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WEB COMMUNICATION OF THE MISSION OF FINLAND TO NATO

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ABSTRACT

The Mission of Finland to NATO is one of the diplomatic missions of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Finland, maintaining the official relations between Finland and NATO in the context of the NATO partnership programme. The Mission launched its website www.finlandnato.org in November 2006, and after learning to manage with the daily requirements involved in updating the website, the timing is appropriate to take a deeper look into the elements affecting the Mission's web communication as a part of the MFA, and thus a public entity.

The research was set out to gain a deeper insight into the various requirements shaping the web communication of the Mission, as it is imposed to both general quality criteria for governmental communication as well as the communication guidelines of the MFA. The main focus was, however, to study the current situation of the Mission's web communication, and to analyse the various factors affecting the website.

The theoretical framework was formed by looking into the various qualitative requirements set by the renewed legislation on openness and different guidelines and recommendations on governmental communication, requiring the authorities to openly and actively communicate about their activities. Also, the MFA introduced its own communication guidelines to guide the communication of the Ministry and its diplomatic missions abroad.

The study was carried out as descriptive analysis and free-form interviews, in order to determine the Mission's input into the web communication and especially its planning; the guidance and instructions provided by the MFA for its missions' web communication; the background and current situation of the Mission's website and possible challenges it could be facing; and the situation with the web communication of two other Brussels-based missions of the MFA, i.e. the EU representation and the bilateral embassy of Finland to Belgium.

The results show that the website is facing certain challenges due to various factors. The Mission sees web communication as a useful but not a primary task, facing limited resources for maintenance and content production. The MFA has provided basic instructions for missions' web communication, however these are limited, outdated and not directly applicable to the Mission. The website www.finlandnato.org has currently sufficient content production, but in the course of 2007 two new language versions are to be introduced, however not as comprehensive as the main version in Finnish.

The situation could be facilitated with some measures, such as drafting a proper web communication strategy for the Mission and a news timetable, which are closely followed. The task of content production could be divided wider among the Mission's personnel, and cooperation possibilities with the Finnish embassy to Belgium and the EU representation should be looked into.

Keywords: Communication, Web Communication, Communication Strategy, Website planning, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, NATO

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The Mission of Finland to NATO (hereinafter the Mission) is one of the diplomatic missions of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (hereinafter the MFA), officially representing Finland at the NATO Headquarters in Brussels. As a part of the network of the MFA's Foreign Service, the Mission is subject to the requirements the MFA imposes on its missions concerning their functions and activities. One of these requirements involve communication, which is a vital part of the MFA's functions, and thus also those of its missions. Recently the MFA has focused on developing its web communication, following the current trends in the information age as well as the requirements and legislation on governmental communication in Finland. These have significantly affected the MFA as well as the public administration in Finland in general.

The MFA has launched a website renewal project covering the websites maintained by the MFA itself, alongside with the websites of the diplomatic missions. The purpose of the project was to unify and improve the MFA's and the missions' web communication by creating a common appearance and a publishing system through which the websites are maintained. At the time of the launch of the project, the Mission belonged to the group of a few missions which still did not have a website at all. This was not only an exceptional situation considering the requirements and criteria concerning the communication of a governmental entity but also an abnormality in an age and a society in which the public is more and more turning towards online sources when looking for information.

The planning and construction of the website www.finlandnato.org was started in the beginning of the year 2006, and the website was finally published in November 2006. At the moment, as the website has been "alive" for a while, it is good to reflect on the aspects effecting its current challenges as well as future development. The timing for such a reflection is ideal, as the website will face some changes in the near future in the form of new language versions. Such an occasion could also be used to analyse and depict the future plans for the website, both with regard to short term objectives and tasks as well as long term general guidelines and strategies. In addition, the Mission has already gained some experience in the practical work of updating the site, which would allow for a more realistic comprehension towards the planning of the website's future.

1.2 Scope of the assignment

The study focuses on depicting various elements forming and affecting the web communication of the Mission, the requirements it faces as a governmental entity and a part of the MFA's Foreign Service, and the challenges awaiting in the future. Such elements include the background and current situation of the website www.finlandnato.org, the goals and resources allocated to its maintenance on behalf of the Mission and the guidelines and support provided by the MFA. The thesis covers only the web communication and the website of the Mission of Finland to NATO, thus leaving its other forms of communication outside the scope of study.

1.3 Goals

The goal of the thesis is to gain a clear picture of the state of the Mission's web communication, what is expected of it, what is the current situation, which challenges it could be facing in the future and how these challenges could be met. Based on these analyses a basic web communication strategy will be drafted, ideally to be used as a daily tool in the tasks involving the website's maintenance, but also to urge and support the Mission to further develop the website, and to remind of the need for future directions.

1.4 Techniques

The study is to be carried out by firstly introducing the various requirements, recommendations and guidelines concerning the communication of the MFA as a governmental entity, thus automatically affecting the communication of the Mission. The elements affecting the Mission's web communication, such as the Mission's own goals and resources allocated for the website and the MFA's own instructions and requirements, will be studied and analysed using qualitative methods, alongside with depicting the background and the current state of the website www.finlandnato.org and the various challenges the Mission is likely to face in its maintenance. Also, the relative situations with MFA's two other Brussels-based diplomatic missions are briefly to be explained in order to gain a comprehension of the challenges other missions are facing.

The results of these analyses will be incorporated into the Mission's web communication strategy, which is to be constructed using the original, limited and already outdated web communication strategy drafted right after the publication of the Mission's website.

The theoretical framework, i.e. the requirements for governmental communication and especially that of the MFA and its missions, is depicted in chapter 2. Chapter 3 explains the study methods used, and chapter 4 introduces the data acquired from the research. The results are discussed in chapter 5 and the conclusions of the work are covered in chapter 6. The web communication strategy is included as an appendix.

2 The requirements for governmental communication

The communication of the Mission of Finland to NATO faces certain requirements due to its role as a public entity as it is a part of the MFA's Foreign Service. Thus, the Mission is subject to both the criteria concerning the governmental communication in general, as well as the requirements the MFA itself has set on its communication. The following focuses on depicting the various criteria, requirements and preferences there are today for governmental communication in Finland in general and for the MFA's communication in particular. Special emphasis is placed on web communication, the requirements for which are described separately.

2.1 Various guidelines

The demand for communication by the public administration of Finland is constantly increasing, bringing along also higher expectations and requirements that have to be met in order to satisfy the criteria set on it by the public. Thus, it is essential that all the governmental organisations managing the tasks of public administration know what is expected of their communication and have a common vision to follow.

The Finnish legislation was reformed in 1999 concerning secrecy and access to information, which brought along various requirements to better serve the public in terms of governmental communication. The purpose of the new legislation was to "increase openness on the part of the authorities" by requiring them to provide information about their work and especially on pending matters (Prime Minister's Office 2002, p.8).

As a reaction the Finnish government has introduced a variety of guidelines to facilitate its bodies to meet the new requirements for proper communication and to keep the common vision still in sight. The guidelines described in this thesis are the Recommendation on Central Government Communication by the Prime Minister's Office Government Information Unit (2002), which includes general principles and requirements of governmental communication; and the JHS 129 Principles for Planning and Implementing the Web Service of the Public Administration (2005), which focuses on guiding authorities on planning and implementing their web services.

What comes to the roles of the ministries, they are "responsible for developing their own communication and for the general development and coordination of communication in their own

branch of government" (Prime Minister's Office 2002, p. 21). Thus, also the Ministry for Foreign Affairs has introduced its own instructions, the MFA's Communication Plan (2003), to guide its and its diplomatic missions' communication.

2.2 Purpose of communication

The main purpose of governmental communication is determined very clearly: "[...] governmental communication exists to serve the public", it needs to be "active and designed to serve" (Prime Minister's Office 2002, p. 12).

The Recommendation by the Prime Minister's Office (2002, pp. 12-13) sees communication as a way to increase interactivity between the government and the citizens as it enables presenting the government's activities and tasks to the public and encourages the citizens to participate in them. Via communication the public can get an overview of the variety of the government's functions, based on which they can form their own critical assessment and understanding. Governmental communication should be structured for its recipients, taking into consideration their needs, rights and interests.

Communication has a central role in the activities of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The MFA's strategy states one of the Ministry's missions is to be an open and service-oriented organisation. One way to achieve this is to "produce and distribute information that is significant and useful for its stakeholders and society", in other words by using developed civic and other public communication to deliver information to its target groups (MFA's strategy 2005, p. 9). Also, the MFA's annual plan for 2007 states that communication of the MFA should be effective, serving widely the needs of its stakeholders (MFA's Annual Plan 2007, p. 13).

2.3 Supporting the organisation

Communication, in addition to fulfilling its compulsory role as a channel to the public, can also provide substantial support to the whole organisation in achieving the organisation's goals and meeting its external expectations. Communication, which is goal-oriented, systematic, coordinated and professionally executed allows for the government to meet the expectations of effectiveness and efficiency that are set on it. In general, communication plays a key part in governmental activities and the achievement of goals, providing an important tool for the management and an opportunity for each authority to perform their functions effectively (Prime Minister's Office 2002, pp.10-14, p. 18).

2.4 Planning communication

Given consideration to the responsibilities governmental communication bears, it is understandable that they can only be met with high enough requirements and criteria, such as adequate planning, evaluation, specified points of focus, regularity and consistency. Also, trustworthiness, independence, timing and rapidity are fundamental for successful communication (Prime Minister's Office 2002, pp. 10-14). It is essential that these requirements are also closely followed and implemented.

For this purpose the authorities should have an up-to-date communication strategy, in which are considered both short term operative functions for daily communication as well as long term objectives and tools how to achieve them. The strategy should include sections concerning for example content, timing, methods and stakeholders. Also, careful and specific planning of target groups, messages and tools is considered important, alongside with ensuring enough resources in terms of personnel, funds, technical abilities and regular training. The emphasis of communication varies naturally according to the areas and issues covered by different authorities, which affect the general targeting and other elements of communication (Prime Minister's Office 2002, p. 12, 18).

The public administration strives towards using diverse means of communication, such as announcements, Internet and other computer networks, and advertising and sponsoring, which are determined according to the target groups (Prime Minister's Office 2002, pp. 15-17) The MFA's Communication Plan divides its means of communication further to direct and indirect, depending on how directly and unedited the messages reach their targets. MFA's web communication is said to be a significant part of both (MFA's Communication Plan 2003, p. 15).

2.5 International aspects

Governmental communication also differs in terms of domestic and international targets, but the main focus is in domestic communication, i.e. communication to target groups in Finland. The international aspect of communication is not taken into much consideration in the governmental guidelines. The Recommendation by the Prime Minister's Office (2002, p. 33) has only a small note on international communication, stressing the need for effective communication in the age of internationalization and the importance of communication in the international arena.

However, when it comes to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, domestic communication is only one part of its communication, as the ministry places equal or possibly even more important role to international communication, i.e. communication to target groups abroad. The important, maybe even dominant role of international communication differentiates the MFA from other Finnish ministries, who communicate mostly to domestic audiences. However, the operational field of the MFA's communication is much wider and versatile, which is logical concerning its core functions. (MFA's communication plan 2003, p. 6)

International communication supports the MFA's main tasks and correctly used it is a strategic resource of the MFA's core functions. International communication can be used for producing and submitting public messages to foreign target groups which strengthen the effectiveness of Finland's foreign policy. The objectives of this strategic communication have to be specific, the target countries and groups have to be chosen and the messages to be formed considering the concrete benefits that are to be achieved with each country and each target group. It is essential to form and schedule the messages concerning foreign policy planning to be communicated to both international and domestic publics in a way which best serves Finland's interests and the goals and objectives set for them. The more concrete and specific the goals for communication, the more efficient the messages can be planned and formed (MFA's communication plan 2003, p. 9, 13).

2.6 Web communication

The renewed legislation on openness of governmental activities requires the Finnish authorities to communicate actively about their activities also via the Internet (JHS129 2005, p.3). In the MFA's annual plan for 2007, a specific goal is set for following the trend of increased importance in web communication, i.e. that the portion of web communication as a part of forwarding information increases further, especially in crisis communication. (MFA's Annual Plan 2007, p. 13) Thus, it can be said the MFA finds the possibilities of web communication as important and emphasises their use and development as an element of the communication of the Ministry.

Web services act as a versatile communication channel that is clearly connected to the processes of the organisation (JHS129 2005, p.3). The online possibilities for governmental communication support the general task of communication and "should be developed in order to stimulate dialogue between government and the public and increase active public participation

in decision-making" (Prime Minister's Office 2002, p. 16). Web communication allows for the possibility to approach different domestic and foreign target groups and to tailor the messages in an appropriate and interesting way (MFA's communication plan 2003, p. 16). In general the web services are seen as a part of the organisations' communication services and thus should be developed as a part of the organisations' communication strategy (JHS129 2005, p.3).

There are a lot of qualitative requirements for a public web service. The requirements, which are set by usability, accessibility, content and security, guide the planning and content of a public organisation's web services, and thus they should have a special emphasis (JHS129 2005, pp. 3-5). Web communication has to be trustworthy; the content needs to be comprehensive, correct, current, error-free, reliable and continuously maintained and updated. To correspond to all these requirements there should be enough resources for maintaining and developing web communication (JHS129 2005 p.3, Prime Minister's Office 2002, pp. 16-17).

According to the JHS129 (2005, p. 5), the web service needs to have its own goals approved by the organisation's management, which support the goals of the whole organisation. A web service strategy is to be drawn before the implementation of the service, stating the functions, goals and users of the service. The elements in the web service strategy should follow the general strategy of the organisation; it should have clear directions for future development; and ways to measure the service (JHS129 2005, p.6).

The MFA's Communication plan (2003, p.16) states that the MFA's most important external web communication channels are, in addition to the ministry's own website formin.finland.fi, websites for Finland promotion (virtual.finland.fi), development cooperation and policy (global.finland.fi), trade and economic policy (www.kauppapolitiikka.fi), EU communication (www.eurooppa-tiedotus.fi) and the MFA's diplomatic missions' own websites. Each channel have their own specific task, target group and user amount, which can be seen as a strength considering their versatile nature. Their content, publication system, functionality and layout are developed together, which is coordinated by the MFA's Department for Communication and Culture's Unit for Web Communications. All the different departments, units and diplomatic missions of the MFA take part in content production for these websites.

Also, the Finnish media has learned to trust web communication as the fastest and most complete source of information. A study conducted among Finnish media states that "the development of web services has clearly changed the communication channels' relative meanings. Nowadays web services as a whole are definitely the most significant channel of communication and their development a central part of developing governmental communication" (MFA's Communication Plan 2003, p. 17).

2.7 Internal communication

Inside the organisation the personnel has to be aware what needs to be communicated and by whom. This supports the guidelines' point that "effective internal communication is essential for successful external communication" (Prime Minister's Office 2002, p. 19). With internal communication the personnel can be kept aware of the organization's goals, having all the information they need for carrying out their work. Adequate communication training should be provided regularly for the entire personnel, and to make sure that especially the civil servants and other officials participate in it (Prime Minister's Office 2002, pp. 19-20). The organisation's management plays an important role as ultimately it carries the responsibility of the organisation's communication, and should act as the main communicator. The management should ensure enough specialists to take care of communicational activities and enable effective cooperation between communication personnel (Prime Minister's Office 2002, pp.11, 19).

Internal communication is also mentioned to be a specifically important resource in a global, dispersed organisation such as the MFA's Foreign Service and a requirement for working external communication. In order to meet the communicational requirements the MFA needs to have effective internal communication and good cooperation between those taking care of communicational activities. Also, sufficient training and guidance concerning communication are needed also for those responsible for preparatory tasks (MFA's communication plan 2003, pp. 5-6).

2.8 Resources

The resources for the MFA's communication comprise not only of talented and motivated communication personnel and their experience, contacts and know-how, but also the facilities, equipment and software that are used for communicational purposes alongside with the allocated funds. Also, established relationships with representatives of the media, cultural institutions and other parties can be counted as resources, as well as the

constantly growing visitor amounts of the website (MFA's Communication Plan 2003, p. 18).

The MFA should ensure constant training possibilities for its personnel in order to sustain and renew its communicational knowledge over new technologies, changing media and operation environment and personal presentational and communicational skills (MFA's communication plan 2003, p. 19).

Based on the review, it can be said that there are various requirements concerning governmental communication, especially on the web, which directly apply to the MFA and its missions. The MFA has introduced a variety of measures to meet these requirements, most relevant of which for this study are the instructions for the missions' web communication. The missions have to construct and maintain their web communication quite independently, using the technical structures and general support provided by the MFA as a basis for this.

This study will focus on analysing how the Mission of Finland to Nato is managing its web communication and how the planning, goals, resources and MFA's support reflect on the current state of the Mission's website and could they could be used for preparing for future challenges. Due to the requirements, a web communication strategy will also be formulated for the Mission's website.

3 Methods

3.1 Material

The material to be used in this thesis can be categorized as the Mission's own goals and ambitions for web communication in the form of Mission's Annual Plan and Scorecard for 2007 and the web communication strategy draft; the website www.finlandnato.org and the material related to its construction and launching; the resources allocated for the website's maintenance; and the guidelines of the MFA for the diplomatic missions' web communication and other theses concerning MFA's web communication. In addition, some material was used from the free-form interviews with other two Brussels-based diplomatic missions of the MFA.

3.2 Study methods

The study was carried out using qualitative methods and descriptive analysis. Also, informal interviews were conducted with the Mission's management and the web teams of two other Brussels-based missions of the MFA, i.e. the Embassy of Finland to Belgium and the Permanent Representation of Finland to the EU. The interview with the Mission's management consisted of free discussion with the Head and Deputy Head of the Mission of Finland to NATO, focusing on the topic of the Mission's own goals and guidelines towards its website now and in the future. The interviews with the other two Brussels-based missions involved free discussion following certain questions concerning their web communication, its structure and current challenges as well as possible areas of cooperation between all three MFA's missions in Brussels.

3.3 Elements

The purpose of this thesis is to gain a grasp of the current situation with the Mission's web communication, how it is guided by the Mission and the MFA, the amount of resources allocated for it, and what kind of challenges in the Mission's web communication should be prepared for. The special nature of the Mission's functions sets it apart from the so called standard missions of the MFA, which also affects the elements of the web communication of the Mission and also the applicability of the MFA's instructions. Based on this information a web communication strategy will be drafted for the future use for the Mission's web site.

3.4 Research questions

The study focused on following research questions:

What goals, objectives or ambitions the Mission of Finland to NATO has set for its web communication? What kind of role does the website www.finlandnato.org have in the context of the Mission's functions? What resources have been allocated for maintaining the website?

What kind of guidelines has the MFA provided for the missions' web communication? Which content should the mission's website structure include?

What is the current situation with the website? Which elements does the website include? How was the website initially constructed taking into consideration the special nature of the Mission? What kind of challenges is the website facing at the moment and in the future?

How is the situation with the websites of the other two MFA's Brussels-based diplomatic missions? Are there possibilities for future cooperation between the three missions?

4 Data

4.1 Mission of Finland to NATO

The Mission of Finland to NATO is one of the diplomatic missions of the Foreign Service of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, located at the NATO Headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. The Mission's staff comprises 22 persons, about a half of which are career diplomats from the MFA, the Finnish Defence Forces' Defence Command, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of the Interior. The other half consists of supporting office personnel, both locally hired and sent from the MFA.

According to its Annual Performance Agreement for 2007, the function of the Mission of Finland to NATO is to maintain official relations of Finland with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, NATO. A central task is to participate in the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council and the Partnership for Peace programme, also monitoring NATO's other activities and development. Following the MFA's strategic goals, the focal goal of the Mission of Finland to NATO is to develop Finland's transatlantic relations as NATO's partner country. The Mission follows NATO's activities and communicates about them to Finland so that it is possible to start preparations as early as possible for necessary decision-making (Annual Performance Agreement for 2007 for the Mission of Finland to NATO, 2007, p. 2).

The Mission strives for close and continuously coordinated cooperation with the main stakeholders, especially with the MFA, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of the Interior and the Defence Force's Defence Staff, in all its activities. Matters concerning both NATO and EU will be coordinated with the Permanent Representation to the EU (Annual Performance Agreement for 2007 for the Mission of Finland to NATO, 2007, p. 2). Its international stakeholders include NATO's other partner and member countries and their delegation's; NATO's international diplomatic and military bodies as well as the overall international community interested in the cooperation between Finland and NATO related to the partnership programme.

4.1.1 Exception among the Foreign Service

The Mission of Finland to NATO can be considered as an exception in many ways among the network of diplomatic missions of the MFA's Foreign Service. The MFA's network of Finnish missions abroad comprises 97 offices, out of which 6 are

permanent representations to international organisations and 1 a special mission, i.e. the Mission of Finland to NATO (MFA's website, Diplomatic Missions).

The MFA's website determines the tasks of its diplomatic and consular missions as follows:

- foreign and security policy
- commercial and economic functions
- international development cooperation
- cooperation with neighbouring areas
- enhancement of knowledge of Finland
- consular services, passports and visas (MFA's website, Diplomatic Missions)

The areas applicable to the Mission of Finland to NATO are mainly security policy and for a small part also development cooperation in the context of NATO peace support operations. Yet it can be stated that security policy forms the main topic around which the Mission functions. The other topics can be applied to the functions of a standard embassy or a consulate, which are representing Finland in a foreign country. Compared to these, however, the functions and goals and thus also communication of the Mission of Finland to NATO differ significantly as its target of representation is in fact an international organization. Due to this, the Mission is often categorized among the 6 permanent representations of the MFA, listed below:

- a Permanent Representation to the European Union (EU) in Brussels
- a Permanent Representation to the Council of Europe (COE) in Strasbourg
- a Permanent Mission to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in Vienna
- a Permanent Mission to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in Paris
- a Permanent Mission to the United Nations (UN) in New York and Geneva
- a Permanent Mission to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other international organizations in Geneva (MFA's website, Diplomatic Missions, Finnish Missions and Representations in International Organisations)

Among these missions, the Mission to NATO is the only representation in an organization in which Finland does not have a membership status. Finland is, however, a member of the Partnership for Peace programme and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council that deal with NATO's cooperation with its partners. This sets different operational possibilities and criteria for the Mission's communication and sets certain challenges in terms of website content production.

As a representation of a NATO partner country, the Mission focuses communicating with the general public only on the activities and information concerning the NATO partnership programme and Finland's participation in it. Thus, the activities and events of NATO's member countries are normally not communicated, with the exception of such events of general importance that affect the partner countries.

4.1.2 The Mission's goals for communication

The Mission has set 11 goals for its activities in the Mission's Scorecard for 2007. The goals have been derived from the MFA's Political Department's annual plan, the MFA's general strategy and the White Paper on Finnish Security and Defence Policy for 2004. One of the goals concerns the Mission's communication: Distributing useful and meaningful information about Finland's activities and functioning in NATO's partnership programme for citizens interested in Finland and NATO's relations, political decision-makers and stakeholders (Scorecard for 2007 for the Mission of Finland to NATO)

This goal is to be achieved by organising visits to NATO for civil servants, political decision-makers and citizens, and also by using the Mission's website in interaction and information sharing. The achievement of this goal is measured in terms of having versatile and planned visitor exchange. All groups applying for a visit are welcomed if the facilities and timetables so allow. The Mission has a website, in which can be found current information concerning Finland's partnership in NATO and other activities of the Mission (Mission's Scorecard for 2007).

The Mission's management pointed out in the interview that the website is intended for supporting the Mission's core goals, and is not seen as a primary task of the Mission. However, the website is considered a useful part of the Mission's functions. The website project started without high ambitions, but the outcome has shown

to be a success. The Mission implements every aspect of its communication following the Ministry's instructions and structures, and operates within its designated role and jurisdiction. The communication is to focus on Finland's cooperation with NATO rather than commenting on NATO's functions in general. The responsibility for content production lies entirely on the Mission, and also for this reason the Mission's management sees it useful to use additional material produced by the Mission's various stakeholders, some of which are physically represented in the Mission. The website will be developed based on the experiences to be gained by monitoring the received feedback on the website.

In addition, according to Koistinen (2001, p.58) MFA's Head of Web Communications Raija Leppäjärvi states that the website can be an addition and supporter for the other communication of the missions, a channel for conveying information that should be taken advantage of. She sees that lack of routine and training of the website personnel are hindering the effective use of the websites. Thus, it can be stated that the importance of web communication stressed in the governmental guidelines is appreciated both at the MFA and at the Mission.

4.1.3 Mission's communication channels

As explained above, the Mission has two major channels by which it conducts its external communication: organising visits to the NATO headquarters for interested Finns and maintaining its website www.finlandnato.org. In addition, the Mission's civil servants are occasionally interviewed by mainly Finnish media and they give speeches or write articles. However, this type of activity plays only a small part in the Mission's overall external communication that it is not taken into consideration in this study.

The visits by Finnish citizens to NATO Headquarters amounts annually up to 1000 visitors, varying from politicians and other decision-makers to groups of students, journalists, pensioners, military officers and the guest groups of the Finnish Members of the European Parliament. The visits are organised by the initiative of the visitors, who arrange for their travel themselves. All groups are provided with briefings by the Mission's staff about NATO in general and the relations and cooperation between Finland and NATO as well as the military aspects of Finland's participation to the partnership programme and NATO operations.

Besides the visits, the Mission's communication depends mainly on its website www.finlandnato.org, which was launched in November 2006. Before this, the Mission's communication was carried out mainly by receiving visitor groups. Therefore, it can be

stated that launching the website for the Mission has significantly contributed to the external communication of the Mission. Alongside with the organised visits, the website forms a main channel of communication to the general public.

4.1.4 Resources

The Mission's website team consists normally of two persons, a First Secretary sent from the MFA and a locally hired assistant. Their roles have been divided so that the First Secretary is responsible for the content, especially in the static parts of the website, and the assistant is responsible for updating the site, using the editor and publishing the news releases. The team receives technical support from the MFA's Web Communications Unit when needed.

Koistinen (2001, p.61) found in her study of the MFA's missions' web communication that ideally the roles of content producer and technical maintenance would be allocated to two separate persons, but due to practical restraints they are often the one and the same person. Thus, she suggests striving towards a situation in which every official would be able to produce a text and put it on the website themselves, which would prevent a big workload from falling only on one person. (Koistinen 2001, p. 61)

In addition to the official web team, currently the main contributors to the website's content production are the Deputy Head of Mission with regard to planning and assigning possible news topics, and the interns temporarily working at the Mission, who take part in the writing process, producing ready texts to be published on the website. In the interview with the Mission's management the idea of adding another assistant to the web team to aid in the technical updating and news publishing was seen as a possibility to share the maintenance tasks.

The daily maintenance of the website involves creating, editing and publishing new material in the form of news releases and photos added to the news; updating the static parts of the website e.g. in the case of changes in personnel; adding links to new websites and publications; as well as monitoring and answering the customer feedback through the website's feedback function. In addition, the website's static parts need to be reviewed periodically and revised if necessary. The members of the web team should constantly look for possible news topics and monitor the news releases and material published by the Mission's stakeholders, or other institutions of interest to the Mission's functions.

Currently, the First Secretary who was involved in the website launch project from its start in the beginning of 2006 is on a leave of absence, and whose responsibilities have been temporarily transferred to another person inside the Mission. In addition, the change of personnel in the summer 2006 in the assistant responsible for updating the site has led to a situation where neither of the persons currently officially responsible for the website have been part of the website launch project from its very start from the beginning of 2006, nor have they been able to participate in the website training organised by the MFA's Web Communications Unit.

Also, currently there is only one person in the Mission who is able to use the editor programme needed for updating the website, which has led to a situation where all the necessary updating activities can be carried out by only one person. This has already affected the ability to frequently publish new material on the website and is especially challenging in a situation in which certain material needs to be published or updated with a very short notice. The situation also reflects the constant changes in the Mission's personnel, which in turn increase the need for sustained internal guidance on web communication, on which both the current and the future personnel can rely.

In addition, the Swedish language version of the website needs to be published as well, following the MFA's requirements on bilingual websites. The necessary texts have been translated and the goal is to have the Swedish site published in the first half of 2007. Depending on the goals and emphasis put on the Swedish version of the site having another language version of the website probably brings along extra work in terms of translation and maintenance requirements. The website will be supplemented with an English language version during the course of 2007, which is intended for foreign target groups interested in Finland's cooperation with NATO. However, the English site will most probably be a limited version of the website, containing only the essential information in the static content on the other two sites.

In terms of technical resources, the website editor needed for maintaining the website is provided by the MFA alongside with support in technical problems. Other resources, such as a acquiring a new digital camera or software for editing pictures have not yet been considered.

4.1.5 Web communication strategy

According to Koistinen (2001, p.58), MFA's Head of Web Communications Raija Leppäjärvi finds important that every mission should have also a web communication strategy of their own in addition to common guidelines. The missions should consider what is their part and how will they participate in communication on the web. Determining their own points of emphasis would be important as otherwise the opinions about the purpose of the website might change alongside the changing personnel. "As the mission's employees change every few years, the official web communication strategy would stay as the backbone, with which the missions' websites could be planned further." (Koistinen 2001, p. 58)

Also, according to Koistinen's research, in order to have websites and web communication that is better taken advantage of and made more efficient one has to set and make official strategies and plans. The personnel of the mission has to acknowledge the meaning of web communication. (Koistinen 2001, p. 84)

Immediately following the launch of the Mission's website in November 2006 a web communication strategy was drafted in order to provide a tool in which the most essential elements of the website, its target groups, content and future planning would be explained. However, the strategy is quite limited in terms of content and needs significant updates and additions based on the experiences gained in maintaining the website. In addition, a wider international audience has to be considered in the context of the English version. Also, a timetable proposal was attached to the original draft, which has since become outdated as the Mission hasn't been able to follow it. This has resulted in content production, which is more impulsive and reactive rather than planned and proactive.

4.2 The MFA's guidelines for its diplomatic missions' web communication

The web communication guideline from the MFA to the missions' websites was drafted in the MFA's Web Communications Unit in 2000 to be valid for 2001-2003. Originally the guideline was drafted in the beginning of the MFA's website renewal project, and was intended only as a plan and not an agreed-upon strategy, according to the Unit's Head Raija Leppäjärvi (Koistinen 2001, p. 57). According to Koistinen (2001, p. 57) Leppäjärvi also stated that the missions' websites could be better coordinated by officially approving the missions' web communication strategy, guideline or similar. However, until today this plan still awaits its replacement or renewal.

4.2.1 The contents

The MFA's web communication guidelines for its missions for 2001-2003 stresses the importance of the Internet's ability to work as a channel for service and information sharing on behalf of the MFA's Foreign Service, a factor which should be used as much as possible.

According to the guideline web communication should reflect both the general values of the Foreign Service as well as those of its missions, simultaneously supporting also the missions' own goals. In addition, web communication enables essentially interactive communication as it takes into consideration the needs of the customers and stakeholders.

The web communication plan is divided into three categories: both foreign and domestic target groups, messages to be communicated and tools how to convey them.

4.2.2 Target groups

The guideline differentiates the target groups based on their location, stating separate target groups for the countries in which the missions operate, and target groups located in Finland.

The missions' local target groups in their countries of operation:

- the general public
- students
- journalists and media
- local authorities
- Finland-friends
- locally settled Finns

- locally settled foreigners
- those travelling or moving to Finland
- minorities with Finnish origins (mainly in Russia or the Baltics)

Domestic target groups for information about the foreign country:

- authorities
- media
- those travelling to the country
- the business world

However, the main target groups for the Mission of Finland to NATO are domestic, i.e. they are located in Finland and comprise the general public, students, journalists and media, authorities and those generally interested of Finland's cooperation with NATO. In the local country, i.e. the local target groups consist of other diplomatic missions to NATO representing its member and partner countries, NATO's own personnel alongside with the media and international community possibly interested if Finland's participation in NATO partnership programme. Thus, it appears that the target groups are almost opposite to those in the MFA's guidelines.

4.2.3 Messages

Essentially, the guideline states that the mission's website should provide the required information when a visitor wants to know anything about Finland or being a Finn.

The messages, i.e. sections to be included in the missions' websites consist of

- General information about the mission (contact details, personnel, opening hours, history)
- Finland info package (general, good to know-information about Finland)
- Information about studying in Finland (student exchange, scholarship possibilities)
- Information on travelling or moving to Finland (matters related to passports, visas and Finnish citizenship)
- Events calendar (cultural, political and business events and their backgrounds)
- Information about the target country (safety for travelling, current matters)
- Link list (collection of Finland-related links)
- Feedback

- Search engine

These messages have been formed following the normal functions of the MFA's missions. When considering the tasks of the Mission of Finland to NATO, which differ significantly from those of a standard embassy as explained before, also the messages to be included in the Mission's website have to be modified to fit the core functions of the Mission and to communicate of the topics essential for the Mission's core functions to best support its web communication. Thus, the sections addressing issues such as Finland and trade promotion, target country information and consular matters have to be replaced by such content related to the Mission which is in fact replacing these activities of a standard embassy.

4.2.4 How to convey the messages right

The guideline emphasises the importance of how the information is presented on the website alongside with the visual appearance. The website should convey a positive profile on technologically and visually talented and able Finland, but should also be recognisable as belonging to the "product family" of the MFA's Foreign Service.

The information should also be sufficient and organised, structured and understandable, made available when not considered secret, and maintained and updated constantly. Also, not everything needs to be produced with own resources as some information can be linked from other websites.

The guideline defines various ways to achieve the criteria, starting from an easy and simple-to-use publishing system to cooperation, networking and information sharing between the missions and the MFA. Also, sufficient resources both in terms of personnel and funds should be allocated for maintaining and developing web communication and services but also for securing sufficient training in content production and technical maintenance. Also, the civil servants have a responsibility to take web communication into consideration in their everyday work.

4.3 www.finlandnato.org

4.3.1 Background

The website project for the Mission was launched in the beginning of 2006 with the help of the MFA's Web Communications Unit, who sent a specialist to attend the content planning meeting in February 2006. The project came to a standstill in summer 2006 due to a change in the person responsible for the technical maintenance. In the fall of 2006 the project was continued swiftly, and the website was finally launched in November 2006. Due to resource and time restraints the Mission set a priority to launch the website first only in Finnish, and to supplement the website with Swedish and English versions in the course of year 2007.

Due to the timing of the project the Mission could base its website to a new publishing system brought along by the MFA's website renewal project, which in part facilitated the project. The Mission of Finland to NATO was the first mission to publish its website using the new appearance and publication system. In addition, as the MFA was changing to a newer version of the publication system, the project of launching the website was at times halted due to certain technical problems involved in using the new editor programme.

4.3.2 Structure of the website

The website's structure was created following the MFA's instructions (see section 4.2.3). However, the structure had to be altered compared to that of a standard embassy due to the special nature of the Mission and its communication. Thus, the instructions had to be followed allowing certain space for modification and alteration, in order to have a website that would best suit the Mission's functions.

The MFA's instructions regarding the content of the missions' websites focus on supporting the main tasks of a standard Finnish embassy, such as Finland promotion; customer service in terms of consular affairs; and providing information of the country in which the embassy operates. As the core tasks between an embassy and a representation to an international organization differ significantly, also a different solution had to be found for the website structure for the Mission of Finland to NATO.

Some elements of the MFA's instructions had to be sustained on the website, such as basic information about the mission, its

functions, history and contact details. Also, elements such as links and feedback were automatically included in the website. However, certain adjustments and alterations had to be made for the front page, the section for Current Affairs, and the majority of the static parts for the site, which can be said to form the very foundation and added value of the whole website.

With regard to the static pages of the website, some were created automatically following the general structure of the missions' websites, but some sections' content had to be specifically designed, combining the MFA's requirements and the Mission's functions and their communicational needs.

Due to the specific function of the Mission, the website naturally couldn't include sections of Finland promotion, consular affairs or information of the target country, as these are in no way connected to the Mission's activities. Instead, the Finland promotion part was replaced by information on the cooperation between Finland and NATO, the consular services part with useful information to those Finns visiting the NATO Headquarters, and the target country information with a page dedicated to information concerning NATO itself. Sections for Frequently Asked Questions were also created for the parts of Finland and NATO cooperation and NATO information.

These alterations have led to a following sitemap of the website:

- Front Page
- Current Affairs
 - News
 - Security Policy News
 - Ministry for Foreign Affairs' News
- The Mission
 - Personnel
 - History
- Visits
 - Meetings
 - Visitor groups
- Finland and NATO
 - Frequently Asked Questions
- Information about NATO
 - Frequently Asked Questions
- Links and Publications
- Feedback
- Contact Information

The front page of the website has space for two news releases, one main news release which should first catch the eye of the visitor, and another normal release. In these two spaces, the Mission can publish and gain visibility for the most important news it has drafted and wishes to communicate. The two sections can be updated separately, thus allowing for different timing of publishing and enabling different periods of visibility on the front page. This means that the main story can be kept on the front page, and smaller but perhaps more urgent news can be updated more often. The front page contains also "title boxes" for the Mission's own and the Security Policy news, in which the titles of the most recent news releases are visible, allowing the user a glimpse of past news releases in addition to the two main stories. The front page also includes a small information box, in which Finland's cooperation areas with NATO are briefly described and linked to appropriate sections inside the website.

The Mission can produce news releases under two categories in the Current Affairs section of the website, i.e. the news drafted and published by the Mission itself and news under the title of Security Policy, which consist of summaries and links to news releases of the stakeholders or other institutions of interest to the Mission and its activities. Out of these two the section of the Mission's own news releases bears more significance as that is the forum in which the Mission can communicate of issues it chooses to communicate, and which reflect its everyday functions. The Security Policy news section is completely dependent on content and news production of other organizations, and its planning and scheduling of published news cannot be controlled by the Mission.

The Current Affairs section also includes a space for the MFA's own news releases, which are the same as on the MFA's website forming.finland.fi, and which are published automatically on the websites of the missions. However, considering the general nature of these releases and the fact that they rarely involve information that could be incorporated into the Mission's communication, this section bears less importance on the website. Thus, the MFA's news releases are left out of the website's front page, which is exceptional among other missions' websites, as especially for smaller missions the MFA's news input is an important source of content for the website.

The challenges the website is currently facing are echoes from other areas involved in the Mission's web communication, i.e. the lack of proper planning in terms of content production and publishing news releases, and the temporary shortage what comes to available persons to update the site and construct the

new language versions in Swedish and English. Also, one factor directly influencing the website seems to be its relatively low recognition among its target groups in Finland, which endangers the main purpose of having the website at all. Communication is nearly impossible, if the intended target groups are not even aware of the information source. However, the website is actively promoted to the Finnish visitors received by the Mission, and the Mission is looking into enhanced ways in conducting this promotion among the visitors.

4.4 Experiences from other Brussels missions

Informal interviews were conducted among the website teams of the Foreign Service's Brussels-based diplomatic missions, i.e. the Embassy of Finland to Belgium and the Permanent Representation of Finland to the EU, in order to determine their current situations and challenges in web communication and also to gather information on their experiences in website maintenance, as both missions have had a functional website for years. In addition, they represent both an embassy and a representation to an international organisation, which incorporated an interesting angle when looking at their current challenges.

As stated before, both the Brussels bilateral embassy and the EU representation have had a functional website for quite a long time compared to the Mission of Finland to NATO. The embassy was one of the two pilot missions of the MFA to launch a website following a common appearance in 2001 whereas the EU representation has had its first website already at the end of 1990s. Both missions' websites have been renewed since, and at the moment both websites are to be moved to the new publishing system, following the MFA's website renewal project.

The Brussels embassy's website team consists of two persons, who are managing the website alongside their other responsibilities. Also, a third person is updating the cultural calendar, and 4 translators outside the embassy are translating the content, as the website is maintained in 5 languages: Finnish, Swedish, English, French and Dutch.

The EU Representation has currently two press counsellors, a press assistant and an IT support person managing the website and developing the renewed website. The current website has three language versions: Finnish, English and French. The EU Representation has received critique of not having a website in Swedish, which will be introduced in the renewed version of the

website to be launched. Also, the Representation is using interpreters due to many language versions.

The EU Representation faces also an exceptional situation with its website, as there are numerous other websites, which already provide substantial amount of EU information. Thus, the Representation wants to provide on its website sufficient contact information, especially of its personnel, for the use of Finnish as well as of other EU member countries' officials. The website has sections for the services provided by the Representation, and basic information on Finland's activities as an EU member country.

The contents of the Embassy's website vary from public diplomacy, cultural promotion, politics and trade topics to passport and consular information and country information of Finland and of Belgium, depending on the target audience. The target groups of the website are among others the massive Finnish community living in Belgium, both foreign and Finnish journalists, Belgian authorities, students and Finnish culture's fans, as well as the international community in Brussels. The website has had visitors from other countries as well. The website follows a timetable of stories and news releases to be published in all 5 languages, which is planned for every coming six months.

The EU representation would wish for some input from the MFA's side in terms of content production, e.g. weekly published stories of general interest, which the missions could edit and incorporate into their websites. General content related to Finland could be produced in Finland and then be distributed to all relevant Finnish missions abroad, in appropriate language versions. This would help save costs, which is an important consideration at a time of a downward pressure on MFA's budgets. Also, the Representation would wish to maintain free hands what comes to developing the websites, so that each mission could shape their website to best suit their communication. In addition, the websites should be developed from the users perspectives.

The Embassy's communication team has plans of developing the content of the website to a more versatile direction topic-wise. At the moment the website's current stories' content consists mainly of culture-related issues. The website team would like to have more substance-related stories, e.g. in the area of politics or business, as well as stories or articles from writers outside the embassy and even outside the MFA. The Embassy's web team suggested on studying the possibilities of cooperation in terms of content production, and taking advantage of the vast knowledge of the personnel of all three missions in terms of content

production and writing articles. In turn, the EU Representation introduced the idea of a common technical support, a person who could assist in the technical aspects of maintaining the websites for all three missions in Brussels.

The Embassy's website team has shown to be quite active in looking for solutions in the challenges they are facing in maintaining a website in five languages with limited resources. In 2005 the embassy tried to look for possibilities in cooperation and content sharing between the missions in the Benelux countries, the EU representation included, and France, due to the advantages of common languages. The idea was well received in all missions, however it failed to develop further from the first joint meeting in 2005.

In both discussions the idea of possible cooperation between the three missions based in Brussels was suggested, discussed and welcomed by both web teams. Even though the purpose, functions and sizes of the three missions vary significantly the common location acts as a unifying factor, the reason for which the cooperation and content sharing possibilities should be looked into. The Embassy's web team took the initiative, and has invited the website personnel of all three missions in a gathered meeting to be held in June 2007.

5 Discussion

The web communication of the Mission of Finland to NATO is affected by various elements, starting from Finnish legislation and communication guidelines on the governmental level. As these affect directly the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA), it has been obliged to set various requirements on the communication of the missions of its Foreign Service, which form an integral part of the MFA's functions. Both the governmental and the ministerial requirements create certain quality criteria for the information published on the Mission's website, its content planning, timeliness and accuracy of information, future planning and guidance in the forms of strategies and the resources as in trained personnel and effective software with which the websites can be maintained in practise.

However, the website criteria, even though introduced to provide more open and communication-oriented governmental entities such as the Mission of Finland to NATO, also create a substantial demand for the entities to construct, provide and maintain such web communication. This is especially challenging at a time when the general trend is moving towards cutting budgets resulting in less resources available for such work. At the same time the importance of web communication increases constantly, forming the most significant channel of communication for certain entities. Thus, it is a very demanding, yet mandatory, task to find a way to combine these two trends, i.e. more web communication with less and less resources, in an appropriate and functional way.

The Mission's goals for web communication

The Mission of Finland to NATO has set as one of its functional goals to communicate information about Finland's activities in NATO's partnership programme and the functions of the Mission itself to the interested public and decision-makers in Finland. If occasional interviews, speeches or articles by the Mission's civil servants are not taken into account the Mission currently has only two sources of communication, i.e. organising visits to NATO and maintaining its website.

The visits are organised throughout the year to individual decision-makers and civil servants as well as to visitor groups consisting of Finnish citizens interested in Finland's relations with NATO. The initiative comes from the groups, who also arrange their travel and pay for it. The visitor groups represent many Finnish society groups and amount annually up to 1000 visitors. However, as it is certainly not possible to organise visits to every

member of the interested public, the Mission also needs to have a functional website providing not only basic information of the Mission but also of its activities. The website should provide the information which would be presented and discussed during the actual visits to the Mission.

However, the web communication of the Mission of Finland to NATO did not even exist before the MFA imposed the website renewal project especially on those missions still lacking a website. When comparing to other missions, the Mission of Finland to NATO has still plenty of experience to gain from the daily work of updating and maintaining the website, and also concerning strategic thinking in terms of the website's future goals and ambitions.

Due to the fact that the website itself is quite recent compared to other missions, who have had them for years, it is understandable that the Mission's ambitions towards the website as well as the resources allocated for it are not yet perfectly clear. This is visible for example as lack of assigned chief web editor as the Mission was not aware one had to be appointed. As the website is a major channel of external communication for the Mission, it should also be constantly developed, both from a short-term perspective by constantly looking for updates to the content as well as with a long-term view in the context of planning the website's future goals.

Now that the Finnish version has been "alive" for almost 6 months, the Mission should put significant efforts in its further development and to determine how it could best support the goals and ambitions of the Mission. As stated before, the websites are a valuable tool for the MFA's missions, and should be taken advantage of. The Mission's management has stated that the website is a useful part of the Mission's functions, however it is considered to have a supporting role rather than primary focus. This approach is understandable taking into consideration the core tasks of the Mission, and the resources allocated for them. As the resources are starting to be quite stretched at the moment due to MFA's savings and budget downsizing, the Mission has to adjust its ambitions towards the website to the factual amount of resources available for putting efforts to its maintenance and development. In a world of limited resources, the website has to compete with other tasks of the Mission's personnel. The level of ambition must probably be calibrated accordingly.

When it comes to the temporary shortage of personnel able for maintaining the site, the situation will most probably remain the same until some changes in personnel have been carried out, and

the Mission has some new work force. It would be crucial to train another assistant to aid in the daily website maintenance, an idea to which the Mission's current management has reacted positively. The situation should return to normal after the return of the First Secretary originally in charge of the website launch project in the Mission.

However, the current situation, in which the Mission has only one person able to use the web editor software for keeping the website up-to-date when other work tasks so allow, has led to delays in publishing new material, and has slowed down the process of constructing new language versions for the site.

Certain relief to the workload in content production could be the interns, which are hired to the Mission normally throughout the year. Due to their relatively short stay in the Mission they wouldn't need to be taught the use of the editor, but instead they could be used to support the website's content production among their other tasks. Thus, in the future when the Mission chooses and plans the interns' tasks they could also include some forms of content production to the Mission's website.

Web communication without guidelines?

Currently the most recent web communication guidelines from the MFA to its missions have been drafted in 2000 to be valid for years 2001-2003. Also, these guidelines were intended to be a preliminary plan and not an agreed strategy. Therefore it seems that at the moment there simply are no comprehensive, official, agreed-upon guidelines from the MFA to its missions to guide their web communication. This is understandable as the MFA's Web Communications Unit's resources have apparently been focused on the technical renewal projects of the missions' websites. However, this leaves the missions in difficult situations. Apparently those missions, who already had a website but which have to plan the renewed version do not have up-to-date official instructions on what their new websites should contain. The same problem affects those missions, who previously did not have a website at all and who later have launched one. Currently these missions do not have a guideline according to which to further develop their recently published websites.

When it comes to the content of the guidelines, it cannot be implemented directly to the website of the Mission of Finland to NATO due to its special situation compared to other diplomatic missions of the MFA's Foreign Service. The contents of communication of the Mission of Finland to NATO differ significantly from those of a standard embassy or a consulate as

the Mission's target audience is mainly in Finland instead of in a certain foreign country. Also, the messages, i.e. what is to be communicated are quite limited for the Mission, consisting only of security policy issues, more precisely Finland's activities as a NATO partner country. Thus, when further developing its website, the Mission cannot adopt the elements of the guidelines directly, but certain amount of improvisation is required.

The Mission and the MFA should always find an agreement on the amount of alterations and modifications to the basic structure MFA applies to its missions' websites. As the Mission of Finland to NATO is not the only exception what comes to the target of representation, i.e. representation of Finland to an international organisation instead of a foreign country, the MFA should take the special needs of these representations into consideration when planning the web communication guidelines for its missions.

www.finlandnato.org – future challenges, possible solutions?

Currently, the biggest challenges for the website www.finlandnato.org are the temporary shortage of sufficient resources in terms of personnel updating the website as well as the project of launching the website's versions in Swedish and English.

As there is currently no proper timetable for news to be published on the website this is definitely an area of improvement. Following the Brussels Embassy's example, a schedule for the stories and events should be drafted for example for every six months following the Mission's activities calendar. It is also essential that the schedule is closely followed.

In addition, the Mission of Finland to NATO could take an example from the website of the Embassy of Finland in Washington D.C., which has a news supply, which supports the official releases already published on their website in another section, away from the actual news. The news give a practical image and background to the website's official sections (Mannila 2005, p. 21).

In addition, it is likely that the intended target groups of the website in Finland are not aware of the existence of the website, let alone finding their way to the site. This conception, however, is based entirely on the Mission's own impressions, as there is no website visitor information available yet due to what seems to be a technical issue brought along by the new publication system.

Once the Mission receives actual data concerning the visitors on its website, this information should be taken into account when planning for the future guidelines for the Mission's web communication in general.

All in all the purpose of this study was to get an idea on what kind of elements affect the web communication of the diplomatic missions of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and which elements have a direct effect on that of the Mission of Finland to NATO, as it cannot be considered as a standard mission due to its special function and goals. It can be said that the website requirements are quite high regarding the content and especially its quality, which of course increase the demands for proper content planning from the Mission. The problem is that this can take a lot of effort, which strain supply of sufficient resources from an already multi-tasked work force, an issue with which the Mission as many others are struggling with.

As web communication is a supporting function of the Mission's core tasks, also the resources have been directed to serve firstly the basic tasks, which have to be managed without flaws. Therefore as the Mission is in a situation in which it cannot dedicate more resources to maintaining the website, it still has to find a way to ensure sufficient content production for its website, meeting all the requirements and expectations set on it. In the future this will have to be considered with two more language versions, even though their content and goals probably will not match those of the main version in Finnish.

Possible solutions to the situation and future challenges could be drafting a well-planned and constructed timetable for news releases and sticking to it; having all the civil servants of the Mission involved in content planning, idea creation and writing texts; using the contribution of the interns and other temporary staff in content production and possible cooperation with the other two missions in Brussels. Even though the core functions and goals of the three missions differ, their web teams should strive to find common elements in all three websites which could be coordinated and implemented by cooperation. Only the physical location of the missions provide possibilities that should be taken advantage of.

6 Conclusions

The purpose of the study was for one part to gain an insight into what is required of public communication, what requirements affect its qualities, content, planning and resources. After changes in the Finnish legislation concerning public access to information, the governmental organisations faced increased requirements to actively communicate about their activities, in order for the interested public to be able to form an overall image of the governmental tasks, and to facilitate their participation in them.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA) was also directly affected by the new requirements, and responded to them by introducing its own guidelines concerning its communication, communicational activities on the web also a part of it. These guidelines have echoed around the globe in the diplomatic missions of the MFA's Foreign Service, a network to which the Mission of Finland to NATO (the Mission) also belongs.

In the recent years the Mission's communication has relied on organising visits and briefings to Finnish visitor groups interested of Finland's cooperation with NATO in the framework of NATO's Partnership for Peace programme and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, in which Finland carries out its tasks as a NATO partner country. Receiving visitors in constantly growing volume has proved to be a successful way to communicate accurately about Finland's activities in the NATO partnership programme. However, this option covers only a marginal portion of the interested public, and is not an efficient way to communicate to the general public.

Following a website renewal project initiated by the MFA, the Mission started creating its own website in the beginning of 2006, and the website www.finlandnato.org was finally launched in November 2006. Before this, the Mission did not have a website at all, which set it in the minority compared to all the MFA's diplomatic missions. The website introduced an efficient external communication tool for the Mission that was lacking one until then.

As the Mission is now in a situation in which its website has been functioning for about 6 months, and as the Mission has already gained some experience in the practical tasks of constantly updating the website, it was a good time to take a look at the situation in which the Mission's web communication currently is. This study focused primarily on introducing the various elements affecting the Mission's web communication and website maintenance. The areas studied further include the Mission's

ambitions and goals set for the website, and the resources allocated to maintaining the website; the guidance and instructions provided by the MFA to the missions' web communication; the background and current situation of the website and possible challenges it is facing; and the situation of the two other Brussels-based missions of the MFA and possibilities for cooperation enabled by the geographical location.

The study found that the whole web communication of the Mission seems to be in a state in which a more visible guidance and planning would be required. The website www.finlandnato.org was created without having time to properly plan its future actions or to create a strategy on which the website could rely on. It can be said that most of the challenges the Mission is currently facing seem to be caused by lack of appropriate planning done beforehand, or during the initial phases of the published website. This is, however, quite understandable as the Mission did not have a website before, by which it could have gained experience and knowledge of the tasks needed for its constant updating and maintenance.

As the thesis focuses on various areas affecting the Mission's web communication, the results shown are quite general in nature. This is because the purpose of the study was to gain an overall comprehension of the factors in the Missions web communication, which should be considered when designing the maintenance of the website. The topic would also have allowed for a more detailed research focusing only on a certain aspect those now studied.

Ideally the study and the web communication strategy drafted based on the analyses could serve as a useful tool for the Mission's management and the web team in further discussions and plans concerning the development of the Mission's web communication. The study depicts the situation of a diplomatic mission of the MFA, which has recently launched a website and is trying to survive its first year, as well as a mission whose tasks and functions differ from the majority of the MFA's missions, setting certain requirements for adjustments to the general concept of the missions' website. Hopefully the work could provide some kind of background material for other missions of the MFA facing either of the two situations.

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8 Appendices:

Appendix 1: Web communication strategy for the Mission of Finland to NATO

Purpose, contents

The website's main purpose is to provide information of the Mission of Finland to NATO, Finland's activities and cooperation in the NATO partnership programme, and general information of NATO as an organisation. The website supports the core tasks of the Mission, and fulfils the requirements for active communication by a public entity to the interested public. The mission should determine the goals and objectives for the role of the website, both in long and short term, i.e. what the mission wishes to achieve by the website in a matter of a month or in two years.

The web communication strategy provides a basis for the Mission's website, facilitating and assisting in the daily tasks of maintaining the website, as well as planning its future. The strategy should be kept up-to-date by regular revision. The strategy should contain sections on to whom, what and how information is to be communicated via the website, alongside with listing current challenges with possible solutions, and possible areas of cooperation with the other two MFA missions in Brussels, i.e. the Embassy of Finland to Belgium and the Permanent Representation of Finland to the EU.

Target groups, stakeholders

The website is targeted for everyone looking for information about the relations and cooperation between Finland and NATO, the functions of the Mission of Finland to NATO and more generally about NATO or security policy. The website provides information for both general information seeking as well as practical details for specific purposes.

The primary target groups are located in Finland, consisting of

- Political decision-makers
- Journalists and media
- Students
- Military officials
- MFA's personnel
- Governmental bodies, other ministries
- Interested public
- Individuals attending NATO meetings

International target groups consist of

- Finns abroad
- MFA's diplomatic missions' personnel
- The diplomats of other NATO member or partner country delegations

Determining especially the international target groups will be facilitated once the Mission gains access to information of visitors on the website. This function maintained by the MFA tracks the amounts and locations of the website visitors, thus giving a general idea about the website's recognition and visitor information throughout the year. However, the service is not available yet.

Messages

The website provides information concerning the relations and cooperation between Finland and NATO, and the functions of the Mission of Finland to NATO. The information on the website is factual, neutral and up-to-date, serving the needs of the Mission's stakeholders and supporting the core functions of the Mission. The website should provide the same information in a nutshell as what is included in the briefings for the various visitor groups at the Mission and the NATO Headquarters.

The website consists of both more static and general information, as well as frequently updated Current Affairs section for the Mission's and its stakeholders' news releases. The releases are categorized as either the Mission's own news or Security Policy news, in which the releases of the Mission's stakeholders are summarised and linked to the original information sources. The Current Affairs section includes also a section for the releases published by the MFA, concerning the activities and functions of the ministry in general. The front page of the website has room for one main story and one normal release, alongside with areas of listing the topics of both news categories, showing the four most recent releases of both.

The static contents of the website comprise following sections:

- The Mission – general information, core functions and purpose
 - Subsection: Personnel – employees' tasks and contact details
 - Subsection: History – brief history of the Mission and its facilities
- Visits – NATO Headquarters contact information, information of visit possibilities
 - Subsection: Meetings – instructions for attending NATO meetings
 - Subsection: Visitor groups – information for interested visitor groups
- Finland and NATO – information of Finland's participation to NATO's partnership programme and the various areas in which it is implemented
 - Subsection: Frequently asked questions – answers to questions relating to Finland's cooperation with NATO as a NATO partner country

- About NATO – general information of NATO's organisation, functions and its partnership programme
 - Subsection: Frequently asked questions – answers to questions relating to NATO's activities
- Links and publications – collection of links to the websites and publications of the Mission's stakeholders or other institutions of interest to the Mission's activities
- Feedback – a platform for submitting comments or questions for the Mission
- Contact information – The Mission's contact details in Finnish, Swedish and English

Channels, emphasis

The website www.finlandnato.org serves as a main source of communication for the interested public, supplementing the communication value of the organised visits by Finnish groups to the NATO Headquarters and the Mission of Finland to NATO. The website emphasises communicating about the cooperation between Finland and NATO in the context of NATO's Partnership for Peace programme and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council. The website will provide information both for general interest towards Finland's activities as a NATO partner country and the tasks of the Mission of Finland to NATO in this respect, as well as more detailed information in terms of contact information or guidance for persons visiting the NATO Headquarters.

The Mission will utilise available material produced and published by its various stakeholders and other organisations of interest to the Mission's functions. The roles of two new language versions to be published in 2007 have to be considered, and their content planning arranged accordingly.

Future challenges and propositions

The Mission should secure sufficient resources for the maintenance of the website, and to find a balance between the goals set for the website, and the amount of personnel available for updating and maintaining the website. The current situation of restrained resources could be facilitated by assigning a second assistant to the web team, who will also be trained properly in order to be able to use the web editor needed for updating the website. Also, possibilities for constant training should be provided to all personnel involved in content production or technical maintenance of the website. The entire personnel should be incorporated into the website content planning and production, thus enabling a versatile supply of material to the website, which also always up-to-date and correct.

The language versions in Swedish and English to follow in the course of 2007 bring along extra tasks in terms of building the new sites and planning, translating and editing the content to be published. Also, the target groups for both language

versions should be separately considered, and not automatically deducted from those of the main language version.

One essential task is to draft a news timetable, e.g. for every six months, in which the stories and topics to be communicated are clearly stated. The timetable can be compiled by following the Mission's own activities calendar, in which its main tasks and events are scheduled throughout the year. It is even more important that the Mission is dedicated to follow the timetable to the best of its abilities.

Possible areas of cooperation with other missions in Brussels

All three web teams from the Mission of Finland to NATO, the Embassy of Finland in Belgium and the Permanent Representation of Finland to the EU have agreed that there could be potential in closer cooperation between them in terms of web communication. As the background of each of the three websites is different, the missions would have a possibility to share their experiences and knowledge in certain areas, with which the other missions might not be well acquainted. The close geographical location of the Missions, as situated in the same city, would allow for possibilities for regular meetings if these should be found important, but also theoretical possibilities for example for shared technical support and other administrative tasks. Also, the possibilities for cost savings in terms of translation costs for various language versions should be further looked into.

In addition, even though the core functions and areas of expertise of the missions differ, there could be a way to combine certain content production efforts among the missions. Those civil servants interested in contributing in the content production could be available also for all three missions, naturally depending on the topic or matter in question. One aspect of close cooperation between the three missions would also be an "added momentum", i.e. possibly having a louder voice when communicating to the MFA concerning the wishes and needs of the missions in their web communication.