

Minister for Foreign Affairs Ann Linde

Statement of Government Policy

in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs
Wednesday 16 February 2022



Statement of Foreign Policy 2022

Mr Speaker,

Our security situation is serious. Russia's increasingly confrontational rhetoric and military activities, both visible and covert, are unacceptable. The heightened Russian military presence at Ukraine's borders and Russian demands for security guarantees threaten the core of the European security order.

The European security order is not negotiable. Standing up for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity is essential for the security of Europe as a whole.

Ukraine, like Sweden, has the right to make its own security policy choices. It is not Russia's place to dictate these through threats and violence. The rules of international law on state sovereignty and political independence are part of the European security order.

The way forward in terms of reducing tensions is continued dialogue and diplomacy, but at the same time we must prepare for the possibility of Russia choosing a different path.

Mr Speaker,

The right to make our own security policy choices is central to our security. The Government does not intend to apply for NATO membership. Our security policy remains firmly in place. Our non-participation in military alliances serves us well and contributes to stability and security in northern Europe.

We combine this with a defence policy that rests on two pillars: strengthened national capability and deepened international defence cooperation. Our cooperation with Finland has a special status in this. Since 2014 we have built up a functioning defence and security network, and have concluded more than 30 agreements and around 20 cooperation agreements, not least with our Nordic and Baltic neighbours. We are building up our military

capability both bilaterally and with NATO. And we are building up credible national defence capability through the largest investment in Swedish defence since the 1950s.

Sweden will not remain passive if another EU Member State or Nordic country suffers a disaster or an attack. We expect these countries to act in the same way if Sweden is affected. An armed attack against Sweden cannot be ruled out. We must therefore be able to both give and receive support, civilian as well as military. But we alone decide *with whom* we cooperate and *in what forms* – in times of peace, crisis and war.

Sweden's foreign and security policy builds on cohesion in the EU and increased cooperation on a broad front: in the Nordic region, in the Baltic Sea region, through the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and through deepened partnership with NATO. The UN and international law remain cornerstones of Swedish foreign policy. A strong transatlantic link is vital for Europe's security.

Mr Speaker,

We have a number of security policy tools with which to address the deteriorating security situation in Europe. The OSCE is one important tool. Sweden recently concluded its term as Chair of the OSCE, during which we made an impact that will endure.

We strengthened the platform for dialogue. The need for dialogue is greater now than at any time since the end of the Cold War. This was exemplified during the Council of Ministers in Stockholm, where some 50 foreign ministers held important political discussions and made decisions.

We also strengthened the platform for conflict resolution. As Chair, we focused on conflict resolution in Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and the South Caucasus.

Meetings with civil society are always a priority, and Sweden's term as OSCE Chair was no exception. In Russia, the human rights situation has progressively deteriorated. An increasingly repressive society has made it impossible for human rights defenders to carry out

their important work. The closure of the human rights group Memorial is one of many alarming examples of this.

In Belarus, we have seen how the regime has cynically exploited migrants for political objectives. Belarus must release all political prisoners and hold democratic elections.

As Chair, Sweden also worked to ensure that Russia's aggression against Ukraine and Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea have remained high on the OSCE agenda. Eight years will have soon passed since the situation arose, and more than 14 000 people have lost their lives. But the passing of time does not make these violations of international law more acceptable. We now carry this work forward as a member of the OSCE Troika.

Mr Speaker,

We are living in the midst of an accelerating climate and environmental crisis. Sweden will take the lead in the climate transition. But the global level of ambition is far from adequate. Climate change and environmental degradation contribute to increased tensions and conflicts. The climate is of critical importance to our security. We must take climate-related security threats extremely seriously.

During our term as Chair, the OSCE took a decision to address the challenges brought about by climate change. Thanks to Sweden's catalytic role, the OSCE now has a mandate to take preventive action against the effects of climate change on security in the region.

We will appoint an ambassador for climate and security. We will incorporate new expertise into our international crisis management operations, peacebuilding, international development cooperation and climate diplomacy. We will continue to strengthen the Swedish-initiated UN mechanism for climate and security. In just a few years, this mechanism has become a mainstay in countries and regions affected by climate-related conflicts.

In June, Sweden will host Stockholm+50, an international UN meeting aimed at advancing an equitable and global green transition.

Mr Speaker,

The COVID-19 pandemic has hindered implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Some of the global progress that was achieved in recent years, such as improvements in maternal and child health and gender equality, has been undone. Global hunger and extreme poverty are on the rise for the first time in 20 years.

The 2030 Agenda is our roadmap for reversing this trend.

Mr Speaker,

The need for a better global health system and the realisation that the pandemic's consequences have hit women and children the hardest are painful lessons.

The Government pursued the issue of more equitable COVID-19 vaccine distribution from an early stage. The COVAX global vaccine initiative has now delivered 1 billion vaccine doses to 144 countries around the world. Sweden is the world's largest per capita donor to COVAX and the fifth largest donor overall.

Efforts to strengthen global health security, not least efforts to combat antibiotic resistance and to develop a robust new global pandemic treaty, are a priority. The Government will therefore appoint an ambassador at the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs to work on global health security.

Mr Speaker,

The EU is Sweden's most important foreign and security policy arena. In uncertain times, the Member States stand stronger together. We will continue to strengthen our close ties with our partners within the EU and with our Nordic and Baltic neighbours. Efforts to realise the vision of the Nordic region as the world's most sustainable, integrated and digitally advanced region will be intensified.

The Government wants to see a strong EU that can take greater responsibility for its own security, but we also stress that this is not incompatible with openness to developing partnerships or a strong transatlantic link.

Next year, Sweden will hold the Presidency of the Council of the EU for the third time. The Minister for EU Affairs recently outlined how work on the Government's priorities will be pursued at EU level. It is an ambitious agenda.

The situation of refugees and migrants demands our continued attention. The EU must establish a common asylum system that provides legal certainty and is humane and sustainable, in which everyone takes their share of responsibility.

We continue to maintain close cooperation with the United Kingdom, not least on security and defence policy, trade, and education and research.

The United States is once again a constructive partner in the global arena. This is encouraging for continued and enhanced cooperation, not least in the areas of climate change, democracy and gender equality. Cooperation with the US is central to security and defence policy, trade and technology.

Mr Speaker,

Feminist foreign policy continues to grow. Sweden was first. And it is gratifying that Germany is now following that lead, like Canada, France, Luxembourg, Spain and Mexico, who are also pursuing feminist foreign policies.

Our efforts must be intensified, not least given the backlash against gender equality that we have seen in the wake of the pandemic. Violence against women and girls has increased all over the world. The pandemic, the climate crisis and shrinking democratic space are putting us at risk of a global gender equality recession. Feminist foreign policy is needed more than ever.

In 2022, we will produce a new national action plan for women, peace and security, and we will also produce a new global strategy for gender equality in aid. Sweden is leading the action for women's economic empowerment within the UN Generation Equality Forum.

Mr Speaker,

For the fifth consecutive year, we are seeing more countries moving in an authoritarian direction than in a democratic direction. Military coups in Myanmar, Sudan, Mali and Burkina Faso, the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, a deterioration in the situation in Belarus and the conflict in Ethiopia are dramatic examples of democratic backsliding.

At the Summit for Democracy hosted by US President Joe Biden, Sweden was an active partner in several activities in which both the Prime Minister and I took part. Sweden's message was that the rise of right-wing populism and nationalism undermines democracy, and that human rights, the rule of law and women's political and economic participation are crucial to democracy. LGBTIQ people's rights must be fully respected internationally.

This year, Sweden holds the Presidency of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, where we will continue to promote Holocaust remembrance and do our utmost to combat antisemitism and antigypsyism.

More attention must be directed at the lack of democracy and human rights in working life globally. Workers are harassed, lose their jobs and are even killed for their trade union activities. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs will continue its efforts in these areas, including within the Global Deal.

Mr Speaker,

The nuclear threat is a reality, and we must continue our disarmament efforts. The aim is a world free of nuclear weapons. Within the framework of the Stockholm Initiative, we have proposed 22 specific steps that provide a constructive and pragmatic approach to nuclear disarmament. An increasing number of countries now back Sweden's proposals.

We have actively addressed the five nuclear-weapon states. Gratifyingly, the Stockholm Initiative's message on the need for progress has been heard. On 3 January, the five affirmed in a joint statement that "a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought".

Mr Speaker,

Humanitarian needs in the world are increasing dramatically. Inequality is growing. Almost 275 million people need humanitarian aid to survive. Some 45 million women, men and children in 43 countries are on the verge of famine.

Sweden's aid policy will maintain a high level of ambition in terms of both scale and quality. Sweden's official development assistance will continue to be equivalent to one per cent of gross national income. And it will be used to reduce poverty and injustice around the world. It is a matter of solidarity – and also of the conviction that a better world makes for a more secure Sweden.

Sweden will step up its efforts to prevent climate change and its effects on food security and the environment, and promote sustainable living conditions. In 2022, we will increase climate aid by a further SEK 1 billion.

When anti-democratic forces gain ground, Sweden's aid will, with unwavering ambition, remain a counterweight. More democratic societies make the world a better place – and increase security in Sweden.

Mr Speaker,

My visit to Israel was the first by a Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs in ten years. It is important that the Government has improved our relations with Israel. At the same time, we continue to recognise Palestine. Sweden continues to act for a two-state solution based on international law.

Terrorist groups have dramatically increased their activities in Mali. It is unacceptable that the Malian junta has postponed democratic elections and engaged in cooperation with Russian mercenaries. Sweden's military and civilian engagement in Mali aims to promote security, counteract terrorism and build sustainable development with respect for human rights.

The war in Yemen is now in its eighth year. It is one of the world's greatest humanitarian disasters. Sweden will continue to emphasise the need for peace talks in the UN. The inclusion of women in these talks is a prerequisite for a lasting peace.

Syria is a deeply ravaged country. The conflict is in its twelfth year. Millions of people are living in acute humanitarian need. Sweden is and will remain one of the largest humanitarian donors.

The conflict and humanitarian crisis in Ethiopia undermine stability throughout the Horn of Africa. Ethiopia is heading towards famine. Thousands have been killed in the conflict, including 24 UN aid workers. We will continue to work through the EU and the UN for an immediate ceasefire.

Mr Speaker,

As the Prime Minister has said: "We will leave no stone unturned in breaking segregation and cracking down on gangs." The underlying criminal structures are almost always transnational. The digital transformation of our societies brings an increase in international cybercrime. Shootings and explosions, often using smuggled weapons, remain a considerable security challenge. Far too often, the young men involved are tools used by more heavyweight international criminal actors.

Eighteen months ago, I appointed a special envoy on organised crime to identify how the Swedish Foreign Service can best support law enforcement authorities. A number of embassies have received special assignments to work to combat organised crime. In the next stage, several embassies will be equipped to contribute more effectively to crime prevention. Cooperation between law enforcement authorities and embassies will be strengthened.

Mr Speaker,

We must stand up for free trade, particularly at a time when the winds of protectionism are blowing stronger. The multilateral trade system, based on the World Trade Organization, is fundamental to growth and welfare. A threat to the rules-based trade system is a threat to

Sweden's economy and our trade relations. While cooperation is important, not least in trade, we will take action against any security-threatening activity directed at Sweden and Swedish companies.

Sweden and the EU need to work even more closely with likeminded partners to safeguard and develop global trade, focusing on the green transition to a fossil-free society. Our trade policy will contribute to achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda.

Through Sweden's participation in Expo 2020, we are showcasing how Swedish solutions enable a transition in a green and sustainable direction.

China's international significance also affects Sweden and Swedish interests, not least in trade. We engage in a frank and open dialogue with China in which human rights and freedom of expression are key. Sweden and the EU see global challenges that we can only address together with China – such as climate change, health and a functioning and fair free trade order.

Mr Speaker,

Last year, Sweden evacuated around 2 000 people from Afghanistan. In August, the situation at Kabul airport was at times chaotic and very difficult. Swedish Armed Forces personnel were just seconds away when a bomb exploded close to the airport.

On behalf of the Government, I would like to reiterate our thanks to everyone in the Swedish Foreign Service, government agencies and municipalities who worked day and night on the evacuations. I am proud of the collective operation that Sweden implemented.

Despite the grave sense of global darkness that many are undoubtedly feeling right now, and although the need for our joint efforts may seem never-ending, I would like to conclude by saying that there is hope that, through hard work and clear lines, change is possible. Or as Archbishop Desmond Tutu said: "Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness."