



11 February 2013

Dinner speech at the Annual Security Conference Leangkollen

Sweden's perspective on the Euro-Atlantic Institutions

- Pål Jonson, Vice-Chairman, Swedish Atlantic Council

Ladies and gentlemen it's a great pleasure to address you and provide some remarks about Sweden's perspective on the future of EU and NATO. I want to start by underlining that the views I express are nobody's but my own.

At the same time as it is a great pleasure to talk about Sweden's approach to the Euro-Atlantic institutions it is also a challenge to do it in an interesting way. Especially since I once read a Chatham House report which had ranked all the most boring subjects on the trans-Atlantic circuit and gave Swedish foreign policy a top position second only to US – Canadian relations.

And of course - if you associate Sweden with being an idealistic, peace-loving and neutral country at the peripheries of Europe, like it once used to be, the word "interesting" is hardly the one that comes to mind.



However, as you are aware of, Swedish foreign- and security policy has indeed changed significantly during the last decades. Idealism is clearly still a strong feature of Swedish foreign policy and it is a notion that it shares with most of its' Nordic neighbors. However, the aversion to the use of military force and the concept of neutrality are indeed things of the past. And today Sweden more than anything else strives to be - not at the periphery of Europe, but rather at its' heart especially in the process of formulating a stronger voice for the EU on the international stage.

Sweden changed its security policy doctrine in 2009 and unilaterally declared that it will not remain passive if another EU- or Nordic country is exposed to an attack or a disaster. Consequently Sweden should also have the ability to give and receive military support.

A big step for Sweden but a small step for humanity someone named this so called Swedish Declaration of Solidarity. And that is probably correct. Even though, in its' defence, I should add that all the Nordic countries adopted a similar declaration in April 2011 in line with a proposal from the Stoltenberg report.

Yet the solidarity declaration creates internal and external expectations and it pegs Sweden to commitments in the field of security. For example, it greatly facilitated the political process to



galvanize strong parliamentary support for Swedish participation in the air surveillance mission over Iceland which Sweden intends to do in the beginning of 2014 together with Finland and Norway within the framework of a rotating NATO-Schedule.

As you might know, Sweden also participated, along with Finland, as the only two partner countries in NATO's CMX 2011 exercise. The Scenario in CMX 11 was clearly one where we would have acted – and did so in the exercise – substantially and decisively in support of one of our neighbours, in line with our solidarity declaration.

However, before I go in to the main points about Sweden's perspective on the EU and NATO I would like to draw your attention to two recent surveys which describe the changes that Sweden's foreign and security policy has undergone during the last decades and the nature of the political environment in which it operates.

Firstly, most of you are familiar with Trans-Atlantic Trends published by the German Marshall Found in September every year. It conducts polls on the public opinion in 12 European countries and the US. To the surprise of many, including myself, the Swedish population was by far the most supportive of all in the 13 countries to the missions in Libya and Afghanistan and potentially also to Syria albeit if there is a UN mandate. A clear majority of the population supported these missions which indicate that there is a strong



domestic support for an active Swedish engagement in EU- or NATO led crisis managements operations.

Secondly, also in the European Foreign Policy Score Card for 2012 published by European Council for Foreign Relations last week Sweden stands out. In this context as punching above its weight in the CFSP. You should always have doubts about the reliability of the methodology of reports like this but according to the report Sweden was identified as the 4th most influential member of the CFSP even though it only has the 9th largest economy and the 14th largest populations.

Now mentioning these two reports sounds as rather self-serving if you are Swedish. My point is, however, that it appears as if the Swedish government has been reasonably effective in positioning itself as an active partner in its most important foreign policy forum, the EU, and the public is largely supportive of this development.

Yet, let me underline that Swedish foreign policy is not without challenges when it comes to the Euro-Atlantic institutions. Sweden's greatest challenge is the renationalization of the CFSP that the EU clearly has experienced during the last two years. So while the Swedish influence over the EU's foreign policy might be on the raise, the influence of the EU's foreign policy in the world is clearly in decline.



For a country who invested so much political capital into this process and which has no other attractive bilateral alternatives this problem is maybe of more significance to Sweden than to many others.

The causes of setbacks of the CFSP are clearly related to the economic crisis which has changed the preconditions for the EU as an international actor. The major challenge, at least for the EU in the short run, is that the economic crisis is draining strength and energy from its' foreign policy resolve. Furthermore it also delimits the Member States' tools of statecraft as budgets for defence and development assistance are down-sized across Europe.

In essence, political influence is of course resource based and it ultimately rests on economic strength. Thus the EU needs to focus on getting its economic house in order which is a precondition also for strengthening the EU as an international actor.

Accordingly, member states needs to pursue economic policies that not only solve the immediate crisis but also strengthens their long-term competitiveness. This, among other things, includes a much more ambitious approach to the free flow of services, deregulations, and opening up the digital market for competition. But in these times



of austerity it also includes safeguarding an open Europe - a Europe that is willing to open for free trade and to new members.

As you are well aware of Sweden has been one of the most active countries in the CSDP having participated in almost all of the 27 military and civilian crisis management operations. Furthermore, it has been particularly eager to promote the civilian aspects of crisis management. It is now preparing to send 15 instructors to EUTM Mali as well as to take over the framework nation role for Operation Atalanta outside the coast of Somalia this spring. Together with Norway, Finland, Ireland and the Baltic States it is also preparing to provide a new battlegroup for the EU in the first half of 2015. This will be the third battlegroup that Sweden provides to the EU in the capacity as framework nation.

Yet, there is also in Sweden a growing awareness that the CSDP is a project which is in a state of crisis. Firstly, there are challenges to providing funding and personnel for on-going missions and no major new missions for the CSDP have been launched for over three years. The inability to reach consensus on when and where to use the battlegroups is also an example of the challenges to the CSDP. The process to reach parliamentary approval for the 2015 battlegroup was associated with great difficulties in the Swedish parliament due to this fact. This commitment is indeed rather costly to maintain and there is a sense of “all dressed up but nowhere to go.”



Secondly the drastically declining defence budgets within the EU will reduce the availability of today's as well as future capabilities. Even though the EU Member States within the Steering Board of the EDA has pledged to increase the R&D up to two percent of their defence expenditures it has actually fallen from 1,6 to 1,3 during the last years.

Finally, and most significantly, France and the United Kingdom's interest and commitment to the CSDP have, for different reasons, drastically declined during the last years.

Now we are of course following closely what is happening during this year leading up the EU Heads of States and Governments meeting in December. The CSDP will be on top of the agenda for the first time in over five years. The Commission has been tasked to provide a report in April on how it can use its' resources to energise the CSDP and the high representative will provide another report in September. However, the future of the CSDP will not be decided by the European Commission or the High Representative for that matter and the success of the CSDP is very much pending on political will from in particular the big states within the EU. At this stage it seems as most of the focus on capability development takes place within the framework of different kind of sub-regional arrangements



such as the Lancaster House agreement between the UK and France, NORDEFCO and among the Visegrad Four etc.

Finally a few words about Sweden's relations with NATO. Membership is not on the Swedish political agenda. The reason for this is very simple: there is no significant political or public support for NATO membership at this time. One could delve deeper into the national narrative and into domestic politics to find the root causes, but such introspection is hardly warranted here.

However, even though we are not a member of the Alliance, NATO is extremely important for Sweden in a number of ways. Sweden has consequently been a very active partner during the last two decades: it has participated in IFOR; SFOR; KFOR and ISAF. Its' partnership with NATO reached its crescendo in the summer of 2011 where it was one of four partner countries that participated with fighter jets in Operation Unified Protector. This shows that Sweden is not just a free rider of the security that NATO produces but it actively tries to contribute to the security by being an effective partner.

Handling the transition of the final stages of ISAF mission to the end of 2014 is a top priority for Sweden as well as NATO. Sweden is reducing its troop presence from 500 to 400 hundred at the beginning of this year but at the same time we are increasing our development assistance to 625 million Swedish crowns not



including multilateral aid. As you know we are also intensifying our Nordic-Baltic cooperation through the establishment of a Nordic-Baltic Taskforce in Afghanistan that will be focused on training the Afghan security forces. And we have opened up for a continued military presence of some 200 soldiers post- 2014 pending on an invitation from the Afghan government.

As for the future, we are grappling with the question how we can maintain influence into the alliance as our role as a troop contributor will decrease as the ISAF mission will be phased out. That is of course pending on what kind of alliance NATO will evolve into beyond the ISAF mission. However, it seems to me that its three pillars of crisis management, collective defence and co-operative security will be maintained for the future possibly with different levels of primacies. From this perspective I would point out three important priorities for the future of NATO from a Swedish view.

Firstly, on crisis management, as NATO is going from a focus on engagement to a focus on readiness, exercises will once again be more important. Sweden is therefore looking into the possibility of increased participation in NATO exercises and maybe even following Finland's example of participating in NATO Response Force. Connected Forces Initiatives is also of great interest to Sweden.



Secondly, on collective defence, despite the fact that Sweden is not a member of the Alliance we still recognize the immense importance which article five has for European security. Thus it is vital also for Sweden that NATO maintains a strong and credible commitment to collective defense.

Finally, on co-operative security, we strongly welcome the initiative taken at the Chicago summit to broaden the political dialog with partners. We recognize the importance of NATO as the primary forum for transatlantic security. In essence, it is the only organization that gathers Americans and Europeans every day to grapple with security problems. Thus, in times of great difficulties like these where the economic crisis is a great catalyst for the transfer of wealth, power and influence away from the Euro-Atlantic community, it seems very important that we also pool and share our political will and intellectual resources to meet the future challenges that undoubtedly will emerge.