

Minister for Foreign Affairs Maria Malmer Stenergard

# Statement of Government Policy

in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs  
Wednesday 12 February 2025



Mr/Madam Speaker,

Sweden is facing a challenging security era.

We – Sweden, the EU and NATO – are in the midst of a long-term confrontation with Russia.

Our task is inescapable: we will constrain Russia's capability to do us harm, particularly through our support to Ukraine.

We will be guided by our national security interests, our democratic values, international law and our belief in a free and strong Ukraine.

And we will forge even closer ties with our Allies and partners in the Nordic-Baltic region, in the EU, in NATO and globally.

The international solidarity that followed last week's horrific mass shooting in Örebro shows that Sweden never stands alone.

\*\*\*

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Support to Ukraine is the Government's top foreign policy priority.

Sweden has increased its support to Ukraine for each year of the war. Our support since the start of the full-scale invasion totals around SEK 70 billion.

Whether Europe will consist of sovereign states in the future is being determined on the battlefields of Ukraine. Russia's goal is to impose a sphere of influence with vassals and satellites – including in the Baltic Sea region.

For Sweden, support to Ukraine is a moral obligation and an indispensable investment in Europe's and – by extension – our own security, independence and future.

It is up to Ukraine if and when negotiations are initiated. Our unequivocal focus is to make Ukraine's position stronger.

Pressure on Russia's war economy must increase. Europe's defence capability and our military support to Ukraine must be strengthened. For this reason, the Government recently presented its 18th military support package – the largest to date.

The only sustainable peace is one that Ukraine achieves through strength. Peace negotiated from a position of weakness would only encourage further Russian aggression.

Sweden will continue to provide political, humanitarian, military and financial support to Ukraine for as long as it takes.

\*\*\*

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Together with our Allies and partners, we will constrain Russia from a position of strength.

The political and military credibility of NATO's Article 5 is the foundation of our policy of constraining Russia.

Sweden's geography and capabilities allow us, as an Ally, to strengthen deterrence across northern Europe. We fully accept the responsibility that this entails. This benefits Sweden, our neighbours and the entire Alliance.

Swedish soldiers are now part of NATO's Forward Land Forces in Latvia. Sweden is contributing through its presence in and monitoring of the Euro-Atlantic area – in the air and at sea. We are shouldering our regional responsibilities as a framework nation in NATO's Forward Land Forces in Finland.

Within the framework of the EU and NATO, we are strengthening our resilience against hybrid attacks: antagonistic actions aimed at destabilising our societies, such as cyberattacks, disinformation and the sabotage of critical infrastructure.

NATO's enhanced activities following the recent damage to underwater cables in the Baltic Sea region are a testament to the Alliance's cohesion, speed and strength. Sweden is making a powerful contribution to NATO's Operation Baltic Sentry, providing up to three warships and a radar surveillance aircraft.

Sweden is a driving force in EU efforts to develop a specific strategy to address Russia's hybrid activities. We are also working to ensure that NATO strengthens its deterrence of hybrid attacks.

The national security strategy makes it clear that Sweden's internal and external security are interlinked. The Government will continue to work internationally in the fight against cross-border organised crime. It is also necessary to intensify our bilateral cooperation efforts, so that criminals orchestrating crime in Sweden from abroad can be extradited and prosecuted.

More also needs to be done in partnership with third countries to reduce irregular migration and increase the number of returns.

\*\*\*

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Sweden will continue to build security together with others, particularly as a member of NATO and the EU.

Sweden pursues an alliance policy based on solidarity that aims to strengthen security and stability in our neighbourhood and throughout the Euro-Atlantic area. We will maintain a strong national defence capability to contribute to both national and collective defence. Sweden will take its responsibility for fair burden-sharing within NATO.

The transatlantic link is crucial to Swedish and European security. It must never be taken for granted. European NATO countries need to take greater joint responsibility for the defence and security of Europe. This includes support to Ukraine.

Bilateral relations between Sweden and the United States are excellent and are strengthened by us being NATO Allies. As a partner, the United States is of particular importance to Sweden and to Europe – for trade, security, and politically.

Cooperation with strategic Allies, such as our Nordic and Baltic neighbours, the United States and the United Kingdom, is especially important for Sweden's security. We are developing our strategic partnerships within the EU with Poland, Germany and France.

With Sweden as a NATO member, the Baltic Sea, North Atlantic and Arctic regions are fully intertwined. Sweden now has a greater responsibility and reason to engage in Arctic issues and develop its High North policy.

In 2024, Sweden held the Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers and chaired the informal Nordic and Nordic-Baltic foreign and security policy cooperation formats – N5 and NB8. This strengthened cooperation with our Nordic and Baltic neighbours.

Security cooperation in our neighbourhood should be intensified further.

Together with Finland, Sweden has taken the initiative to utilise the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) for security policy dialogue. Former President of Estonia Toomas Ilves and former Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Gabrielius Landsbergis will present a report ahead of the ministerial meeting in May. We want to see the CBSS as a regional security policy format that also includes Poland and Germany.

In these uncertain times, one thing is certain: in our region, we stand together and we stand strong.

\*\*\*

Mr/Madam Speaker,

This year, we mark 30 years since Sweden joined the EU.

The EU is a community of values and Sweden's most important foreign policy platform. A strong EU gives Europe strength and Sweden a stronger voice on global issues.

Our priorities in our work in the EU are clear: they are the major cross-border issues of our time and our continent – war, crime, climate and competitiveness. It is a matter of defending our prosperity and our security.

The EU is crucial to securing long-term and robust support to Ukraine and to constraining Russia. The EU also plays an increasingly important role in strengthening the defence industry, military mobility and civil preparedness in Europe.

Moreover, the EU is key to imposing effective sanctions.

Sweden has pushed for sanctions against Russia's shadow fleet and liquefied natural gas, and for using the extraordinary revenues generated by immobilised Russian assets to support Ukraine.

Sweden has also contributed to establishing a new sanctions regime against political oppression in Russia, and to imposing sanctions on Belarus based on the oppression there. The Government supports the Belarusian people on the path to a free and democratic Belarus that is a member of the European family.

Sanctions require effective enforcement. The Government works continuously to strengthen national efforts, and in the coming months it will present a bill to the Riksdag with proposals for a new act on international sanctions. This will expand the range of punishable offences and increase penalties for sanctions violations.

The EU's continued enlargement and cooperation with partners in our neighbourhood are essential to our security and economy.

EU enlargement is a geostrategic investment in peace, democracy, security, stability and prosperity. It is in our interest to help the candidate countries to move closer to the Union.

The Government is pushing for additional steps towards EU membership for Ukraine and Moldova, which have both made impressive progress on reforms. At the same time, it is important that progress is also made in the candidate countries in the Western Balkans.

Sweden's support for the candidate countries is strong, but not unconditional. Their pace of reform is decisive.

The Georgian Government's actions run counter to the values and principles upon which the EU is founded. Parliamentary elections in October were characterised by an uneven playing field, entrenched polarisation, pressure and threats against voters. Violence against peaceful protesters is unacceptable, and Sweden wants to see sanctions against those responsible. At the same time, we must continue to support democratic and pro-European movements in Georgia.

Sweden's close relationship with the United Kingdom is important, particularly with respect to security policy. We are also actively seeking to enhance cooperation at EU level, and we look forward to the UK-EU summit in May.

\*\*\*

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Increased growth goes hand-in-hand with increasing Sweden's and Europe's security. An economically strong Europe is a more secure Europe.

It is the EU single market and potential for trade that make us attractive to the rest of the world. The Government looks forward to the European Commission's new Single Market Strategy.

The conclusion of negotiations on a trade agreement between the European Commission and the MERCOSUR countries and a modernised EU Global Agreement with Mexico are welcome developments. The Government will continue to work proactively for additional free trade agreements.

At the same time, the Government takes a serious view of the risks associated with actors seeking to exploit vulnerabilities and economic dependencies.

We see an increased need for international cooperation at the nexus of technology, innovation, trade and security.

To harness the potential of new digital technologies, secure and trusted infrastructure is needed. Sweden is world-leading in mobile communication networks, and we cooperate with like-minded actors for secure connectivity within the EU and globally.

In recognition of the increasing importance of cyber and digital issues, the Government has adopted a specific strategy on these issues within foreign and security policy. A new national cybersecurity strategy will also be presented in the coming months.

\*\*\*

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Developments in the Middle East are difficult to predict, but important steps in the right direction have been taken recently. Ceasefire deals are in place in Gaza and Lebanon. The brutal Assad regime has fallen. Iran and its proxies have been weakened.

The Government supports Israel's right to defend itself against Hamas in the aftermath of the worst mass murder of Jews since the Holocaust. At the same time, we have made it clear that Israel has an obligation to protect the civilian population in Gaza and to secure access to humanitarian support. International law, including humanitarian law, must be respected.

Sweden supports efforts to secure the release of all hostages, drastically improve the humanitarian situation and ensure that the ceasefire is lasting.

The Government is also deeply concerned by settler violence and the expansion of illegal settlements in the West Bank.

Ultimately, a negotiated two-state solution based on international law is needed. This is the only sustainable solution in which Israelis and Palestinians can live side-by-side in peace, freedom and democracy. A Gaza free from Hamas rule is a political prerequisite for this.

Iran has played a major role in the negative developments in the region and security risks in the West. The Government will not tolerate Iranian attempts to destabilise Sweden or orchestrate terrorist activities here via proxies.

The fall of the Assad regime is an opportunity for Syria's people to shape their future and build a free, democratic country. The EU should contribute to a Syrian-led, peaceful and inclusive process in which all Syrian people's human rights are respected. Participation of women and ethnic and religious minorities must be ensured.

\*\*\*

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Asia and Oceania is the region where the greatest economic growth is expected. Moreover, the security of Asia and that of Europe are becoming increasingly interlinked.

China is the world's second-largest economy and a leader in technology; at the same time, the country is under authoritarian rule and has growing geopolitical ambitions.

China's conduct towards Taiwan is worrying, and threats of military violence are unacceptable. China's enabling of Russia's war in Ukraine has a direct, negative impact on the security of Sweden and Europe.

We welcome dialogue and cooperation with China, where this is possible and in line with our interests and values, for aims such as promoting trade on equal terms and tackling climate change.

In parallel with this, we continue, along with the rest of the EU, to draw attention to human rights violations. Sweden's relations with China must be anchored in a European strategy and close transatlantic cooperation.

India is a key actor in addressing global challenges. Sweden advocates the conclusion of a free trade agreement between the EU and India.

Sweden is intensifying its cooperation with Japan, which is an important partner country to NATO and a significant export market. Sweden's participation in World Expo 2025 in Osaka will be a step towards strengthening the Swedish business sector's competitiveness in Japan and the region.

\*\*\*

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Swedish development assistance should create opportunities for better living conditions for people living in poverty and oppression. Development cooperation has a key role in efforts to make societies free and well-functioning, and should focus more on areas where Sweden can provide clear added value.

The Government sees potential in identifying synergies between development assistance and trade to tackle growing global challenges. One example is the green transition. Sweden is one of the world's most generous donors of climate aid, and Swedish companies offer innovative climate solutions. Sweden is chairing the board of the Green Climate Fund in 2025, which presents an opportunity to improve the effectiveness of international climate aid.

At a time when more than 300 million people are in need of humanitarian support, Sweden is one of the world's largest humanitarian donors. For 2025, Sweden is doubling the humanitarian support that previously went to UNRWA, allocating SEK 800 million for the severely afflicted civilian population in Gaza and the region.

Moreover, we continue to address acute humanitarian needs in Ukraine and other crisis-affected places, such as Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen. In the midst of these crises, we also continue to push for humanitarian access so that aid can reach those who are most vulnerable.

Civil society organisations are indispensable partners in all of these efforts.

\*\*\*



Mr/Madam Speaker,

Gender equality is a core value in Sweden's foreign policy. We are currently seeing the regression of gender equality worldwide. In countries such as Afghanistan and Iran, the sweeping and systematic oppression of women underpins authoritarian rule.

Sweden's work is essential to increasing women's and girls' empowerment.

Swedish development assistance must contribute to increased access to health and maternity care, comprehensive sex education and measures against all forms of sexual and gender-based violence. This is an important part of our broad commitment to global health.

In 2025, Sweden holds the Presidency of the UN Women Executive Board. This is a unique platform to advance global gender equality efforts, through which Sweden will particularly highlight the importance of women's economic empowerment.

\*\*\*

Mr/Madam Speaker,

International law, including the UN Charter, is a cornerstone of Sweden's foreign and security policy. Sweden supports the independence and integrity of the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court.

Human rights and freedoms must be defended. The equal value of every individual, regardless of gender, age, sexual orientation or religion, is a matter of freedom. A number of minority groups around the world, including Christians and Uyghurs, are being subjected to oppression.

It is worrying when human rights and freedoms are undermined by authoritarian states such as Russia, China and Iran, which seek to reshape them based on their value systems.

Sweden will remain engaged in arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. Later this year, together with the Philippines, we will assume the presidency of the Article XIV process, which seeks to facilitate the implementation of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

\*\*\*

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Sweden's diplomatic presence abroad is one of our main tools to assert our interests.

The Government has therefore conducted a review and can now announce several new missions abroad and other reinforcements.

Sweden's presence in the United States is being expanded. A new consulate-general in Houston will consolidate cooperation in key industrial sectors such as space, aviation, defence, energy, IT and life sciences.

Our Consulate-General in Brussels is being upgraded to an embassy, reflecting Belgium's role as an important partner for Sweden in the EU and NATO.

In the coming months, Sweden will open a new embassy in Senegal, which will work to promote our interests in French-speaking West Africa and the Sahel.

We are strengthening Sweden's presence in the Indo-Pacific region – which is important in terms of trade and security – with the addition of a new Stockholm-based envoy for the Pacific Ocean.

We are also installing a Stockholm-based ambassador to Peru to further promote our relations with key partners in Latin America.

Taken together, these steps aim to strengthen our partnerships and improve conditions for trade, investment and innovation.

Last year, Swedish citizens Johan Floderus and Saeed Azizi, who had been wrongfully imprisoned in Iran, came home to Sweden. The Government will continue its efforts to secure the release of journalist Dawit Isaak, publisher and poet Gui Minhai, and researcher Ahmadreza Djalali.

\*\*\*

Mr/Madam Speaker,

The Government's foreign policy rests on European, Nordic-Baltic and transatlantic foundations.

With a war being waged on our continent, our neighbourhood will be our top foreign and security policy priority.

At the same time, Sweden will maintain its strong global engagement.

We will continue to work within the UN through alliance-building, a long-term approach and determination. Our engagement and partnerships with key countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America are being further strengthened.

We are facing a challenging time. A time when we must have the capacity to defend our interests and values to ensure that they are respected.

Together with our Allies and partners, we will counteract the authoritarian forces that seek to divide, dominate and destabilise our open societies.

We will safeguard the cohesion of the democratic world.

And above all, we will safeguard Sweden's freedom, peace and security. There is no more important task.