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Lucas Derks

NLPeace Talks: the social panorama in negotiations

On 3rd June 1999 Martti Ahtisaari, the president of Finland, went to Belgrade to seek agreement with the Serbian president Slobodan Milosevich about a UN peace-keeping force in Kosovo. A series of Russian, American, British and French diplomats had already tried this in vain. However, to everyone's surprise, Ahtisaari made it work. The core question for an nlper is, of course, how did he succeed where so many others had failed? Is he an example of an excellent negotiator?

There is an anecdote that sheds some light on how Ahtisaari might have completed his extremely difficult mission. The story goes that after a long day of hard talks, the stubborn Milosevich invited Ahtisaari for a banquet. But Ahtisaari immediately dismissed the offer, saying: "You have no time for a dinner party. You must do homework. You have to sign this treaty tonight." And Ahtisaari set off for his hotel. The next day, the Kosovo war had ended – at least on paper.

After presenting a training on trauma treatment in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1998, Richard Bolstad and Margot Hamblett wrote a moving article about how NLP could contribute to peace at large (Bolstad 1998). Their inspiring reflections gave rise to the idea that NLP can help in three ways:

1 by promoting peaceful attitudes in people through education and the media;
2 by treating people that suffer from war trauma, thus preventing resentment and revenge from developing, and
3 as an aid to politicians and diplomats whose job it is to negotiate peace deals.

This article makes my contribution to the third of these.