹ See also NSD, 930511; 930512; NK, 930507; 930512.

²⁰ See also VF, 110917.

²¹ See VK, 111220. See also NSD, 110524; N, 110901.

3.1.2. The Sámi Parliament as an administrative authority

The second way in which the Swedish Sámi Parliament is represented as a problem has to do with its function as an administrative authority, where the general opinion is that its administrative performance is weak. There are several ways to explain this poor performance within the media discourse. The first describes the parliament as a whole as characterized by chaos and disorder. This approach, in which the parliament's ability to function in a normal way is put into question, is frequently encountered in the media coverage and was a recurrent theme during the period of our study. In such news reports the depiction of the Sámi Parliament as chaotic and disordered is often closely related to the portrayal of the political instability of the parliament. This has especially been the case during the last few years. Following the 2009 elections, the coverage of the political turbulence is often accompanied by observations of how this affected the administrative efficiency of the parliament. As reported, for instance, by *Västerbottens-Kuriren*: "The division in the Board of the Sámi Parliament is more profound than ever, and this brawl may now result in a paralysed exercise of public authority" (VK, 110506). Similarly, *Norrländska Socialdemokraten* wrote that: "The handling in the Board of the Sámi Parliament has got completely wrecked. [...] The disputes in the Sámi Parliament have caused the work of the administrative authority to cease almost completely" (NSD, 110507).²²

This way of explaining the problem is thus quite similar to the way in which the representative capacity of the parliament is framed as a problem of political stability, something which is hardly surprising, given the dual function of the Sámi Parliament. Indeed, in the media representation of the parliament as a problem it was often unclear whether the reports were intended at its function as an administrative authority or its role as a popularly elected parliament. This was most clearly the case in the early press coverage of the parliament. A few months after the general elections in May 1993 *Västerbottens-Kuriren* described the activities during the first session of the Sámi Parliament in these terms: "Already when the agenda was about to be affirmed there was a general confusion [...] How could the parliament function if the division paraded at the nominations continues?" (VK, 930828). Prior to the 1997 election the Skellefteå based newspaper *Norra Västerbotten* referred to a Sámi MP who compared the proceedings of the parliament to a cancer: "We have failed in designing the Sámi Parliament and its working regulations" (NV, 970513).²³ A few years later, another MP was interviewed in the Luleå daily *Norrbottens-Kuriren*, and to the question whether "the Sámi Parliament had found its work model and routines" he answered: "No, it is more turbulent than ever as a result of our re-organisation and we have a temporarily appointed Chief Secretary. We have never experienced more disorder. The Board can not keep the budget [...]" (NK, 050509). Although the description of the parliament as characterized by chaos and disorder was a recurrent theme during the entire period of our study, it was particularly characteristic of the media coverage surrounding the two elections in 2001. Prior to the first election that year, it was, for instance, stated in the tabloid *Expressen* that: "Following four chaotic years characterised by endless procedural issues, defections, and mugwumps that have barred all decisions, it is election to the Sámi Parliament on Sunday. [...] The last length of office can be summarised in one word. Chaos" (E, 010518).²⁴

²² See also NK, 110406, 110421, 110506; N, 110219, 110506, 110901; NSD, 110202, 110326, 110420, 110524, 110527; VF, 110507, 110510, 110526; VK, 110202, 110219, 110325, 110413, 110622. Similar reports were published in 2010. See for example NK, 100224; N, 100526; NSD, 100223, 100224, 100527, 100924; VK, 100225.

²³ For other reports which described the Sámi Parliament as characterized by chaos and which were published this year, see DN, 970326; 970518; NSD, 970531; VK, 971112, 971118.

²⁴ A large number of similar reports were published this same year. See for example DN, 010131, 010206, 010412, 011104; SVD, 011102; VK, 010219, 010222, 010227, 010412, 010530, 010606, 010901, 011023, 011215; ÖP, 010531, 011129.

The second way of explaining the Sámi Parliament's administrative performance within the media discourse is to characterise it as weak due to its bureaucratic inexperience or managerial incompetence. While not as frequently mentioned as the issue discussed here above, the view of the administrative apparatus as unprofessional and unskilled is well established in the news reports that we have analyzed. Above all, a large amount of such reports was published in connection with the second election to the Sámi Parliament in November 2001. As noted in an editorial of *Västerbottens-Kuriren*, with reference to the decision to declare the May election invalid: "It is regrettable that the election officials were not sufficiently trained and it was definitely a mistake by the election committee to count invalid votes" (VK, 010713). According to the same newspaper: "Despite the review the election committee is still in office, but they have now participated in a course to manage the requirements better" (VK, 011102). Or, as a Sámi MP summarized her opinion in *Dagens Nyheter*: "It is a pity that we can not go through with an election" (DN, 010712).²⁵

The representation of the administration as incompetent was a common theme in newspapers from 2010 and 2011 as well. In a recent report in *Norbottens-Kuriren*, for instance, suspicion was cast upon the impartiality of the President: "The President of the Sámi Parliament [...] used an incorrect and a preliminary record to get rid of the Chief Secretary" (VK, 110331). According to a letter published in Skellefteå daily *Norran*, moreover, the members of the Board of the Sámi Parliament are not qualified for the task to "make decisions of importance for all of Sápmi. [...] How is it possible that the representatives of the Sámi Parliament behave like sulky and obstinate children in pre-school?" (N, 111119).²⁶

The third explanation within media is closely related to the first two insofar as the representation of the parliament's administrative performance as a problem is expressed in terms of its incompetence or bad organization. In articles which adhere to the third version of this discourse though, the assumptions regarding the week performance of the parliament is reinforced by making reference to external authorities such as the Parliamentary Ombudsman (JO). The reason for treating such media coverage as a separate category in this study has to do with a sudden increase in the number of articles which represent the parliament as a problem in such a way. Following the legislative change in 2007 to transfer part of the responsibility for the reindeer husbandry to the Sámi Parliament and thus to make the parliament a central administrative agency under the Ministry for Rural Affairs, criticism against the management of issues such as the compensation for damages caused by wild animals and land conflicts has resulted in a growing number of complaints regarding the administrative performance of the parliament. In 2010 and 2011, when most of the media coverage was focused on the issue of the political instability of the Sámi Parliament, a considerable amount of articles was published in which the administrative performance was represented as a problem in such a way. As it, for example, was reported by *Norbottens-Kuriren*: "A private individual has reported the Sámi Parliament to the Parliamentary Ombudsman, JO, after waiting 14 months before his appeal of a decision was redirected to the court" (NK, 110603). Similarly, according to *Norrländska Socialdemokraten*: "The Parliamentary Ombudsman (JO) criticises the Sámi Parliament in four cases for slow handling or negligence of managing cases" (NSD, 111107).²⁷

In *Norrländska Socialdemokraten*, *Norbottens-Kuriren* and *Västerbottens-Kuriren*, the three papers with the largest coverage of the Sámi Parliament during this period, the presence of such problem

²⁵ See also DN, 010725, 010914, 011101, 011105; SVD, 010712, 011101; VK, 010403, 010530, 010712a, 010712b, 010914; ÖP, 010727, 011105. Compare the reporting about the "lost" votes after the 1997 election. For instance NK, 970527; TT, 970527; NK, 970530.

²⁶ See also NSD, 110502; VK, 110219, 110325. See also the following articles from 2010: NK, 100118; NSD, 100119. The denigrating images that often accompanied the appearance of Sámi officials and parliamentarians in the press were frequently augmented by reader comments appearing below the article in the on-line version of the paper.

²⁷ See also NK, 110128, 110329, 110715, 111107; N, 111107; NSD, 110129; VF, 110428, 110716; VK, 110312, 110323, 110429, 110603, 111110; ÖP, 110318.

representations is quite clear. The amount of such reports published prior to this period was negligible. For *Norrländska Socialdemokraten* the share of the total number of reports which described the Sámi Parliament as a problem in this way were 17 percent in 2009, 5 in 2010 and 13 in 2011. The figures for *Norrbottens-Kuriren* were 20, 25 and 29 percent respectively while for *Västerbottens-Kuriren* the figures were 53, 66 and 26 percent.

In our view, these three explanations of the weak administrative performance of the Sámi Parliament should be understood as different expressions of the same dominant discourse. According to our analysis of the news, the vast majority of the articles tend to frame the problem in terms of a lack of professional competence or a general disorder in the main functions of government. However, as was the case with the issue of the parliament's function as a representative body, there exists a marginal alternative explanation emphasising that the weak administrative performance is to be understood as a consequence of the institutional design of the parliament. This counter discourse could, for instance, be illustrated by an article published in the Skellefteå-based newspaper *Norra Västerbotten* in 1997, quoting a Sámi MP arguing that: "This clash of interests between being an administrative authority and at the same time popularly elected to represent the Sámi is the origin of conflicts. [...] Sometimes the state is our partner and sometimes our adversary" (NV, 970515). A few years later, the Luleå daily newspaper *Norrbottens-Kuriren* wrote that the "complaints about the disorder in the parliament and that it does not work" is unfair to the Sámi Parliament as many "parliaments have not found their structure in ten, twenty years" (NK, 050508). This way of framing the problem is, however, almost completely absent in the news coverage as a whole. During the course of the 1997 election for example, only about 5% of the articles (4 of the 78 articles in the *SPA* from that period) can be categorized as examples of such a discourse.²⁸ Indeed, most articles which describe the administrative capacity as a problem do not indicate any institutional explanation at all.

As in the case of the depiction of the representative capacity of the Sámi Parliament we have to make a distinction between two general assumptions regarding the causes of this problem. Within the terms of the dominant discourse, the weak performance is assumed to result from individual incompetence of the members of parliament or the functionaries, immature behaviour or a not fully developed organisation and—as we have seen in the media coverage of the political instability—a further explanation could be strong and deeply engrained internal divisions between the subgroups of the Sámi population. The weak performance is thus explained by internal flaws. The alternative explanation to this problem is once again explained in terms of the institutional design of the parliament, i.e. external factors. The conclusion is thus similar to the analysis of the other problematic topic within the media discourse: if the problem is formulated as an internal problem, the Sámi officials are the ones to blame for the defects of the parliament.

And once again it is important to note that the order of discourse remains more or less unchanged during the period of our study, although the weakness of the parliament's administrative performance appears to be increasingly emphasised as the parliament gets more administrative tasks to handle.

3.2. The media discourse and its consequences for the political representation of the Sámi

If we return to our research questions it appears as if the recognition of the Sámi as an indigenous people is widely accepted in the news representations of the Sámi Parliament, and the parliament in itself and the Sámi right to self-determination are not explicitly challenged. In the media discourse, however, a consensus can be found on the limited capacity of the Sámi Parliament to function as a representative body of the Sámi people and on its weak administrative performance, which—if true—must be considered to be serious problems. In this article our ambition is not to discuss or evaluate the accuracy of the dominant conception of the Sámi Parliament as malfunctioning; rather, our aim is to

²⁸ In addition we have gathered data from three newspapers for the entire year of 1997. Of the 60 articles inspected only 1 represented the Sámi Parliament as a problem in such a way.

analyse further the consequences of the dominant explanations to this problem within the media discourse as it is put forward in terms of persistent and unsolvable conflicts between the political parties, a firm unwillingness to compromise or personal antagonism between the MPs (its political instability), or individual incompetence of the members of parliament or the functionaries, immature behaviour or a not fully developed organisation (its weak administrative performance).

Our starting-point here is how this way of formulating the problem puts the blame mainly on the Sámi themselves, and not on the institutional design of the parliament, i.e. on the relation between the Sámi people and the Swedish state. On the one hand, this massive critique formulated in the media discourse could be seen as legitimate and a fulfilment of one of the major tasks of the media: to critically scrutinise political and administrative power. From this point of view a malfunctioning Sámi Parliament ought rightfully to be criticised, just like any other publicly elected body in Sweden (or elsewhere), and the elected MPs have to take their responsibility. Moreover, our analysis of the media discourse on the Sámi Parliament only gives some support to the report from the Swedish Ombudsman against Ethnic Discrimination, which shows that the Sámi in Sweden often perceive the picture conveyed by the press as degrading: “The Sámi complain that it is quite legitimate to joke about the Sámi on the basis of racist and prejudiced conceptions. Descriptions of the Sámi are also based on such conceptions and the Sámi are often depicted as an exotic, frock-wearing people or as being a reactionary group dependent on social welfare” (DO 2008, p. 33). Although the discourse is characterised by a stereotypical understanding of the Sámi, in terms of personal antagonism, democratic immaturity, incompetence or immature behaviour, there are no overtly racist conceptions to be found in the news representations, and no explicit exoticism.²⁹ A derogatory use of language is, however, present in the news representations, as Sámi politicians and political debates are described by using words such as “sandpit”, “throwing pies”, or “pre-school children”, but such descriptions are probably common also in news coverage of the Swedish Riksdag and the local parliaments.

Furthermore, the media discourse might be interpreted as mainly, or at least partly, reflecting an internal Sámi debate, not the attitudes of the dominant Swedish society, as the articles often refer to or quote Sámi MPs and civil servants. However, the internal Sámi debate is much more complex than what is usually represented in the media, something that is evident in a letter by Sara Larsson, a member of the Sámi Parliament and former President, published in *Västerbottens-Kuriren*. In the letter she identifies three reasons in order to explain the persistence of difficulties related to the parliament’s dual functions: “The first is the division between reindeer herding and non-reindeer herding Sámi. The second is the construction of the Sámi Parliament as both a representative body and an administrative authority. The third and decisive reason is the lack of leadership” (VK, 110521).³⁰ Earlier research also confirms that the Sámi MPs are worried about how the parliament works in both its roles, but a fundamental problem according to them is the unsolved question of how the Sámi right to self-determination ought to be interpreted and what it would mean in the day-to-day life of the Sámi Parliament (Lawrence & Mörkenstam 2012, pp. 43-45, 48-50).

On the other hand, this one-sided news representation is problematic, and has consequences for the political representation of the Sámi, especially in a context where the right to self-determination—what it means and ought to mean—is negotiated and re-negotiated in political practice. Firstly, this massive critical stance towards the Sámi Parliament in the media discourse, in which the blame is put on the Sámi MPs themselves, could contribute to the lack of trust in the parliament and thus undermine its political legitimacy within the Sámi community. Although the Sámi MPs and civil

²⁹ Reports from Finland demonstrate similar experiences of the news coverage as “biased” and based on “[s]tereotypical representations of the Sami”, but in Finland the news reports are also shown to be explicitly “anti-Sami in character” (Pietikäinen 2003, p. 587), something that is not present in the Swedish media discourse. It is worth noticing here that our analysis is limited to the media coverage of the Sámi Parliament and in news representation on other issues the descriptions may differ considerably.

³⁰ See also, VK, 110521; NSD, 110114, 110525; NSD, 100625; VK, 100217.

servants are partly responsible for the political instability of the parliament and its weak performance, something that they are well aware of, they also emphasise the parliament's dual roles and limited mandate as undermining the trust in the parliament, as both factors delimit the right to self-determination drastically. And this perspective is something that is completely ignored in the media discourse. Moreover, this lack of trust was also something that in itself was considered to be news and as such recurrently made by reference to various polls. In 2011, for instance, *Västerbottens Folkblad* stated that: "Following the turbulence lately in the Sámi Parliament the voters seem to have lost their trust in the activity. Half of the Sámi voters report that they have a low or very low trust in the political work of the Sámi Parliament during this length of office" (VF, 110524).³¹

In this context it is worth noticing that there are almost no explanations of the perceived political instability of the Sámi Parliament by comparing the parliamentary situation to other popularly elected parliaments. The political instability following the 2009 election could, for instance, easily be interpreted as a common problem to all parliaments or assemblies facing an unstable majority. In such a context, the political turbulence could be explained as part of democracy and especially of democratic electoral systems based on proportional representation without an election threshold (see, e.g., Lijphart 2008). Furthermore, political cleavages have been an important part of election studies for a long time, where particular conflicts are understood in a larger societal context and as a natural part of politics (see, e.g.; Lipset & Rokkan 1967). This larger context was, however, marginal in the news representations, although decisive in order to understand the every-day work of the Sámi Parliament. Some cleavages concern the relation to the Swedish state and the contemporary legislation (like the right to self-determination, land rights and fishing and hunting rights) and others are internal to the Sámi community (like geography, or livelihood) (Bergh & Saglie 2011; Lawrence & Mörkenstam 2012).

Secondly, with a popularly elected Sámi Parliament, the media has a more important role as access to information is decisive in order for the constituents to be able to practice their democratic rights (Dahl 1989). There must be some kind of public sphere where a debate between different options can take place. Voters need information about the parliament and the political parties to make informed choices, and in national elections the contact between constituents and politicians comes mainly through the media (Asp 1986; Norris 2000). According to the standard account of the relation between the media and the public sphere, the public sphere is dependent on the free press in order to fulfil its function to discover and draw attention to important social problems. Depending on whether this relation is approached from a normative or a descriptive point of view, it can be understood either as a condition for enlightenment and liberation or as a source of oppression. According to Jürgen Habermas (1996, p. 359), the public sphere must "not only detect and identify problems but also convincingly and influentially thematize them, furnish them with possible solutions, and dramatize them in such a way that they are taken up and dealt with by parliamentary complexes". According to our analysis, the Sámi public sphere in Sweden seems not only to be limited to a few topics (however important these topics may be) and characterised by negative reporting; different interpretations of events and further background information were seldom to be found in the news representation.³² Thus, important political problems on the political agenda of the Sámi Parliament—like the right to self-determination, language rights or the right to land and water—were rarely mentioned and the role of the dominant Swedish society was consistently ignored.³³

³¹ The same poll was referred to in NSD, 110524 and N, 110526.

³² A similar pattern appears to be prevailing in the news discourse in Finland (Pietikäinen 2003), while the election study of the 2009 election to the Sámi Parliament in Norway unequivocally shows that there exists a Sámi public sphere exclusively for Sámi politics and political debate in Norway (Josefsen & Skogerbø 2011).

³³ Our analysis does not exclude that these kind of political problems were discussed in other articles, as we have only analysed articles on the Sámi Parliament. However, even if we could find articles on these highly topical issues, it would be interesting that they are not discussed as important issues to the representative body of the Sámi people.

This way of making the topical political questions invisible could, thirdly, be interpreted as a way to de-politicise Sámi issues. De-politicisation means that some questions are made non-negotiable or unproblematic. Problems and conflicts are formulated in personal and individual terms rather than as matters of collective concern, i.e. as political (Wendt 2012, pp. 17-18). In the news representation of the Sámi this de-politicisation is made in two different ways (besides the already mentioned neglect of topical issues of concern to the Sámi people): the focus of the articles is often on internal and personal conflicts among the Sámi, while neglecting the major conflict between the Sámi people and the Swedish State; and the different political ideals among the Sámi and the political parties are not considered to be a sign of a healthy democracy, what is explicitly required from the Sámi is unity on all issues. The media discourse thus provides a very limited field of possible political options—to use the language of Foucault—and thus contributes to set narrow normative limits for the legitimate action of the Sámi MPs and the parliament.

Fourthly, the media discourse evolves around only a few topics constructing stereotypical images of the Sámi Parliament and these news representations are hard to distinguish from the Sámi themselves: they are politically and administratively incompetent, democratically immature and inclined to political and personal strife. These stereotypes are in a historical perspective easily understood as a continuation of the dominant conception of the Sámi people describing the Sámi as immature and uncivilised (see, e.g., Cramér 1982; Lundmark 2002; Upman 1978). In the early 1900s, for instance, the conception of the Sámi as being nomads—dominant in the public discourse of the time (Mörkenstam 1999)—equalled being “uncivilised”, which implied that the Sámi were incapable of handling their own affairs. This could be illustrated by the parliamentary debate in 1917 on the right of the Sámi to combine reindeer herding and farming (something that required the Sámi to reside in permanent houses). In the debate the Secretary of State posed the question if the “Lapps [really are capable] of realising the consequences of such a system? In opposition to their own opinion [in favour of a combination] one could present the results, arrived at by experienced men with the mandate of the government to investigate the issue and whose competence and impartiality are beyond doubts” (Riksdagens debatt (FK), No. 51 1917, p. 9).³⁴

This way of framing the problem within discourse made it easy to reject demands for political rights for the Sámi in capacity of being a national minority. Instead, the dominant conception of Sámihood at the time justified a paternalistic and “protective” policy, institutionalised in detail in legislation (Lantto 2012). In the case of colonizing states Anaya (1996, p. 23-24) has described this kind of state policy as a “trusteeship doctrine”. In its emphasis on the democratic immaturity of the Sámi parliament—the incapacity of the Sámi themselves—the contemporary media discourse is in many ways a continuation of this traditional system of belief even though Sámi rights are recognised and the Sámi have their own representative body. Consequently, there are no proposals for an increased autonomy to be seen in the media coverage of the Sámi Parliament, neither politically nor administratively. And this could be devastating to the Sámi when the right to self-determination in practice is negotiated and under development.

4. General conclusions

In the introduction we characterised the situation and status of the Sámi people as highly acknowledged and recognized, and in terms of the ACCEPT framework they can be seen to fulfil, or even transcend, the third and most advanced class of tolerance on a constitutional level. This class includes “recognition, respect as equal and admission as normal” (Modood & Dobbernack 2011, p. 32), and in line with this category a mere focus on toleration is not enough, but instead more thorough reforms of institutions and citizenship are seen to be needed to challenge historical injustices, and to secure the right of the Sámi people. Discussions on these kinds of reforms are not frequent in the

³⁴ Riksdagens debatt (FK) stands for Parliamentary Debate, First Chamber.

media discourse in Sweden. On the contrary, our analysis shows that the media discourse has both direct and indirect consequences for the political representation of the Sámi, delimiting their recognised right to self-determination. Directly, it affects the construction of a Sámi public sphere, indispensable for the parliament to function in its role as a representative body. The news reporting is limited in scope as it, as we have seen, privileges reporting on internal conflicts and individual behaviour and tend to neglect or ignore fundamental political problems of the Sámi people, thus it contributes to a de-politicisation of Sámi politics. Furthermore, it contributes to a conception of the parliament as problematic and dysfunctional, thereby undermining the potential level of trust of its constituency. Indirectly, the emphasis on the democratic and administrative immaturity of the Sámi parliament reproduces stereotypical images of the Sámi as unable to handle their own affairs, thus framing the problem in a specific way. And if we believe that the way a problem is framed affects the way that this issue is dealt with politically, then the range of possible political options is seriously limited by the way the Sámi Parliament is conceptualised in media discourse. If it is the Sámi Parliament (and the Sámi politicians) in itself that is the problem, and not the Swedish Sámi policy or the relation between the dominant majority society and the Sámi minority, political proposals trying to increase Sámi self-determination in accordance with the UN Declaration will, for instance, easily be rejected within discourse. Thus, could the media discourse in Sweden be characterised as intolerant, and thereby challenging the institutional accommodation of the Sámi people?

In order to answer this question, we believe that our conclusions correspond to what has often been said about the ambivalence of the contemporary practices of toleration, i.e. that toleration can be based on disrespect and domination as well as on recognition and respect. Therefore, we should in accordance with Forst (2004) distinguish between two conceptions of toleration: a permission conception and a respect conception. “According to the first [permission] conception [...] toleration is a relation between an authority or a majority and a dissenting, ‘different’ minority. Toleration then means that the authority (or majority) gives qualified permission to the members of the minority to live according to their beliefs on the condition that the minority accepts the dominant position of the authority (or majority)” (Forst 2004, p. 315). The second (respect) conception of toleration “is one in which the tolerating parties recognize one another in a reciprocal sense [...] they respect each other as moral-political equals in the sense that their common framework of social life should [...] be guided by norms that all parties can equally accept and that do not favour any one specific ‘ethical community,’ so to speak” (Forst 2004, p. 316).

Our analysis clearly shows that the recognition of the Sámi people on an institutional level—the right to self-determination as institutionalised in and through the Sámi Parliament—is hampered by the way the media represents the Sámi Parliament. The practice of toleration in the media discourse seems to reach a limit when the Sámi claim equal public and political status in capacity of being an indigenous people. By neglecting the relation between the Sámi people and the dominant Swedish society in news representations, i.e. the right to self-determination, it is obvious that the Swedish State still is considered to be the sole legitimate authority with exclusive “discretion over the values that justify and limit toleration” (Forst 2004, p. 316). Thus, the media discourse could be seen to give voice to a permission conception of toleration. Furthermore, unlike the view that the limits of toleration should be determined at the discretion of the dominant majority or authority, the respect conception has to rely on the ability of the members of the civil society to perform this task. In other words, a respect conception of toleration makes tolerance “a demanding *moral and political virtue*” (Forst 2007, p. 232). Our analysis casts doubts on how the one-sided news representation could contribute to a respect conception of toleration, as respect “can hardly grow on a cultural soil which only nourishes the values and conceptions of the good of a part of the citizenry” (Forst 2004, p. 320).

The media discourse in Sweden can thus not be characterised as widely intolerant, however, the practice of toleration as it is expressed in the news representations is based on domination and disrespect, not on recognition and respect. In that way, the media discourse could be characterised in terms of a limited or very limited tolerance.

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TT 930513, Samisk splittring inför historiska sametingsvalet (SPA:417).

TT 930525, Elva partier tar plats i sametinget (SPA:418).
TT 930526, Historiskt sameting utsett (SPA:418).
TT 940316, Sameting faxade uttalande till Riksdagen (SPA:429).
TT 941025, Enigt nej till EU på Sameting (SPA:435).
TT 970527, Samelandspartiet störst i sametinget (SPA:461)

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VF 930514, Samisk splittring inför historiskt sametingsval (SPA:417).
VF 110428, Sametinget JO-anmäls.
VF 110507, Kris inom Sametinget.
VF 110510, Vill byta ut styrelsen.
VF 110524, Förtroendet har minskat.
VF 110526, Inget klart än med ny styrelse för Sametinget.
VF 110716, Sametinget förbättrar rutiner.
VF 110917, Sametinget sparkar chef.

Västerbottens-Kuriren (VK)

VK 930517, Historiskt sameval – Leif körde 25 mil för att få lägga sin röst (SPA:418)
VK 930828, Födslövåndor på sametinget.
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VK 110219, Stökigt Sametingsmöte väntas.
VK 110312, Sameby kritiserar Sametinget.
VK 110323, Fler av länets samebyar ger sametinget bakläxa kring gränsdragningarna.
VK 110325, Sametingets bas vill sparka kanslichefen.
VK 110331, Fortsatt bråk inom Sametinget.
VK 110413, Oenig sametingsstyrelse ställdes in.
VK 110429, JO-anmäler Sametinget.
VK 110506, Storbråk lamslår sametinget.
VK 110521, Sametinget tar inte ansvar.
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VK 111110, JO riktar kritik mot Sametinget.
VK 111220, Vanligt med hot i Sametinget.

Östersundsposten (ÖP)

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ÖP 940318, Större kansli ska göra Sametinget ännu starkare (SPA:429).
ÖP 010531, Sametinget kunde fått bättre start.
ÖP 010727, Nytt val till sametinget år 2002.
ÖP 011105, Samevalet lockade få röstande till vallokalerna.
ÖP 011129, Sametinget bildar ny styrelse.
ÖP 110318, Bakläxa för sametinget om överklagandebeslut.
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